

*A Patristic Commentary*



# THE BOOK OF Psalms

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

## PSALM 76

# GOD IS FEARED BY THE TYRANT KINGS OF THE EARTH

This psalm relates to the previous one; as we see the Lord reign through His cross, as a King-Priest, and all submit to Him.

If sin corrupted the world, and man was driven out from the garden of Eden, with all its possibilities, joy, and peace, to a world, more like a perpetual battle field; he seeks peace but he does not find it, and covets the true comfort to find it as though a sort of an imaginary fantasy.

But God, whole in goodness turns this battle into what is for the edification of man, his peace, and his happiness. As God Himself enters into the battle, particularly on the cross, He tears up the hand-written requirements against us, destroys the authority of the devil, makes him of no reputation; and the Lord reigns over the hearts, proclaiming His splendor and majesty in us.

This psalm came conforming to psalms 46 to 48, of Korah.

### Its divisions:

1- The name of the King-Priest	1 – 3
2- The work of the King-Priest	4 – 6
3- The reign of the King-Priest	7 – 9
4- Worshipping the King-Priest	10 – 12

### The title:

It is a psalm of military conquest, realized through the presence of God in His temple in Jerusalem, destroying the arms of the tyrants, and bringing justice to the oppressed. It could be written in any of the following occasions: inauguration of a new king; a thanksgiving service to God for a conquest realized; an anniversary of a memorial of a certain conquest; or a celebration of a feast in Jerusalem.

Some however believe that the conquest mentioned here refers to the one realized by David over the Philistines in the valley of the **rephaym**. While others believe that the psalm is a prophecy to be fulfilled later on for the people of God.

And in the Septuagint version, as well as in the writings of several of the modern scholars, it came that this psalm was written on the occasion of the invasion by the Assyrians in the days of King Sennacherib.

### 1- THE NAME OF THE KING - PRIEST:

*“In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel” (1)*

Great is God, His glory being within Him, He needs no further glorification; Our knowledge of His glory or of His secrets, adds nothing to His glory; but would make Him great in us, and glorified in our life.

The tribe of Judah refers to Israel as a whole, being the royal tribe of authority over the whole people. And as it came in psalm 114: 2: *“Judah became His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion”*.

No one indeed, can recognize Him unless he belongs to Judah; and no one can enjoy getting in touch with the greatness of His name unless

he becomes an Israelite. Yet, this could not be in the literal sense of the tribe of Judah, and the old people of Israel; But truly applies to those who spiritually belong to Judah, who spiritually become a living member of the new Israel.

The name of God became known in Judah, as He is the Son of David, the Lion who comes forth of the tribe of Judah; who grants His believers the life of conquest. The Lord Christ came as the King of kings, and the heavenly High Priest, to reign over the new Israel (the church); and to proclaim His dwelling place in Zion.

**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem** believes that the name of God became great in the Gentile nations like Egypt, and the rest of the world, that became the new Judah, and the new spiritual Israel.

- ❖ Before the cross brings forth the light to the world; before the Lord was seen on earth, God was known in Judah; and in Israel, His name was great. But once the Savior came, His voice ringed high in the whole earth, and His message reached to the end of the world<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Before the resurrection of Christ, God was only known in Judea, and His name was only great in Israel<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ See, even we, as well, say the same thing: Unless one is in Judah, God would not be known to him! But what does the apostle say: The Jew in secret, who is as such according to the circumcision of the heart; not in the letter, but in the spirit, is the true Jew. There are Jews in the circumcision of the flesh; and there are Jews in the circumcision of the heart. Many of our saintly fathers (in the Old Covenant), had the circumcision of the flesh as a seal of faith; and had, as well, the circumcision of the heart for the sake of faith.

From those fathers came men who only had the glory of the name (as Jews), yet have lost the work; they remained Jews in the flesh, but heathens in the heart.

From Judah came David; and from David came the Lord Jesus Christ. Believing in Christ, we belong to Judah, and know Christ.

The word 'Israel' means: (He who sees God!)

How could they see God who walked in flesh among them; whom counting Him as man, they killed Him?

*"His name is great in Israel". Do you want to be 'Israel'?*

*That man about whom the Lord said: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile"* (John 1; 47). If that was indeed an Israelite in whom is no guile; he, in whom there is guile, would not be an Israelite indeed<sup>3</sup>.

- ❖ We seek this request, not that His name is not holy, but to see it holy; Namely, we seek to see nothing more holy than Him.

It is said: *"In Judah God is known, His name is great in Israel"* (1). This does not mean that His name is great in one place more than in another; but it is great wherever we call Him great. The same thing is said: His name is holy wherever He is called with

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 9.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 60, to Heliodorus, 4.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 76.

reverence, for fear of opposing Him. That is what we seek to fulfill through preaching the gospel; to call the name of the One God, through the ordinance of His Son<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ God was only known in Judah (1); and His name was only called in Israel. But now, *“their voices have gone forth to the ends of the earth, and their words to ends of the world”* (Psalm 19: 4). The servants of Isaac (as a symbol of Christ) have gone forth to the whole world to dig wells (Genesis 26: 22), and to purify the living waters for all; *“baptizing the Gentiles in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 28: 19); For *“The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness”* (Psalm 24: 1)<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ Before His coming, the name of Christ among the people of Israel was confined in the minds of the Jews as though in a kind of vessels; For *“God was known in Judah, His name was great in Israel”*; namely, the name that in the vessels of the Jews was confined in their narrow limits.

But after that, He, by whose coming He shone over the whole world, has spread His divine name over extensive regions over the whole creation Having filled the void, His name became awesome in the whole world.. His name poured a kind of flowing abundance of grace and of heavenly goodness<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ Before the coming of Christ, God was only known in Judah; But after His coming, His grace filled the whole world; that the voice of the apostles rang high through the whole earth, and their message reached the ends of the world<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ The Lord Himself says in the gospel: *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain”* (John 12: 24). Now, as the precious grain of wheat died, and was buried through passion, from that One grain, came the produce of the church that set forth in the world.

God is not any more known only in Judah as it was before; nor His name is worshipped only in Israel, but so became from sunrise to sunset<sup>5</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

- ❖ As ‘Israel’ means (He who sees God), everyone should be enlightened by the grace; whether a Jew or a Greek – should be liberated from the bondage of Egypt, even from that of Pharaoh – namely, of the devil – who weighs on him with a heavy yoke<sup>6</sup>.

**(Deacon Codefilitides)**

Who is ‘Israel’, whose name is great? He is every believer who enjoys the enlightenment of the divine grace.

***“In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place is in Zion” (2)***

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on Mount, 2: 19.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Genesis 13: 3.

<sup>3</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, 1: 95.

<sup>4</sup> Sermon 169: 6.

<sup>5</sup> Sermon 94: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Quodvultdeus: Book of Promises and Predictions of God, 1: 32: 44.

Who would not covet for the Lord Christ to set His tabernacle in His heart, and to proclaims His dwelling place in his depths? Let our hearts become the new Jerusalem, where the inner peace is; namely, become the new ‘Salem’ on which the heavenly Melchizedek would reign, as Melchizedek of the old has reigned on ‘Salem’.

Indeed, His a tabernacle is set in ‘Salem’ (short for Jerusalem); namely, His church is established on the Lord Christ, who is according to the order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110: 4; Hebrew 5: 6, 10, 20), King of Salem (Genesis 14: 18; Hebrew &: 1, 21), King of peace and righteousness, through His sacrifice and priesthood, to destroy the weapons of the devil (3).

The dwelling place of Christ is the new Zion, namely, His church. As the word ‘Zion’ means (a stronghold or a vantage tower), Wherever there is knowledge and teachings of the Holy Book, as a stronghold in the soul. She would be the dwelling place of God.

- ❖ We are committed to do good if we intend to forsake evil. We are committed to seek peace if we intend to avoid war. Yet it is not enough to seek it, but once we find it, and it flees from us, we are committed to chase it with our whole energies; as *“the peace of God surpasses all understanding”* (Philippians 4: 7); Peace is the dwelling place of God; It is according to the psalmist: *“In Salem is His dwelling place”* (2 LXX) <sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ *“In Salem”*, Here you see that the literal meaning of Jerusalem is ‘Salem’, later called ‘Jebus’, and finally “Jerusalem”. That is ‘Salem’ whose King was “Melchizedek” (Hebrew 7: 1). When we read: *“You are Priest according to the order of Melchizedek”*, It obviously refers to Christ.

Aaron offered animal sacrifices, and poured animal blood; but, as Melchizedek did nothing of the sort, but offered instead bread and wine; hence It is said *“according to the order of Melchizedek”*.

There is no tabernacle for the Lord, where there is no peace; God would not be where there is controversy and dissension, as a Protector of the place. Let us then accept the interpretation of the Septuagint version, that the dwelling place of God is only in the soul filled with peace; the soul with no peace would never be a dwelling place for the Lord who Himself says to His disciples: *“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you”* (John 14: 27). Peace is our inheritance from the Savior<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ As Zion was the city of the Jews, the true Zion is the church of the Christians. The interpretation of the Hebrew names that came to us: ‘Judah’ means (confession), and ‘Israel’ means (he who sees God). After Judah comes Israel. If you wish to see God, you should first confess, then God’s dwelling place would be within you. As long as you do not confess your sins, you are still in controversy with God<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“There He broke the arrows of the bow; the shield and the sword and the battle-ax” (3)***

The Assyrians put Jerusalem under siege, but had to lift up the siege through a miraculous act by God; as it is written: *“And 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*

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 125. to Rusticus, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 9.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 76.

*eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses – all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh*” (2 Kings 19: 35-36). What happened here, happens in some way or another, seen or unseen, in the life of the church in every generation, as well as in the life of the children of God as members in His church.

According to **St. Augustine**, those who do not confess their sins, and haughtily enter, as though into a battle against God, all their weapons on which they depend, will be broken.

❖ Where is then the dwelling place of God? In Jerusalem, and in Zion. In Jerusalem where peace is, and in Zion, the vantage tower. I wish the human soul would have the peace of God and the meditation; I wish she would also be in the church, and bound to the Holy Books. In her there will be, most surely, peace, and the dwelling place of God; and *“There He will break the arrows of the bow”*, the arrows sent forth by the devil. There, God will break *“the shield, the sword, and the battle-ax”*<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

## 2- THE WORK OF THE KING - PRIEST:

*“You are more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey”* (4)

The ‘mountains’ refer to the kingdoms; the ‘mountains of prey’ to the kingdoms set upon robbery and plunder; which assume that there is no God to rein them. About such kingdoms it is written: *“Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion walked, the lioness and the lion’s cub, and no one made them afraid? The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs, killed for his lioness, , filled his caves with prey, and his dens with flesh”* (Nahum 2: 11-12; 3: 1).

The psalmist says that God is greater, stronger, and has more splendor than all the earthly kingdom, however great is their dominion and terror on the face of the earth. The dominion of those kingdoms is just for a certain time, whereas that of God is eternal, Their greatness will come to an end in an instant; whereas the glory and greatness of God will never end.

In the Septuagint version it came as: “You amazingly shine from the eternal mountains” (75: 3 LXX).

**St. John** the beloved looked at the churches to find them seven golden lampstands, and in their midst was the Lord Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shining as though from His holy mountains, shining by His amazing works through them. The psalmist says: *“Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me to Your holy hill and to Your tabernacle”* (Psalm 43: 3).

❖ The mountains could be interpreted in two ways: In the Old Covenant, they are the prophets, and in the New Covenant they are the apostles. About those mountains the Holy Book says: *“I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help”* (Psalm 121: 1). On these hills the city of God were comfortably established.

Any city built on a hill would not be hidden. We were all before in the darkness, in the shadows of death, Then the Lord shone on us from His eternal mountains; namely from the prophets and the apostles.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom. 9.

- ❖ What are those eternal mountains? They are those whom God makes eternal, the great mountains, the preachers of the truth; The mountain first receive Your light, and from the light received by the mountains, the earth is clothed as well<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The eternal mountains could also be interpreted as the heavens from which He sent the gift of the Holy Spirit on the apostles; and through them the whole world was enlightened in a way not perceived by human mind.

They could also be interpreted as the hosts of angels through whom He stirs up the souls of those worthy of enlightenment.

They could also be interpreted as the saintly men like Moses and the rest of the prophets, who, before the coming of our Lord, were eternal mountains; And after His coming, like the apostles and the teachers, through whom God enlightened the souls of the believers; by amazing visions and proclamations.

The eternal mountains could also be interpreted as the dogmas of the true faith, by which God enlightens every human soul coming into faith.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“The stouthearted were plundered; They have sunk into their sleep; And none of the mighty men have found the use of their hands” (5)***

As the Assyrians and others tried to invade some countries for spoil; Instead of taking spoil, they had to forsake their own treasures, and flee, leaving behind them as spoil what they have got in their own hands.

They have sunk into their sleep, and never waked up, for *“they were corpses – all dead”* (2 Kings 19: 35-36). In the Old Testament, the term “sleep” was sometimes used to refer to “death” (Psalms 13: 3; Jeremiah 51: 39, 57; Nahum 3: 18).

*“None of the mighty men have found the use of their hands”*, as they became utterly unable to bear arms, whether for offense, or even for defending themselves.

This phrase also refers to those who have put their whole hope in temporal things; Yet their life would soon pass away as a dream they saw in their sleep, then woke up to find themselves got nothing!

- ❖ They love the present things, then they go to sleep, and dream as though they have found a treasure; they become rich as long as they are still sleeping; but once they wake up they go back to their poverty<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The prophet calls the Assyrians ignorant and stupid, for they wrongly assumed that they could prevail against the God of Israel. They have gone to sleep around Jerusalem, planning to wake up to destroy the city, and hoping to be rich through the spoil they were going to plunder. But they became instead dead corpses, empty-handed of what they hoped for; their sleep turned into death.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ This life is indeed a dream, a dream of becoming rich. Yet, as soon as it becomes within our hands, it disappears. This view is expressed by the prophet Isaiah, saying: *“It shall even be as when a thirsty man dreams, and look – he drinks; but he awakes,*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 76.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 76.

*and indeed he is faint, and his soul still craves”* (Isaiah 29: 8). That truly describes the riches of this world: once we reach them, they forsake us.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ I wish the sleep of slothfulness and of the riches, would not swallow us There are some horse riders who sink in their sleep; about whom is written: *“Both the (horses and horse riders) were cast into a deep sleep”* (Psalm 76: 6). Does greed wound your heart? Does lust kindle in your body? You are then a sleeping horse rider! Cast into sleep, Judas did not listen to the words of Christ; he was overcome by the sleep of wealth, having sought the wages of his treason (Matthew 26: 15). Seeing him buried in such a deep sleep of greed, *“Satan entered into his heart”* (Luke 22: 3); the horse was wounded, and its rider was cast away<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ Our father **St. Anthony** once said: [It so happened that I went to Alexandria to get the blessing of the lighted pillar, the stronghold, and the well-established foundation of the apostolic faith; the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete; whose heart became a sanctuary for the Almighty God; he who was steadfast in his belief in the one Trinity, equal in essence; he who is beloved by our Lord Jesus Christ – Athanasius, the great, the son of the apostles -- who became a martyr several times by order of kings, because of the upright Orthodox faith. I stayed two days in his company, talking things of the Holy Book. And because of the sweetness of his life-giving talk, I slept only sporadically. Yet, whenever I was overcome by sleep, he kept on waking me up, saying: ‘Abba Anthony, you should forsake such a sleep, For the Holy Spirit said: *“They have sunk into their sleep (and benefited nothing)* (Psalm 75: 5)... He who watches in moderation is the one who rejoices and become filled with the gladness of the eternal life; For the joy of the present life is indeed not the true joy, and its sweetness is not the genuine sweetness]. When I heard those words, I bowed down before him; then returned to my place praising God.
- ❖ If you are overcome by sleep, do not surrender to it; for it is written in the gospel: *“Watch and pray”* (Matthew 26: 41); And, *“They have sunk into their sleep (and benefited nothing)”* (Psalm 76: 5 – according to the Septuagint version).

**(The garden of monks)**

***“At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and horse were cast into a deep sleep” (6)***

The wicked opponents of the divine truth are only in need of a word of rebuke from the Lord, for their chariots and horses to be cast into perpetual death. The tumult of the enemy, their haughtiness, and their violent cries turned into what is like a funeral. Either the horses died, and the charioteers lost their abilities to move; Or the charioteers themselves died, and the horses become almost dead for lacking those who lead and guide them.

- ❖ Who are they who ride horses? Those who refuse to be humble.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Patriarchs*, 7: 33.

It is not a sin to ride horses, but it is a sin for man to “*lift up his horn on high, and to speak with a stiff neck*” (Psalm 75: 5); and to think of himself as more distinguished than others<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Those who spend their years in slothfulness and laziness, boast their power and riches, and are overcome by bodily lusts; when rebuked by our Lord Jesus Christ, on the day of judgment, they lose all their hopes, will tremble before His wrath; and will have nothing in their hands of what they have acquired in their life,

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ As there are splendid mountains and dark mountains, there are likewise, good and bad horses. When horses and chariots came to Elisha to arrest him, and his servant was terrified to see the Assyrian army surrounding the city; Elisha said to him: “*Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha*” (2 Kings 6: 16, 17). He did not see anybody in the chariots; he just saw horses and chariots; namely, hosts of angels of the Lord. ...

(St. Jerome)

### 3- THE REIGN OF THE KING – PRIEST:

*“You, Yourself, are to be feared; And who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry?”(7)*

By saying “*You, Yourself*”, the psalmist means to say: “You, alone, are to be feared, and there is no one like You”

In the previous verse, the psalmist says that the adversaries will be cast into perpetual sleep; And now he says: “*Who may stand in Your presence?*”; Meaning, with the coming of the day of judgment, there would be no more chance to stand before the Lord, neither to oppose, nor to repent!

In those boastful, who lean upon their abilities and possibilities, St. Augustine sees adversaries to God, who will be cast into deep sleep, not to perceive that God rebukes them; until the dwelling of the great day of judgment of the Lord, when they stand before the awesome Lord in His anger.

*“You caused judgment to be heard from heaven. The earth feared and was still”*  
(8)

As God condemned the wicked, and issued His judgment against them, heaven heard His judgment; as though it was astonished before the longsuffering of the Lord on the wicked. And the earth feared and was still; for no one could defend them, as the cup of their evil was full.

When the Lord let the Philistines fall into the hands of His people, it was said: “*There was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people; the garrison and the raiders also trembled, and the earth quaked*” (1 Samuel 14: 15).

If heaven refers to the saintly oppressed children of God, the earth refers to the adversary wicked. In the midst of the great anguish, the souls of the righteous listen to the judgment and care of God for them; whereas the wicked who boast their power, ability, and dominion, fear, and stand still.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 76.

- ❖ Meaning that the defeat and destruction of the Assyrians became heard by all, like thunder from heaven; which caused the earth to fear, and to stand still.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“When God arose to judgment, to deliver all the oppressed of the earth” (9)***

According to the wicked, God does not care for mankind, and no one could save the pious from their hands. Whereas the pious believers, the meek and the poor in spirit, on the other hand, trusting in the divine promises, will exult in God, their Savior, even before their salvation from the hands of the wicked, is fulfilled.

- ❖ Who are the meek in heart? They are those who do not ride horses, but will humbly confess their sins<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Once the people realize that God is their Judge, they will sin no more<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

#### **4- WORSHIPPING THE KING- Priest:**

***“Surely, Your wrath against men brings You praise; With the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself” (10)***

God, the wholly goodness, turns even man’s wrath and his evil into good; as He did with that of Joseph’s brothers to the glory of His name; with the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart to the salvation of His people; and with the treason of Judas to the fulfillment of salvation, etc. For He is the Almighty, the Beneficent.

In the Septuagint version it came as: “Man’s thought confesses You, and its remainder praises You”.

As a start of our thought, It is befitting of us to confess our sins, to recall the Savior’s work in our life, and to present praises of joy and exultation for His work with us. Distinguishing between men’s thought and the remainder of thought, **St. Augustine** says: [Thought comes first, and then its remainder follows. What is the first thought? The good thought by which we begin is the confession, which unites us to Christ. Then the confession itself, namely, the first thought, produces the remainder of thought, which praises the Lord. What is the thought that confess? It is the thought that condemns the old unacceptable life; a departure from the old life ...; But, in case you forget your sins from which you intend to depart, you neither confess your Savior, nor praise Him<sup>3</sup>].

- ❖ We confined all our thought on confessing Your goodness on us; we shall not preoccupy it with anything else, not even for one minute, except with glorifying You.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“Make vows to the Lord Your God, and pay them; Let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared” (11)***

God calls us to make vows and to fulfill them. Here, many fathers distinguish between the collective vow of all the believers, and the individual vow. The collective vow is the dedication of the whole heart and all its energies to God. If the Lord Christ says: *“For their sakes I sanctify*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Job 14: 6.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 76.

*“Myself, that they also be sanctified by the truth”* (John 17: 19); It is for us to say back: “For Your sake, O Lord, we sanctify ourselves, for You, and by You, O Holy One”.

The individual vow is not for all, but is according to how much love for God, and longing for exaltation and perfection, the believer proclaims.

As an example for this, **St. Augustine** says: [Every married Christian vows to commit himself to his or to her spouse, as long as he or she is alive. It is a commitment vow. But in case of the departure of one spouse, and the other spouse vows to live a widower, it would be an optional individual vow. There are, as well, one who vows to live a virgin, and not to get married all his or her life, for the sake of worship or ministry, etc.

❖ Do not linger to vow; for you will fulfill it, not through your own strength; you will fail if you do. But if you depend upon Him to whom you vow, you will be safe, and you will fulfill your vow. *“Make vows to the Lord Your God, and pay them”*. We should make vow to believe in Him; to hope for the eternal life from Him; and to live in piety, according to the measure befitting of all men<sup>1</sup>.

❖ *“Let all who are around”*. Who are they? What is common to all, has to be in the middle. Why so? For it would thus be on the same distance from everyone. If it is not in the middle, it would be as though special for a particular group.

What is in there in the middle, so that all those who come to use it, and enlightened. At least this one to me, so it cannot be used to share what is in the middle of all Who know that the right is the year for all who are humble<sup>2</sup>

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ What should we vow, and what should we pay, O brethren? To believe in Him, and to hope to have the eternal life from Him, and the good life, according to the general level. There is a general level for all men. *“Do not commit adultery”* is a general commandment for all, whether married or single All of us should vow what concern faith, justice, chastity, and mercy; And, by the help of Him to whom we vow, we will pay.

Those who make a vow to be chaste their whole life, even if they are unmarried, their vow would be greater than all<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

*“He shall cut off the spirit of princes; He is feared by the kings of the earth”*  
**(12)**

Here he talks about the rulers, whether the religious, civil, or military, who oppose faith, and persecute believers; whose constitution is violence, injustice, and oppression, like Pharaoh in the days of Moses, Adoni-Bazek, king Saul, Belshazza, Sennechrib, and the two sons of Eli the priest, and Korah and his group.

Interpreting this phrase, **St. Jerome** felt terrified, for fear that leaning upon being a monk, a priest, or a head of a monastery, he may walk with the spirit of pride, and God Himself would stand against him.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 76.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 135: 1.

❖ *”He shall cut off the spirit of princes”* (12). “the spirit” here could be understood in one of two ways: Either the soul, or the spirit of pride. Let us count the saints as ‘rulers’. Solomon, for instance, as well as others, were ‘princes’; even ‘Judas’ was a ‘prince’. And having sinned, God has cut off their spirits. I wish no one says: I am a bishop; a priest, a deacon, or a monk; I am a ‘prince’ in this world; For God is awesome enough to *“cut off the spirit of princes”*.

Again, You are committed to remember how God had rejected the spirit of pride: How the good Spirit of God forsook King Saul, whom, according to the Holy Book, an evil spirit from God disturbed God withdrew from king Saul to let him be disturbed by an evil spirit. And finally, knowing that God is capable to cut off the spirit of princes, David beseeched Him: *“Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me”*).

*“He is feared by the kings of the earth”* (12). God may allow us to become “kings of this earth”, to reign upon our body; as according to the apostle: “Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body”

Somewhere else in the Holy Book, it is written: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord” The kings therefore, are the saints, and their hearts are in the hand of the Lord. I beseech God to make us kings to reign upon our bodies, to have them submit to us. The following words by the apostle apply to the situation here: “I discipline my body and bring it into submission, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” Let us then control our souls, and submit our bodies, for then Christ would come and make His dwelling in us. Every day Christ stands at the door of our souls, longing to enter. Let us open them up wide for Him; to enter, to dwell, and to dine together with us.

**(St. Jerome)**

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 76**

### **REIGN UPON MY DEPTHS, O LEADER OF THE BATTLE**

- ❖ The enemy kindles a battle against me;  
He intends to turn the world that You created for my sake into hell;  
But You did not forsake me alone;  
You hid me in You to grant me conquest.
- ❖ You have condescended, O word of God, and incarnated in the womb of David's daughter;  
You became known in Judah;  
For You are the Lion who came from the tribe of Judah;  
And Your name became great in the new Israel, Your holy church;  
You are High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, King of Salem;  
Wherever You went, You turned the location into a center of peace (Salem);  
And turned it into a new Zion (a stronghold or a vantage tower).  
Come to dwell in my depths, to turn my soul into a source of peace for others;  
And to open up my inner insight;  
To become a vantage tower to behold Your high secrets.
- ❖ The enemy is trying to terrorize me by his fiery arrows;  
But You alone can break his shield, sword, and battle-ax;  
You set Your believers as holy mountains, on which You transfigure;  
You surround them with fiery chariots and horses;  
And make them praise You together with Elisha the prophet, saying:  
"Those who are with us are more than those who are with them"
- ❖ You are the Leader of the battle;  
An awesome God; Who can stand before You?!  
The devil with all the hosts of darkness assumed that they could swallow us;  
No human possibility can stand before them;  
Yet, You, the Heavenly One, resurrected to save all the poor in spirit on earth;  
You are the God of the oppressed;  
You raise them up from the heap of trash;  
And make them kings and greats.
- ❖ Receive my vow to You, O King of kings;  
Receive my humble present;  
What can I offer You except perpetual thanksgiving, and continuous praise?
- ❖ Grant me, O Lord, the spirit of love and humility;  
I see You a Lover of all mankind;  
I see You the perpetual Light in the midst of all;  
You intend for all to be saved, and enlightened by You;  
You wish for them all to attach to You with no partiality;  
To grant all of them the light of Your divine knowledge;  
You intend for all to enjoy Your salvation;  
My soul exults to see Your work with all.

## PSALM 77

# THE CONSOLING MEMORY OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE WORKS

This psalm was written in the midst of a great anguish that dwelt upon the psalmist. He confesses that he came to be greatly troubled for being unable to perceive God's plan; and that he knows of no other way to deal with such an anguish, other than to have faith in God the Refuge of his soul! With such an extremely bitter anguish, remembering God's past dealings with us, and raising the heart up to heaven, would grant our depths the deposit of heavenly comfort, or to celebrate a joyful heavenly Sabbath.

### The key of the psalm:

The word "remember" or "consider" came four times in this psalm (verses 3, 5, 6, and 11). It is befitting of him, in the midst of such an anguish and trouble, to think of God, and to remember His past dealings with His people, and with him.

### Its divisions:

1- Confusing questions	1 - 10
2- Comfort for the psalmist	11 - 15
3- God's way in the sea	16 - 20

### The title:

To the chief musician. To Jeduthun. A psalm of Asaph.

According to the Septuagint version, the title came as: To the end (to the conclusion); for the sake of Jeduthun; A psalm of Asaph.

Commenting on this title, **St. Augustine** says: [Jeduthun, meaning (jump); and Asaph, meaning (a congregation); the psalm talks about the congregation jumping to reach the ultimate Goal, namely, Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>.

"To Jeduthun": This title came in psalms 39 and 62, meaning (a presenter of a praise). If its occasion was the dwelling of a great anguish, yet it would never deny the believer to present a praise, in which to sing and exults in the midst of his intense confusion, praising God, his Refuge, and the Secret of his comfort.

According to **St. Athanasius**, "Juduthun", one of the chief musicians, hearing about what was going to dwell upon the people, he moaned and suffered greatly, lamenting their alienation from God<sup>2</sup>. And according to Josabius, David and Asaph wrote several psalms to comfort Jeduthun, and to take away from his heart such a great sorrow, and the illusion that God has forsaken the world<sup>3</sup>.

### 1- CONFUSING QUESTIONS:

The psalmist starts by a crying-out to God, yet confirming his trust that God, hearing his cry-outs in the midst of his anguish, will respond to the confusing questions that come on his mind. God listens and responds to the silent cries of the heart, not for the sake of the cries themselves, but for the sake of what they imply of our faith and trust in Him. It is written about the Lord Himself, that "*in the days of His flesh, He offered up*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 79 (77).

<sup>2</sup> الراهب القس صموئيل السرياني: تفسير المزامير لإثنيموس أسقف أورشليم، 1988، مز 76 (77).

<sup>3</sup> المرجع السابق.

*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).*

The eyelids of the psalmist were held open; looking into his depths all along several nights during which he could not sleep; And as he could find no words to express what went on within himself, he resorted to silence; and, in an attempt to calm his soul, and to find comfort through trusting that God would never forget him, he got back to his feelings in the past, and recalled what he used to sing. Those memories, though, stirred up in his soul, questions he expressed in this psalm (verses 7 to 10). Those questions have their answers, for God is faithful in His word; and His promises, and covenants would never fail.

***“I cried out to God with my voice – to God with my voice; and He gave ear to me” (1)***

When the psalmist cried out to God with all his heart, with zeal and faithfulness, God moved to give him ear. Cries that move the heart would move God Himself, He who dwells in the heart, and make it His dwelling place.

The believer, who cries out with his heart, does not only move his lips, but moves his whole being, the physical, the mental, and the spiritual.

If sin alienates man from God, he cries out as though talking to someone far away; Yet they are not cries to be heard by the ears, but are cries of a heart, seeking to be sanctified, to feel that he is in the bosom of God, or to regain his position in the divine bosoms, by purity and sanctity, through the riches of God’s grace, and the work of His Holy Spirit.

According to **St. Jerome**, the debate with God is realized by work; the cry-outs of the psalmist here is through the good work, according to God’s commandment; and God’s response is through work as well.

- ❖ *“I cried out to God with my voice in the day of my trouble I sought the Lord”.... See, how much trouble he was in; that he had to cry out loudly seeking God. A loud cry is essential when the troubled heart is far from God; As though he says: Because of my sins which alienated me from You, I have to cry out loud, so that You would have compassion on me<sup>1</sup>!*
- ❖ When we are troubled, we think of nothing but of our trouble. But the best we should do in such a time is to pray with zeal for if we find God, we shall get everything back.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ See that our good works cry out to the Lord, even when we are silent. That is why, in the Holy Book it came: *“Then the word of the Lord came through (the hand) of Haggai the prophet”* (Haggai 1: 1, 3); the word of God did not come by talk, but by the hand – by work.

With the same spirit the prophet Jeremiah says: *“I wish my eyes have no rest”*. See, how even our eye is not silent! We indeed often cry out with our hands, as well as by our tears<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Psalms – homily 10.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Psalms – homily 10.*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on Psalms – homily 10.*

- ❖ In the day of my trouble I cried out, supplicating to Him, seeking His help; And as my cries were worthy of His response, He listened to me, and saved me from my sorrows. Therefore, be sure, O (Jeduthun), that God is near to those who seek him as is befitting of them.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

According to **St. Augustine**, in the day of his anguish, the believer cries out to God, not to get rid of his trouble, as much as to make (Jeduthun) jump above the whole world and all its troubles; to make him jump to the bosom of the Lord, seeking the Lord Himself.

Anguish for him does not concern a certain issue in itself, but concerns the whole life with all its troubles, so that the soul would abide in her heavenly abode.

**St. Augustine** often talked in abundance about the importance of (jumping) above all troubles for the sake of the acquirement the Lord Himself, and the enjoyment of His divine bosom.

- ❖ There are many who cry out to the Lord for the sake of temporal issues, but they rarely cry out for the sake of the lord himself. It seems easier for man to seek something from the Lord than to seek the Lord Himself; as though what the Lord gives is sweeter than to be given the Lord Himself! That is why he who cries out to the Lord for the sake of something temporal, is not someone who (jumps) Because the Lord will indeed listen to you when you seek Him; and not when you seek something through Him; it is written: *“They cried out, but there was none to save them, even to the Lord, but He did not answer them”* (Psalm 18: 41)<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ When you are in trouble, what would you seek? If it you are in prison, you would seek release. If you have fever, you would seek health; If you are hungry, you would seek satisfaction; if you are in a financial trouble, you would seek profit; If you wish to be someone who (jumps); In the time of trouble you should seek God, and not something from God. For then, God would take trouble away from you, in order to let you get attached to him undisturbed<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord. My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; my soul refused to be comforted” (2)***

In the day of trouble, the psalmist did not seek merely to be saved of trouble, but sought the Lord Himself, being the secret of his comfort, joy, and the exultation of his soul. In the midst of the night of this world he stretches out his hands as though to embrace his Beloved and Sanctifier; so that the devil would not be able to deceive him, nor to make him lose the divine comforts.

- ❖ In another psalm it came: *“Stand by night in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord”* (Psalm 34: 1, 2). In the night of this world and in its darkness, while the others hasten toward their iniquities, I present my works to You alone. *“and I am not deceived”*, For I cried out with my works. There are two interpretations for this: Either my prayer was well received; or I was never deceived by the nets that the devil is trying to set up for me.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 76 (77).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps.

According to the Hebrew text it came as: “in the night I did not hesitate to stretch out my hands”. My hands are always stretched out to good works, and never to sins.

- ❖ *“My soul refused to be comforted”*. As my soul plunged into sin, I could not comfort myself with any hope. “But once I remember God, my soul is lifted up”. When I turn my thoughts toward God, my heart becomes again preoccupied with the compassion of His mercies.

According to the Hebrew text: *“I meditate, and my spirit faints”* (3); whether through despair, or through longing to God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ As an example: Let us assume that someone loses his son. What wouldn't he do to find him? Where wouldn't he go? What sea wouldn't he sail? Wealth and possessions would be of secondary importance compared to finding him. And once he does, he would never let him go. How much more would it be befitting of him to do for the sake of God, without whom he would not even exist?! Being so weak, we should, in the least, seek God, the way we seek our children or our possessions.

Did not ever leaves your house for the money? Did not care about every way? As you find, and become filled with self-confidence?<sup>2</sup>

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ *“In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord”* (2). I did not seek the gold nor the silver of the world, but only God. As nobody would like to suffer trouble; In case it comes, man should seek God God may allow for trouble to come on man, not out of anger on His part, but rather out of compassion. God would never forsake man, but wants him to seek Him.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ God, being a Refuge; and besides, being in heaven and beyond heaven, we are surely committed to flee from here to there, where there is peace and comfort from troubles, and where we can celebrate the great Sabbath. It is a banquet, where one is filled with gladness and calm, finds comfort in God, and looks forward to His pleasure. We have resorted to God; Shall we go back to the world?! We have become dead to sin; Shall we go back to seek it?! We have denied the world; Shall we go back to attach ourselves to its mire<sup>3</sup>?!

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ I perpetually raised my hands to Him; not just by day, but also in the night. In the days of my sorrow I no more sought sleep, but spent the whole night praying. I never failed; namely, I got my request, and was never disappointed.

Saying *“my hands”*, he means: As my trouble made my life miserable, I did not seek help only by my tongue, but through doing the good work as well.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“I remember God, and I moan; I meditate, and my spirit faints”*** (3)

According to the Septuagint version, it came as: “I remember God, and I become glad; I pour my complaint, and my soul is belittled”. It is as though the psalmist, looking

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Psalms – homily 10.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Hebr., 22: 6-7.*

<sup>3</sup> *Flight from the world, 8: 45.*

at God and remembering His dealings with him, his depths exults and become glad; but getting preoccupied with his troubles and his complaints, his soul get belittled in him.

- ❖ Every hour of prayer, provides a special memory of God's blessings on us. We should pray early in the morning; for the beginnings of the tendencies of the soul and mind to be dedicated to God; and before touching, we have first to become glad by meditating in God; for according to what is written: "*I remember God, and become glad*" (Psalm 77: 3 LXX). We should not start any work before fulfilling what is written: "*To You I pray. 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: 2-3) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

- ❖ A mere remembrance of God would bring comfort to the soul; according to what is written: "*I remember God, and become glad*" (3).

**(Father Dorotheos of Gaza)**

- ❖ Nothing could comfort me like remembering God, It would turn my sorrow into joy. Remembering the calamities that have dwelt on me, on the other hand, would only bring disturbance and trouble to my soul.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ My hands did not work in vain; as they found a great Comforter. Being not slothful, I was preoccupied with God, and I became glad<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***"You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak"* (4)**

In the midst of such troubles, because of the persistence of his enemies on opposing him day and night, man would become almost helpless, and unable to open his lips to utter a single word; he would bury the sighs of his heart, his moans, and complaints inside him.

- ❖ Meditating in my sins, I would not dare to raise my eyes up to heaven; "*For to the wicked, God says: What rights have you to declare My statutes?*" (Psalm 50: 16). I, therefore, became as though paralyzed, I am terrified; I am not able to utter a single word<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Before the watchers of the night begin their watch, I went ahead of them, with wide open eyes, and with no sleep, because of the multitude of thoughts that disturbed me; yet, I could not utter a word from my mouth.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

According to the Septuagint version, it came as: "My enemies have set watchers against me; I am so troubled that I cannot speak". The psalmist could not sleep the whole night; his eyes were wide open because of the multitude of thoughts that troubled him; about which he could not utter a single word.

- ❖ "My enemies have set watchers against me". The did not spare a place to set traps for me!. Who are those enemies but those about whom the apostle says: "*For we do not*

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<sup>1</sup> *On Fear of Punishment.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 76 (77).*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on Psalms – homily 10.*

wrestle against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6: 12). We bear animosity against the devil and his angels, whom he calls “*rulers of the world*”, not on account of that they are the rulers of the whole world, of heaven and earth, but of the sinners who love the world. .. There is no harmony between us and the devil and his hosts, who hate us for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, and will never be on good terms with us<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

Before such a serious situation, the psalmist “*is so troubled that he cannot speak*”.

**“I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times” (5)**

Looking at the opposition of the enemies, even at night, when they set watchers against him, his soul gets troubled. But when he gets to remember God’s past dealings with him, and His eternal plan for his salvation, his soul exults and praises Him.

The psalmist talked before about how he buried his bitterness inside himself; and how he could not speak; But turning the moans of his heart into inner cry-outs which he raised to Him who hears the language of the heart; and getting back to the past dealings of God for his sake; the bitterness of his heart turned into inexpressible gladness, and unutterable exultation.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist, feeling as though stricken outside the gates, he resorting to the inner depths of his heart to flee from the traps set by enemies outside, by remembering the days of old. Keeping silent and uttering no word before the horror of the opposition of the enemies, he resorted to meditating calmly inside his heart. He (Jumped) to those days of old, not by much talk, but through calm meditation<sup>2</sup>.

What are those days of old in the psalmist’s mind, in which he perpetually meditate? According to **the scholar Origen**, it is the eternal gospel, namely, the eternal plan of God for our salvation. From eternity God has been preoccupied with our salvation. That is the eternal annunciation (Revelation 14: 6) which the angel brings forth to those dwelling on earth. [This gospel will be proclaimed when death is swallowed and eternity is proclaimed. It seems as though “*those days of old; the years of ancient times*” (5), about which the prophet talks concerns this eternal gospel<sup>3</sup>:

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, remembering God’s dealings with His people in the days of old; like bringing them out of the land of Egypt; His care for them in the wilderness, and in the promised land; the psalmist becomes filled with hope in His mercy, compassion, and care.

**“I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart; and my spirit makes diligent search” (6)**

As there is no comparison between the opposition of the enemies to him day and night, and God’s care for him; the psalmist is preoccupied with searching his depths, and recalling God’s care for him.

The psalmist’s sorrows and lamentations turned into inner songs and glorious joy, when he perceived why God has allowed for his anguish; and when he experienced God’s compassion in the midst of sufferings, his soul became filled with hope in the glorious salvation of God.

According to **st. Jerome**, the psalmist is preoccupied with no one, nor with anything in the night, except with God and God’s dealings with him.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 76 (77).

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On Ps. 76 (77).

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on Rom., 11: 2.

❖ He started talking to himself in his secret place, and meditating in the days of old<sup>1</sup>.  
(St. Augustine)

❖ I am not preoccupied with my anger on my enemy; as all my pleasure is in God. Night, usually, is a time for comfort or for lust; But for me, it is a time for deep meditation in virtue I am like someone plowing a field to plant the seeds of God's teachings<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Thought normally come forth from within ourselves; as we naturally recall what we did or what we heard; about which the blessed David says: "*I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times; I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart, and my spirit makes diligent search*" (5 – 6); And again he says: "*The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile*" (Psalm 94: 11); and, "*The thoughts of the righteous are right ...*" (Proverbs 12: 5). And in the gospel the Lord says to the Pharisees: "*Why do you think evil in your hearts?*" (Matthew 9: 4)<sup>3</sup>.

(Father Moses)

***"Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more?" (7)***

In the midst of his troubles, man has such thoughts. But shall God, the whole love and mercy, cast him off forever?, and will he be favorable to him no more? No way! He anticipates to embrace him, and to bring him forth into the heavenly glories.

❖ Having reached the limits of anguish in this life, the psalmist thought of another life without tribulation; But such a life could not be reached unless we perceive that our troubles here come from God's wrath. In his silence he wonders: "*Has His mercy ceased forever?*" (8). yet, God. Through the prophet Isaiah says: "*I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry*" (Isaiah 57: 16) Do you endure the wrath of God that is what was discovered (Psalmist) in silence has His mercy ceased forevermore?"(lxx8)<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***"Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore?" (8)***

It is befitting of us not to let despair cover up our eyes, as God's mercies will never cease, and His promises will never fail. He is faithful despite our unfaithfulness.

***"Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" (9)***

Our unfaithfulness will not make God forget His mercies; Even if He gets angry because of our sins, He will never shut up His compassion from Himself; for He is merciful and beneficent.

**St. Ambrose** says: In a magnificent commentary on God's nature, full of mercy and love; which He proclaims by saying: "***Everyone*** therefore who acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before My Father in heaven; but ***he*** who denies Me before others, [Saying "***Everyone***" about those whom He will eternally glorify; and not saying it (but saying "***he***"), about those who deny themselves the eternal glory,

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps 76 (77).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Psalms – homily 10.

<sup>3</sup> Cassian, Conferences 1: 19.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 76 (77).

reveals the Lord's longing for glorifying mankind, and His sorrow for those who fail among them].

- ❖ The former was our conversation reveals a tendency to the mercy of our Lord Jesus, we will take him also tells us himself, when he said: "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10: 32-33).

When he spoke of its confessors, said: "everyone," As for his speech on the state of denial did not mention the word "he" ... In the case of the reward promised by the Useful all admit it, but when the punishment did not threaten all...

Let us meditate in what the Lord Christ says. He promised the reward to "*everyone*" of those who acknowledge Him; But in case of the punishment He did not threaten all; It came the same way in St. Luke as well (12: 8-9); which confirms that it was intentionally written, and not by chance. He means to say that "*everyone*" who acknowledge Him, whatever his or her age or condition is, with no exception; which He did not say in case of the denial.

**(St. Ambrose)**

***"And I said: 'It is my anguish; that the right hand of the Most High has changed'" (10)***

According to the Septuagint version it came as: "I said: Now I start. That is the change of the Right Hand of the Most High". Having perceived that God the Most Merciful, even though not pleased with man because of his sin, He will still not forget His divine promises of salvation, and His eternal mercies; the psalmist sings: "I said: Now I start". It is as though he started a new life, through perceiving that, for his sake, the Word of God, or the Right Hand of the Most High, has become Man; that, to save him, He who is unchangeable, incarnates and takes the form of a servant.

The Word of God did not change as far as His Divinity is concerned; but He came down to us to renew our nature, and to bring us up from corruption to non-corruption; and from lowliness to exalted glories.

- ❖ "And I said: Now I start; that is the change of the Right Hand of the Most High" (According to both the Septuagint and the Coptic versions). Now the Right Hand of the Most High started to change me Now I start something feeling secure Now I enter into the palace of Joy, where there is no fear of an enemy Now I start to be in a place where all my enemies will not set watchers against me<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ "The change of the Right Hand of the Most High" (10). Unless the Right Hand of the Most High changes; and He takes up on Himself the humanity of man, we shall not be able to receive His mercy<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ By proclaiming: "*The Right Hand of the Most High has changed*" (10 LXX); the prophet refers to that, even though the divine nature is unchangeable. Yet through His condescending to the weakness of our nature, it changed to our form.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 76 (77).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Psalms – homily 10.

When the recipient of the law (Moses) took out his hand from his bosom, it unnaturally changed; and when he put it again in his bosom, it restored its natural beauty.

Again we say that the only begotten Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, is the Right Hand of the Most High<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

- ❖ That Right Hand of the Most High has changed the nations as well, and brought them forth from evil vanity to a better situation. Such a change from evil to goodness, we call “the change of the Right Hand of the Most High”.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## 2- COMFORT FOR THE PSALMIST:

The psalmist looks back to his past. For the psalmist, history would be the story of God’s compassion, faithfulness, might, and fatherhood to ward him.

God is Holy, dwells in unapproachable light; Fearful to those who enter into animosity with Him; and Amazing in His compassion to those who enter into friendship with Him. His relationship with His people goes beyond being just a relationship of friendship; for they are His people, with whom He enters into a covenant, and whom He considers as His kinsmen or household.

*“I will remember the works of the Lord. Surely I will remember Your wonders of old” (11)*

The comfort of the believers, in the midst of their many troubles, lies in the remembrance of God’s work along the history, and of His wonders since He created man; and will last until they encounter Him in the clouds. The secret of their comfort is His amazing works, and His exalted promises.

- ❖ Let us now exult by bringing those works to our memory; Let us jump above our tendencies, cease to rejoice in the temporal things rejoice instead in God’s works, and exult in listening to Him who speaks (God); that when we depart from here, we would practice what we used to, when He spoke To rejoice in the works of God is to forget even yourself, as what would be better than rejoicing in Him alone<sup>2</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ *“I will remember the works of God”*; His amazing works with Moses, and those He did with His saints meditating in the compassion you reveal to your saints, I would never be without hope<sup>3</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Here, the prophet remembered God’s works, wonders, and deeds. The **works** are His creations that He made from void. The **wonders** are both general and personal: The general is creating a rational man from dust; and what is more amazing is creating him *“in His image, and according to His likeness”* (Genesis 1:26), to let him become a ruler over all what are lower than him.

The personal wonders are those He performed in the land of Egypt, in Sinai, etc.. As to His **deeds**, they are the ordinances He gave for the sake of reforming man and his

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<sup>1</sup> *Life of Moses*, 28, 29.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 76 (77)*.

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on Psalms – homily 10*.

salvation, including the chastisements He allowed to come over him to bring him back to repentance, through the statutes and laws He set on him.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“I will also meditate on all Your works, and talk of Your deeds” (12)*

*“Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God?”*

(13)

After remembering God’s eternal mercies, and His unceasing compassion, the psalmist got preoccupied with His amazing works with man since his creation. And now he enters into the depths of his soul to realize that the goal of all this is to set out of his depths a holy sanctuary for the Lord, and a way that crosses over from earth to heaven. This is the greatest of wonders, that God sets our hearts a heaven or a kingdom for Himself; and conforms us to be in the likeness of angels. That is what **St. John Chrysostom** has cherished so many times; as though nothing preoccupy him in all his life, but to see that, by Jesus Christ, the earth has been transformed to what is like heaven; and men into the likeness of angels.

- ❖ What is “*the way of God*”? It is the Savior who Himself says: “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (John 14: 6). The Way is therefore the Son of God. The way of God is only in the holy man. In case we wish for God to dwell in us, let us be holy; as God’s way is holiness<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ By saying: “*Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary*”; he means (in Your statutes) which You have given us in Your sanctuary, on Mount Sinai; where we knew Your way; namely, in the enlightenment by Your statutes, and the wonders You have done.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples” (14)*

That amazing work did not concern a specific race, but all the nations were called to enjoy the membership of the church, to practice the power of His salvation, and the exalted work of his cross.

- ❖ “*You are the God who does wonders*”. The psalmist did not say, “Who did”, but “*who does*”, as God will always do wonders<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ He did not say “*You have declared Your strength among the people*”, but, “*Among the peoples*”. As His strength, then, came to the knowledge of both the Israelites and the Egyptians. When He came to the world, all the world knew that a strength coming out of Him healed **all**, His blood was shed for **all**, and He tasted death to redeem **all the peoples**, from their vain works, inherited from their fathers, as is written by the apostle Peter.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ You are indeed the Great God, who does wonders in both the soul and the body: In the body, You made the deaf hear, the blind see, the paralyzed walk; and the dead risen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Psalms – homily 10.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Psalms – homily 10.*

And in the soul: the foolishly drunk became rational; the idol worshippers became believers; and those who rob others became givers to others<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph” (15)***

Some fathers believe that Jacob here refers to the Jews, or the old Israel; while Joseph refers to the Gentiles. For the Arm of God, namely, the incarnate Word of God, has granted the absolution from the bonds of sin, to let all be in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

According to **St. Augustine**, by the arm of God, namely by His strength the Jews and the Gentiles were liberated, and both were melded together by the Cornerstone – the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2: 20).

- ❖ By Your might You have liberated Your people from the bondage of Egypt; namely those born from the seed of Jacob; whose status was exalted through Joseph. We also say that, as the only begotten Son of God, is called “the Right Hand”, and “the Arm” of God; while ‘Joseph’ means (God’s increase); the prophet says: “*By Your arm*”, O God, namely by Your only begotten Son, You saved Your people, formed of the seed of Jacob, the circumcised; and the children of Joseph, namely, the Gentiles, who are God’s increase or addition to the people of Israel.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

### **3- GOD’S WAY IN THE SEA:**

God, the Creator of nature, who cares for it, the Almighty God, has His way in the sea.

***“The waters saw You, O God, The waters saw You, they were afraid; the depths also trembled” (16)***

If the waters of the Red Sea, as well as those of the River Jordan, were afraid and horrified before God, the Savior of His people, and the people of the old could cross over to the wilderness of Sinai, then to the land of Canaan; In the New Covenant, as well, the water of Baptism tremble before the work of the Lord Christ, who brought humanity forth from the bondage of the devil to the liberty of the children of God.

**St. Augustine** believes that the ‘waters’ refer to peoples (Revelation 17: 15); and the ‘*depths*’ refer to the conscience of man, which trembles when he confesses.

- ❖ As the people crossed over the Red Sea and the River Jordan, while the waters recognized their Creator, the people did not! “*The waters saw You, O God, the depths also trembled*”; What waters, and what depths? The pure minds and hearts. “*They were afraid*”, not out of hatred, but through faith<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ The waters of the Red Sea, and those of the River Jordan, were both portrayed by the prophet, as though, sensing the presence of God preceding the procession of His people, they stood stiff out of fear; and the depths trembled when a mighty tempest blew.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 76 (77).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 10.

***“The clouds poured out water; the sky thundered; Your arrows flashed back and forth” (17)***

According to **Father Omesimus of Jerusalem**, the clouds here refer to the saintly apostles, who sent forth their declaration of the holy gospel to the end of the earth.

- ❖ The angels, who accompany us all along our life on earth, either rejoice for our sake, or wail when we commit sins.

The prophet Jeremiah also says that the earth will mourn because of those dwelling on it. It is also said: *“The idol made with hands is accursed, and so is the one who made it”* \*Wisdom 14: 8); not that the curse comes upon the solid material from which the idol is made, but by the word *“idol”*, he means the devil dwelling in it, who gives the idol its name. In the same way the *“earth”* means the angel responsible for the earth; and the *“water”* the angel responsible for it, about whom it was written: *“The waters saw You, O God, the waters saw You, they were afraid; the depths also trembled; the clouds poured out water; the sky thundered; Your arrows flashed back and forth”* (16-17)<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ *“The clouds thundered”*, The clouds or the prophets who were silent concerning of the Jews, spoke to us through the apostles; *“the sky thundered; Your arrows flashed back and forth”*, The preaching spread the word of Christ all over the world.

"The Voice of Thunder in the storm (the wheel)." Kingly voice, because education is high.

Now we are talking in particular about human procedure. The wheel as you know, settle on the land base is very simple, they are not always going to stabilize. Do not touch the ground but stand and reflect.

Speeds of the top things to carry in your same

**(St. Jerome)**

***“The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind; The lightning lit up the world; The earth trembled and shook” (18)***

According to the Jewish Historian Josephus, once the army of Pharaoh entered into the red Sea, the waters rushed over them, a flood of rain poured from the sky, lightning lit, thunder sounded, and darkness dwelt upon them.

A horrible portrait, when the same location of the amazing salvation for the believers, became itself the location of destruction for the wicked.

This portrait bears a symbol of what happens during baptism; when the angelic hosts exult for the sake of those newly baptized, for their enjoyment of sonhood to God; and the head of the devilish dragon is crushed by the loss of his authority over them.

According to **St. Augustine**, the voice of the thunder in the whirlwind, refers to the voice of the divine commandment that thunders in the conscience of man; while the lightning flashes in our depths.

***“Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great water, and Your footsteps were not known” (19)***

God led His people through the waters of the sea, along a way never treaded before by the feet of man. The salvation of God for man is always so unique, exalted, and never perceived by mind.

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<sup>1</sup> عظات للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكلين سمير كوستي، 10: 6.

According to **st. Augustine**, all the nations are like the sea, with its salty and bitter water, and unceasing storms, violent waves, and torrential currents. God's way which He sanctified (13) is in the sea; as the Holy Messiah descended to the world, gave the good news to the nations, and made His way among the peoples. Yet the Jews did not believe in Him. Not recognizing His footsteps, they claim that He has not yet come, for they did not know that he walks on the sea.

- ❖ The same way, man cannot see any trace on the water, of a boat or a swimmer after it or he passes by; So man cannot perceive the exalted divine ways<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

- ❖ He would not be able to walk on the sea, if He is not the Creator of the world. About Him the blessed 'Job' says: "*He alone spreads out the heaven, and treads on the waves of the sea*" (Job 9: 8); and in the wisdom of Sirach, he says: "*I dwelt in the highest heavens, and My throne was in a pillar of cloud. Alone I compassed the vault of heaven, and traversed the depths of the abyss*" (Sirach 24: 4-5). And David proclaims: "*Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great water, O God*" (9 LXX)<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Khromatius)**

***"You led Your people like a flock, by the hands of Moses and Aaron" (20)***

In shepherding the sheep – specially in the East – the shepherd precedes the flock, that follow his footsteps, sure that no wolf or any wild beast can touch them.

He is truly the hidden true Leader through Moses and Aaron.

According to **St. Augustine**, Although the Lord has sent Moses and Aaron to take care of the Jews, and split the sea for them to walk on its dry bottom; the Jews still do not believe that He has come, and made His way among the multitude of nations.

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<sup>1</sup> مؤسسة القديس أنطونيوس: السجود والعبادة بالروح والحق، ج 5، 2006، ص 69.

<sup>2</sup> *Tractate on Matt 52: 2.*

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 77**

### **AN ENTRY INTO ANGUISH OR AN ENJOYMENT OF THE COMFORT OF HEAVEN**

- ❖ When a great anguish dwells upon me;  
And I feel that all doors are closed before my face;  
I count that no one had ever come through such an anguish.  
And I count You, far away from me, is pouring Your wrath upon me.  
Yet, when I go back to remember Your past dealings with me, I wonder:  
“Will the Lord cast off forever?  
Will He be favorable no more?  
Has His mercy ceased forever?  
Has His promise failed forevermore?  
Has God forgotten me altogether?
- ❖ You allowed for me to pass through affliction to learn to cry out to You.  
I cry out to You with my whole being;  
I cry out to You with my tongue, my mouth, and my larynx, that will never  
cease to express what is with me;  
I cry out to You with my hands, when they practice Your good work;  
I cry out to You with my eyes, when they talk with the language of tears;  
I cry out to You with my heart, as You alone can hear and respond to it.
- ❖ My soul praises You in the time of affliction;  
It refuses to be comforted by anyone else;  
Amid the affliction, the whole world becomes narrow in my eyes  
My heart withdraws to Your Heavens to encounter You, O the refuge of the  
poor;  
There, I partake of the gladness of the heavenly Sabbath;  
There, I enjoy an exalted banquet;  
There, I recognize Your sanctity;  
I have no wish to return to the world;  
Together with the apostle Peter I supplicate: “It is good, O Lord, to be here”.  
The world will have no more authority to seduce me;  
Nor sin will have ability to set traps on my way;  
For You, O Holy One, is the Way.
- ❖ I see You, O the only begotten Son of God, and the Right Hand of the Father, as  
though You have changed.  
Although You are the same, yesterday, today, and forever.  
For my sake, You have indeed become Man;  
Yet You will remain One and Equal in essence to Your Father;  
Your incarnation lifted me up to You;  
To enjoy a fellowship with You by Your Holy Spirit;  
And to unite with the Father, Your Father, and abide in His bosom.
- ❖ I stand in awe before Your exalted works, O wonder Maker!  
You led Your people to enjoy the holy life;  
And behold, You came to us as the Way, the Truth, and the life;

You became for us righteousness, redemption, and sanctity.

- ❖ You caused Your people to pass through the Red Sea and the River Jordan;  
The waters saw You and were afraid, and the depths trembled;  
Now, before You, all peoples trembled, and in You they believed, O Savior of the world.  
In the Old, the clouds thundered;  
And now, the whole world hear the voice of the clouds – Your prophets!  
Behold, the voice of preaching Your gospel, thunders on the whole earth.
- ❖ Your gospel is joy to hearts;  
It turned the world from being a valley of tears, into a joyful heavenly journey;  
Your works transformed our lives into a deposit of heaven.  
Affliction will no more destroy our souls;  
But it became an amazing gift, through which we encounter You, O Savior of souls!

## PSALM 78

### A HISTORICAL RECAPITULATION

This is the seventh psalm to carry the name ‘Asaph’; and the first of the historical psalms (78; 105; 106; 135). It is the longest psalm after psalm 119.

Psalm 78 turns history into a practical sermon, exhorting us to learn God’s law and to preach it, in order to enjoy the Holy One dwelling in us. It presents as well, a lesson on the enjoyment by the believers of blessings, and the fall of the disobedient under chastisement. While psalm 105 transforms history into a praise and an invitation to joy; Psalm 106 refers to the history of the denial of man; and psalm 107 exhorts us to reject idolatry, and to glorify God.

#### **Its goal:**

1- If psalm 119 talks profusely about the work of the Word of God in the life of believers; this psalm also does to reveal the commitment to sanctify the soul as a dwelling place for the Word of God, so that the divine presence would not be taken away from us; as it was when Shiloh was denied the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, which was moved instead to the city of Zion.

2- It exhorts the people to be faithful to God, presenting to them beneficial lessons from the events of history. It recapitulates the history of the people since the time they were in the land of Egypt, until the reign of David as their king. Those events reveal a series of God’s goodness that reveals His Person; met by the peoples’ denial and disobedience, that led them to be put under chastisement, to bring forth to them God’s forgiveness, and new goodness.

3- This psalm reveals the denying nature of man along the history, and under all situations; As sin reigned on man by death; but God, his Savior did not forsake him, but sent to him David as a king, and a symbol of the Son of David, the Savior; He who reigns with righteousness.

That is why the psalm ends with the words: “*He shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands*” (72).

#### **The author of the psalm:**

1- Some believe the author to be a contemporary of David the prophet, or right after his departure; for he ended it by the era of David the prophet; and referred to the episode of moving the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh (60) to the city of Zion, where “*He (God) built His Sanctuary like the Heights*” (69).

2- Some scholars like Clarke<sup>1</sup>, believed that this psalm was written after the division of the kingdom, following Rehoboam from the tribe of Ephraim, and before the Babylonian captivity; based on putting the blame upon Ephraim (9– 11), who led the movement of rebellion and division. Yet other scholars interpret the mention of Ephraim as a symbol of all Israel, being the largest in number and the strongest of all the tribes; and on account of that the Ark of the Covenant was kept in Shiloh, within the domain of that tribe in the days of the judges.

#### **The circumstances of its writing:**

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<sup>1</sup> W. S. Plumer: Ps. 745.

Some connect the writing of this psalm to moving the tabernacle from Shiloh in the land of Ephraim to Zion in the land of Judah; exhorting us to keep the practical life of faith, lest we would be denied the divine presence, as it happened to Shiloh; but to receive its presence in us, as though we are the spiritual Zion.

Let us not stop at the vain formalities, by saying together with the elders of Israel: *“Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us, it may save us from the hands of our enemies”* (1 Samuel 4: 3); To which the Lord of hosts, God of Israel would say: *“Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying: the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these”* (Jeremiah 7: 3-4). *“But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel”* (Jeremiah 7: 12).

### **Psalm 78 and the New Covenant:**

- The Lord Christ quoted verse 2 of the psalm (Matthew 13: 35); presenting a new meaning to it through the secrets of the word.
- In 1 John 1: 1-4, **St. John** quoted what came in verse 3, reminding us of the importance of encountering the divine Word to get in touch with Him, that He would perform wonders in our life.
- In 1 Corinthians 10: 8, it refers to verse 18; confirming that it is not befitting of us to tempt the Lord.
- St. Peter quoted verse 37, when he rebuked Simon the sorcerer for attempting to purchase the gifts of the Holy Spirit with money (Acts 8: 21).
- Verse 44 appears in the book of revelations, as the third angel was about to pour the bowl of wrath on earth. With the spirit of the psalm we notice that the moments of wrath are followed by the proclamation of a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21: 1)<sup>1</sup>.

### **Its divisions:**

This psalm presents an instructive poem about the preparation of the heart to become a sanctuary for the dwelling of the Word of God, concentrated on the dealings of God along the history.

<b>1- Listening to the divine word along the generations</b>	<b>1 – 8</b>
<b>2- The experiences of the wilderness</b>	<b>9 – 32</b>
<b>3- The complaint of man and his chastisement</b>	<b>33 – 37</b>
<b>4- God’s mercy in the midst of His wrath</b>	<b>38 – 41</b>
<b>5- Salvation from the bondage of Pharaoh</b>	<b>42 – 51</b>
<b>6- The entry into the promised land</b>	<b>52 – 55</b>
<b>7- A collapse in the era of the judges</b>	<b>56 – 58</b>
<b>8- God forsakes Shiloh</b>	<b>59 – 64</b>
<b>9- The kingdom of David is established</b>	<b>65 – 72</b>

### **The title:**

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<sup>1</sup> *Stuhlmueller, p. 30.*

A contemplation of Asaph. We have already spoken about Asaph as a chief musician. David was probably the author of this psalm, then gave it to Asaph to put it into tunes.

## **1- LISTENING TO THE DIVINE WORD ALONG THE GENERATIONS:**

The psalmist starts by calling the people to listen to the voice of the Lord on his mouth, saying:

***“Give ear, O my people to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth”***

(1)

**St. Augustine** believes that the Speaker here is God who calls the people “*My people*”, and the law “*My law*”. Yet many scholars believe that the speaker is the psalmist David, on account that, by the spirit of love, not only the kings, the rulers, the prophets, and the apostles, feel that the people of God are their people; but every single believer feels likewise; referring them to himself, and himself to them. It is the right of the head to refer every member of the body to itself; as it is the right of every member, whatever its position is, to call the other members as his members. That is why ‘Ruth’ the Gentile, was counted as a ‘believer’, when she said to her mother-in-law ‘Naomi’: “*Your people shall be my people*” (Ruth 1: 16). And ‘Jephthah said to the men of Ephraim: “*My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon, and when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands*” (Judges 12: 2). And talking about his longing to build the house of the Lord, David says: “*Hear me, my brethren and my people*” (1 Chronicles 28: 2).

The psalmist counts God’s law as his law, referring it to himself, being a personal message presented from God to the believer; that is why the apostle says: “*My gospel*” (Romans 2: 16; 16: 25; 2 Timothy 2: 8). If the author is the prophet David, by calling God’s law as “*My law*”, he proclaims his great love for the divine commandment, cherishes it, and refers it to himself; not as something put on him to obey, but as a gift from God, to become his own, to acquire for himself, and to live it with his complete free will.

By saying “*my law*” David probably confirms that he, as a prophet and a king, submits to the law like every other member of the holy congregation; namely, he is not above the divine law, but submits to it.

He requests from his people to incline their ears, not to some of the words of his mouth, but “*to the words of my mouth*”, counting every word coming from his mouth, as conforming to the law of the Lord. This way, the believer, with all his thoughts, words, and works, turns into “*an epistle of Christ, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God*” (2 Corinthians 3: 3).

On another aspect, it could be said that the Speaker here is the Lord Christ, the Son of David, addressing His people whom He called from the Gentiles; as according to the prophet Hosea: “*I will call them My people, who are not My people; and call her beloved, who was not beloved*” (Romans 9: 25). He presents to His people His law and the words of His mouth; He talks to them mouth to mouth.

Our Christ used to talk to the multitudes by parables and riddles (Matthew 13: 3; mark 3: 23). then interpret them to His disciples in private, saying: “*To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables*” (Luke 8: 10).

*“Incline your ears to the words of my mouth”* (1), conforming to the same line of thought in the gospel phrase: *“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Luke 8: 8).

- ❖ The Speaker here is the Lord Christ, who gave the law; and the addressees are the Gentiles, whom He calls ‘His people’, according to what came in the second chapter of the prophecy of the prophet Zechariah: *“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming, and I will dwell in your midst’, says the Lord. Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people”* (Zechariah 2: 10-11); and in the prophecy by Hosea, God says: *“I I shall call them My people, who are not My people”*.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Here, the Savior Himself speaks; whereas the rest of the verses until the end of the psalm, are understood to be on the tongues of the apostles. That is why when the Lord says: *“Incline Your ears to the words of My mouth”* (1); He means to say to them: O My apostles, *“What you hear in the ear, preach on the housetop”* (Matthew 10: 27); to which the apostles respond by saying: What You say to us, O Lord, have been proclaimed to us by the fathers Patriarchs and prophets, that we shall not hide from our children, but declare to the generations to come. Namely, As their children, we know that God has spoken to them, to deliver His word to us.

They taught us – their children – His message, and we shall teach it to our children<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

Therefore, although the word of God is presented to all, that all would be learned from God; but there is a commitment on our part, that, as we have been delivered the living evangelic faith, with no diversion, by the past generations, we are committed to deliver it to our children; so that the living tradition would remain active along the successive generations, read by all; so as to hear the voice of the Lord, saying:

*“These words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up”* (Deuteronomy 6: 6-7).

- ❖ This psalm includes things said to have happened with the old people, and bears instructions to the new people of later time, to be aware not to fall into denial of the blessings of the Lord, to avoid being subject to His wrath, and to receive His grace<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ You learn from us; your wives from you; and their children from them; But you cast everything on our shoulders; which make our burden double as much<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter hidden things, things of old”*** (2)

*“I shall open my mouth in parables”* (2). I shall open for you what was shut up for the Jews; *“Without a parable He did not speak to them* (Mark 4: 34); But to His disciple, He used to interpret the parables in private.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom. 11.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Col., hom 9.

The word “*parable*” implies (control) or (submission); for speaking in parables has its effect and influence on the soul and mind.

Whereas “*hidden things*” means that the talk is very deep and vague, not perceived except by him who loves and finds pleasure in pondering what he hears; as it is written, “*A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel*” (Proverbs 1: 5-6). While the word “*utter*” means here (talk profusely); the psalmist is like a river that flows with divine mysteries on the souls longing for knowledge.

The Lord Christ spoke in parables, and uttered hidden things, namely, exalted divine mysteries; whoever seeks and research them will find his heart’s desire.

**St. Jerome** says: To someone who may probably wonder why those words were applied to the Person of the Lord Christ, I say that, as Christians, we should respect the counsels and views of the evangelists in this concern<sup>1</sup>.

❖ As you notice, St. Mathew the evangelist applied this verse to the Lord Christ (Matthew 13: 34-35), when he said that the Lord spoke in parables that surpassed the perception of the common man, “*that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘I will open My mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world’*” (Psalm 78: 2)”

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ In the days of our Savior, the Logos told the apostles secret things, according to the prophecy in Psalm 78: 2 It is the activity of the Word Himself, “*For the Word of God is living and powerful*” (Hebrew 4: 12), drawing to Himself, in a secret and unseen way, every one who receives Him<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Clement of Alexandria**)

❖ Having begun to recite and refer to such things that seem to need those who listen rather than those who interpret; he says: “*I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter hidden things of old*”. Who would not here awake from his sleep? Who would dare and hasten to read the parables and the hidden things, as though they are obvious in themselves; although from their names it is clear that they should be considered with great and deep research?

(**St. Augustine**)

“*Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us*” (3)

The psalmist presents no fantasies nor human inventions; but an experience of life that he and his fathers before him have lived, as a sort of life, lived and delivered through history and living tradition.

The amazing works of God that our fathers told us about, are the creation made by God for our sake. That is concerning the touched things; but what concerns the psalmist here –according to **St. Augustine** – is that what our fathers of the Old Covenant have told us, has been fulfilled in the New Covenant. The divine promises have been realized by the coming of the Lord Christ the Savior.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Stomata 5: 12.

- ❖ The (beginning) “*of old*” is the Old Covenant; and the (end) is the New Covenant. “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (Psalm 111: 10). And the goal (the end) of the law is Christ for righteousness for everyone who believe in Him; He who grants “*the love of God that is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” (Romans 5: 5).

**(St. Augustine)**

**“(They) will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, His strength, and His wonderful works that He has done” (4)**

They tell “*the praises of the Lord, His strength, and His wonders*”. Man used to be more preoccupied with wonders which amaze him; then with the strength of the Lord, and finally with His praises. But the psalmist puts the praises first, followed by the strength of the Lord, then His wonders. For the most important things for the believers to present to their children is the spirit of praise and joy. For, when the new generations enjoy the experience of the exultant heavenly life, they would then perceive the might of God, and would believe in His exalted wonders. This is how the living church delivers, when the present generation hand the icon of heaven to the new generation.

It does not stop at speaking about the works of God, and in particular those which touch the salvation of mankind; but should extend to the enjoyment of the new generation of the deposit of heaven, and the fellowship with the heavenlies in their praise.

What our fathers have presented to us of living tradition, namely, of faith translated in our thoughts, feelings, words, and works; we are committed to deliver to our children with the same living spirit. This would be our testimony to the generations to come; not to the presence of the tabernacle of testimony among us, which was eventually moved by David to his city; but to the proclamation of the dwelling of God in our hearts and in the midst of His people. This is the tradition which we should deliver.

- ❖ Our fathers – according to the command of the Lord God – hid nothing from their children; but they told them what the entire Lord has done, which are worthy of praise and thanksgiving.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Praise is good in itself; and the psalm presents a lot of experiences. It separates the mind from the earth, gives the soul wings, and makes the wings light to be able to fly in air. That is why the apostle Paul says: “*singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5: 19) There is need for man to praise for the sake of his life, his prayer, and his success<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children” (5)**

That is the work of the church of God (the new Jacob or Israel); which is the testimony to the divine truth; a testimony before the world for its salvation; a testimony along the generations.

According to **Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem**, God presented to His people, His law, the tabernacle, and the Ark of the Covenant, as a testimony to keep His covenant. But, having broken the covenant, He presented to them the body and blood of His only begotten Son, as a living testimony in His church.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147.

The true believer is like a candle that testifies to the divine Light by its own light up to the end. Yet, it is befitting of it to kindle other candles around it, to keep the divine Light working in a multitude of candles, never to be quenched. He who keeps the light without delivering it to other candles will certainly lose the light.

Through the living faith, the spiritual birth, and the Eucharist, we came to have a living testimony to God's work, full of compassion for the whole humanity. As to the goal of this testimony, it is to invoke in us the spirit of hope, to lean upon God our Savior, and not upon human arms.

According to **St. Augustine**; the psalmist, as he used to do, repeats his words. Here he proclaims that *"God established His testimony in Jacob"*, then repeat: *"appointed it in Israel"*. He used "Jacob" first, who took the place of his brother Esau, as the firstborn; then used "Israel", for he enjoyed seeing God. It is befitting of us as the new Israel, to strive together with Jacob to enjoy the membership in the church of the firstborns; and to become truly the new Israel to enjoy seeing God. This is the goal of the law of God: the heavenly church membership and seeing God.

He also says that God has established the testimony of the Old Covenant (the prophecies and the symbols) in a hidden way; and did not present it exposed without veil. But, in the New Covenant, crossing over to Christ, *"the veil is taken away"*, according to the words of the apostle in (2 Corinthians 3: 16); *"For all the promises of God are 'yes', and in Him 'Amen'"* (2 Corinthians 1: 20).

❖ He who attaches himself to Christ will have all the goods, even what he does not perceive through the letter of the law; Whereas he who alienates himself from Christ will neither perceive, nor will not enjoy the law that is in Israel.

(St. Augustine)

***"That the generations to come might know them; the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children" (6)***

That is the message of the believers, that every generation should deliver to the new generation the words of the divine love and His promises and works; according to what the Lord said about Abraham: *"For I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord"* (Genesis 18: 19). And it is also said: *"My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouths of your descendants' descendants", says the Lord, from this time and forevermore"* (Isaiah 59: 21). This is the delivery or the living tradition, to which the church of Christ, every family, and every true believer are committed.

**St. John Chrysostom** considers the role of parents in raising their children a holy work, practiced by the parents to present to God sacrifices of thanksgiving, the subject of His pleasure. He confirms that he does not seek that every child should be prepared to practice the monastic life, but he seeks from every parent to raise his child to lead an honorable life since their early youth.

❖ This commitment concerns both parents. Unfortunately there are parents who sacrifice everything to provide their children with wealth and means of pleasure; but they do not care for making them good Christians who practice piety. What a crime, blindness, and stupid slothfulness, responsible for the confusion and bitterness of the society. For if you leave your children a great fortune, yet you raise them to be ignorant of how

to walk upright in their life, they will soon scatter what they inherit, and perish together with what you left them<sup>1</sup>!

(St. John Chrysostom)

According to **St. Augustine** and **Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, men of the Old Covenant were the early generation; while men of the New Covenant to whom were delivered the prophecies from their fathers, are the later generation.

***“That they may set their hope on God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments” (7)***

This delivery is not just a formality, and is not some sort of bigotry, but its goal is that the new generation would become filled with the spirit of hope in the Lord, trust in Him, do not forget his works with their fathers, and keep His commandments. By that, faith would be a practical experience with God, lived by the successive generations, to the account of the glory of God, and the extension of His kingdom.

***“And may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that did not set their heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God” (8)***

The psalmist wish for the new generation to be perceptive to what is behind the prophecies, the parables, and the hidden things; to enjoy what the generation of the Old Covenant have not enjoyed; through the salvation work of the Lord Christ, and the work and leadership of the Holy Spirit.

The goal of the testimony is to have hope in the Lord, with the whole heart, faithfulness, and obedience, without rebellion or grumbling; to remember the works of God, and to keep His commandments. By that, they would not do what the people did in the wilderness, who committed four main sins:

- They were a stubborn generation who apostatized from faith (having worshipped the golden calf); and have gone astray from the faith of their father Abraham, who entered into a covenant with God.
- They were a rebellious generation
- They did not set their heart aright. Bearing the spirit of treason, and plotting to kill Moses and Aaron, they could not seek God.
- Their spirit was not faithful to God. Walking with hypocrisy, they were pushed around by the violent winds, and the mighty storms.

According to **St. Jerome**, the generation that came out of Egypt bore four features: loss of goal; blasphemy of the Creator; resistance and rebellion; and rejecting of, and not receiving the work of the spirit of God in them.

❖ Why does the psalmist call that generation as having gone astray? Although God created them to be good, and held them in His hand as a bow by which to aim His arrows against His enemies; yet *“they turned aside like a deceitful bow”* (Psalm 78: 57); they blasphemed their Creator.

*“A generation that did not set their hearts aright”* (8). Up to this very day, Israel are an opponent people.

*“Their spirit was not faithful to God”*; For Israel did not accept the Son of God, nor His Holy Spirit<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring up Their Children, Ch. 19.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

(St. Jerome)

According to **St. Clement of Alexandria**, God deals with such people with a kind of firmness to lead them to repentance through fear, having not done so through love<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ God seeks, not only the inner faith, but the apparent one as well; He seeks from us to proclaim trust, great love; saying: “*whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven*” (Mathew 10: 32)<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ He who believes would endure much; Man’s faith appears through his works, abidance, and zeal<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ As long as God’s gift is utterly beyond perception, It would be only logic that we need faith. Lack of faith is a deep abyss; whereas faith is a stronghold With faith – mother of all blessings -- we would be like those who resort to an utterly calm harbor; sail the ship of our life aright; keep our orthodox faith; and enjoy the blessings by the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ Like a lamp that gives light to the house; faith gives light to the soul, a straight way for life; and a foundation to the eternal salvation<sup>5</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ To believe in God is to get attached to Him through doing good.

(St. Augustine)

## 2- THE EXPERIENCES OF THE WILDERNESS:

*“The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle” (9)*

Calling them to listen, the psalmist presented to them the experiences of their fathers along the history; starting by the dealings of God with them in the wilderness, in their strife after their exodus from the land of Egypt, setting forth toward the Promised Land.

He then talked about the children of Ephraim who, despite their abundance in number and might, they were defeated in war for not keeping the covenant of God, not walking according to the divine commandment, and forgetting God’s works and wonders.

According to **St. Athanasius**, and all the other scholars; by Ephraim, the prophet means all Israel; and he probably refers to the defeat that dwelt upon them in the days of Eli the high priest (1 Samuel 4: 10-11).

- ❖ The children of Ephraim, although known for their might in battle, yet, because they were not thankful to God who provided them with strength, they became slothful, were defeated in war, and were the first to be led into captivity by the Babylonians from Samaria. On account of that many of them worshipped idols, they were the cause of the perdition of all Israel.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> *Paedagogus (Fc. 23: 76-77).*

<sup>2</sup> *In Matt. Hom 34.*

<sup>3</sup> *In 1 Thess., hom 1.*

<sup>4</sup> *In Rom. Hom 2.*

<sup>5</sup> *In Cap. 25 St. Mat. PG 56: 930*

- ❖ In the book of Hosea, we find that all his prophecies were against Ephraim, among which: *“Ephraim is like a silly dove, without sense”* (Hosea 7: 11). Doves always live in towers; but Ephraim, like a silly dove, deserted the temple, the house of God, to live in the forest and wilderness<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ *“Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained the law of righteousness”* (Romans 9: 31). Why? Because they were a generation, who did not put their trust in God, but in the works of the law. Having aimed their arrows, namely their works of the law, they did not set their hands (their hearts) aright; something that the righteous do, by living by the faith that works with love, by which man attaches to God, *“to will and to do for God’s good pleasure”* (Romans 1: 17; Galatians 5: 6; Philippians 2: 13).  
(St. Augustine)
- ❖ We can also say that the children of Ephraim refer to all the heretics, who have withdrawn from the house of God; deserted David and his kingdom; to live in the wilderness like the silly doves. Although they read the Holy Book, yet their reading is silly.

Like the children of Ephraim, they were defeated in the day of war, for they do not know Him who says: *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you”* (John 14: 27); and they even do not know how to talk eloquently; they may talk fluently; yet they should be aware of the words: *“Scatter the people who delight in war”* (Psalm 68: 30)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law” (10)***

God has brought them out of the land of bondage, and set a covenant with them, to bring them forth into the promised land, as a symbol of entering into the heavenly Canaan. But they broke the covenant, and could not present a living testimony about Him; despite their pledge: *“All the words which the Lord has said we will do”* (Exodus 24: 3). They surrendered to idol worship and to its iniquities; rebelled against the law of God; and disobeyed His commandment.

The prophets themselves testified to the way Israel lived all along history breaking the divine covenant.

According to **St. Augustine**, the words *“they turned back in the day of the battle”* (9), is interpreted here by saying: *“They did not keep the covenant of God, they refused to walk in His law”* (10). Turning back in the spiritual war is their disobedience to the Lord and not keeping the covenant with Him. Whoever trust in God will faithfully keep His covenant. God is upright, and whoever attaches to Him should walk, and keep his heart upright; whereas he who disobeys Him walks in a diverted and distorted way.

***“They forgot what he had done, the wonders He had shown them” (11)***

As not keeping the covenant, and disobeying the divine commandment usually come together with forgetting the goodness of God and the wonders He has done with them and their fathers; the Holy Book warns us against forgetfulness.; saying:

*“Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen, or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them”* (Deuteronomy 4: 9).

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

*“Be careful that you do not forget the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Deuteronomy 6: 12).*

*“Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe His commandments, His laws, and His decrees, that I am giving you today” (Deuteronomy 8: 11).*

*“Then your heart will become proud, and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the Land of slavery” (Deuteronomy 8: 14).*

*“When the Lord your God gives you rest from all your enemies around you in the land He is giving you to possess as an inheritance, yo shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!” (Deuteronomy 25: 19).*

*“Does a maiden forget her jewelry; a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet My people have forgotten Me, days without numbers” (Jeremiah 2: 32).*

❖ The heretics have forgotten their Father and His wondrous works in the Land of Egypt, in the darkness of this world; and have forgotten, how, by His salvation they have been born anew in the church; yet they were never satisfied<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan” (12)***

Some believe that ‘Zoan’ was a prominent city in Egypt, where Pharaohs set their royal court, and was given several names in different eras; the most famous of which was what the Greeks called ‘Tanise’, on the eastern bank of the Nile in the delta, about 18 miles south east of Damietta, the remains of which are still in the region of Sa-el- Hagar.

The Psalmist called Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel *“their fathers”*, before whom God has done wonders in ‘Tanise’ the capital of Egypt. There, by His mighty hand He brought His people out; a wonder that was a symbol of a greater work; namely, the descent of the Word of God to grant us the sonhood to the heavenly Father; through which we cross over to heaven itself; according to the words of the Lord: *“Do not call anyone on earth ‘father’, for you have one Father, and He is in heaven” (matthew23: 9).*

We also hear His apostle say: *“For in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4: 14).* Such a spiritual sonhood in the Lord bears a heavenly feature, and touches the salvation of the believers through Christ the Savior of the world. It is not an alternative to the sonhood to the Father, nor a hindrance to enjoying it; but is a spiritual fruit of it.

***“He divided the sea and led them through; He made the water stand firm like a wall” (13)***

The waters of the Red Sea and the River Jordan retreated to open a dry path for the children of Israel. Water stood solid like a mountain. It is written: *“With the blast of Your nostrils, the waters were gathered together; The floods stood upright like a heap; and the depths congealed in the heart of the sea” (Exodus 15: 8).* And, *“The waters of the Jordan has been cut off; the waters that come down from upstream stood as a heap” (Joshua 3: 13).*

The Lord walked on the sea; He calmed the waves and let us pass. Up to this very day, O faithful believer, whenever you are led out of Egypt, the sea is split to let you pass.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

According to **St. Augustine**, God cut off the waters, and shut them up, as a reference to cutting off the bodily lusts, and their corrupt work in our life, so that the believers cross over in peace through baptism.

- ❖ By His strong arm, God split the sea, and set crystal walls on all sides, that no drop of water would hit them until they pass through<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night”***  
(14)

Some believe that God appeared as a pillar of cloud rising up to heaven, as a sign of His presence among them, and His care for them. He appeared as well as a pillar of light by night, that moved behind them, to separate between them and the Egyptian army, giving them light, while darkness dwelt over the Egyptians (Exodus 14: 19-20).

The believer, in this world, walks as though in daylight by the work of the Sun of righteousness in his life, He who covers him like a cloud, to keep him from getting burned by temptations; until the great day of the Lord comes to proclaim his splendor, and not to be burned together with the wicked.

How wonderful it is to say “*by day*”, because there is never darkness in the cloud, but always light.

God has been and always is for His people, a cloud by day to protect them against the heat of the sun of temptations, but not to bring them into darkness; and a light of fire by night, to reveal the way before them, lead them to His eternal light; and be a wall of fire all around them (Zechariah 2: 5) to protect them against the fiery arrows of the enemy<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ “*The Lord rides on a swift (light) cloud and is coming to Egypt*” (Isaiah 19: 1). We should think of such a (light) cloud that suits the (light) body of the Savior, never burdened by a sin; as St. Mary who carried a child with no human seed; we can understand how the Lord would enter (Egypt) of this world on a swift cloud; namely, the Virgin<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ Behold, the Lord enters the Egypt of this world on a cloud light, the Virgin. “***He guided them with the cloud by day***” (Ps 78: 14). Creativity in the said “day”, because the cloud were not never dark, but always enlightening. “***and with light from the fire all night***” (Ps 78: 14). For you darkness itself is not dark, and night shines by day (Ps. 139: 12). “Light the fire all night.” The Lord our God is a consuming fire Psalmist did not say whether the fire-eating, leaving it to our intelligence
- ❖ “*For our God is a consuming fire*” (Deuteronomy 4: 24; Hebrew 12: 29), for those who builds with wood, hay, or straw on the foundation laid by Christ (1 Corinthians 3: 12). For fire has a double nature: it gives light to us if we are righteous, and it would consumes us if we are wicked<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“He split the rocks in the desert, and gave them water as abundant as the seas”***  
(15)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Ps 11 (PS. 77).

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

Here, he does not say “*the rock*”, being a symbol of the Lord Christ; but saying “*the rocks*”, he probably means the believers whose hearts were hardened like rocks, then fountains of water erupted in them through the cross, not only to quench their thirst, but to flow on others as well.

**“He brought streams out of a rocky crag, and made water flow down like rivers” (16)**

It was said by Isaiah: “*I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys; I will turn the deserts into pools of water, and the parched grounds into springs*” (Isaiah 41: 18); and, “*I am making a way in the desert, and streams in the wasteland*” (Isaiah 43: 19).

By the Lord Christ, the Rock struck by the cross, we enjoyed the streams of the Holy God, the Grantor of life.

❖ The rock in the wilderness was struck for our sake, and the water flowed from the Rock who says: “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink; out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*” (John 7: 37, 38). In the barren wilderness, water profusely flowed for us<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

**“But they sinned even more against Him, by rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness” (17)**

This refers to what happened in Rephidim where there was no water for the people to drink, and the people contended with Moses, and said: ‘*Give us water that we may drink*’, and Moses said to them: ‘*Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?*’” (Exodus 17: 2).

The expression “*they sinned even more*” refers to a repetition of rebellion. It is amazing that the more God cared for them, and provided them with more than their needs, performing wonders that shocked the nations all around them for a long time; the more they sinned and rebelled against Him. He brought them forth to a wilderness where there was no possibilities of life; that if they resort to Him, He would not let them in need of anything; Yet, the more gifts He gave them, the more evil and opposition to the truth flowed out of their hearts.

God provided them with streams of water to quench their thirsty bellies ; whereas their hearts and minds rejected the water of the Spirit, and remained dry and fruitless like a barren wilderness.

**“And they tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy”(18)**

There is a great difference between asking for food while man is hungry, and challenging God to provide a proof of His presence, might, and care! He would be pleased when we seek from Him even our material needs, yet without tempting Him in our hearts; Namely, when we seek food, to feed, move, and work, but not to satisfy our fantasy and craving. It is written: “*The children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes*” (Numbers 11: 4-6).

Although the creation has no right to tempt her Creator, yet God in His love for man, gave him freedom which he abused, tempting his Creator.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, hom. 11.

- ❖ Asking with faith is different from asking to tempt God. They did not ask for food with faith.

With such sense, the apostle James says: *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting”* (James 1: 5-6). That generation have not got such faith to guide their hearts and spirits that did not trust God.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Souls, according to the way man was created in the image of God, are in no need of material food; but those that lost their way and turned fleshy, became fond of earthly things, which are meant by the words of the Holy Scripture: *“Soul, you Have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry”* (Luke 12: 19).

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“Yes, they spoke against God; they said: ‘Can God prepare a table in the wilderness’”* (19)

*“Behold, He struck the rock, so that the water gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?”* (20)

He abundantly provided them with water; In their hearts, they tempted Him; whether He could He provide them with a table of meat instead of that manna coming down from heaven?!

Instead of giving God thanks and praise for the daily manna and the rock that accompanied them, overflowing with running and renewable water; they tempted Him by seeking meat as a fantasy, instead of the sweet and useful manna. Although He did not forsake them hungry or thirsty, yet they sought what would satisfy their lusts; and in their lack of faith, they assumed that He who provided them with manna and water, would not be able to prepare a table for them according to their stupid desires. By such behavior they insulted the might of God, and misjudged His divine care! Although not denying the wonders that God performed for their sake, yet their hearts and minds were overcome by their lack of faith.

*“Therefore the Lord heard this and was furious; So a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel”* (21)

*“The Lord heard this and was furious”* His anger was not for no reason; but being the One who searches the hearts and minds, and knows the hidden things that go on in them, is aware of all their sins.

In both the Old and the New Testaments, fire often refers to the divine wrath; as for example: *“Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire, brimstone, and a burning wind”*(Psalm 11: 6); and: *“Every tree which does not bear good fruit, is cut down and thrown into the fire”* (Matthew 3: 10).

It so seems that some of them said that drawing water out of a rock is something easy, as water normally lie underneath the ground; but from where will He get the food to prepare a table for His hungry people?! Because seeking food from God was not in faith of His work and love, but out of ridicule for Him and testing Him, the fire of the divine wrath was kindled against them, and His anger dwelt upon them as a natural fruit for their work, and not out of hatred against them. As we wrote in our book *“The Brotherly Love”*, God has got no such human reactions of anger; but that could be said concerning those who, rejecting God and His love, casting themselves by themselves in the corruption of sin, are counted as subject for the divine wrath,

***“Because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation” (22)***

The greatest sin of the world all along the generations, is the lack of faith in God’s might, goodness, and care. As without faith, it is not possible to enjoy His pleasure. He who does not believe in God would not trust Him, nor give Him pleasure.

Having been dwelling among them, and caring for them like a mighty and wise Father, He counted their words and thoughts as an insult and blasphemy against Him; and His wrath and anger kindled, not as a revenge, but because of their lack of faith, and of not enjoying His free salvation.

According to St. Augustine; When the psalmist was asked why the fire of God’s wrath dwelt upon them, he responded by saying: For their lack of faith and trust in God.

***“Yet He commanded the clouds above, and opened the doors of heaven” (23)***

***“He rained down Manna on them to eat, and given<sup>1</sup> them of the bread of heaven” (24)***

***“Men ate angels’ food; He sent them food to the full” (25)***

God remains faithful despite our unfaithfulness.

According to **the scholar Origen**, setting forth along the royal path in the wilderness journey – as done by Moses and his people -- dwelling in holy tents, knowing no rest for his body, nor slothfulness; man gets the heavenly manna, or the bread of the angels, as a gift to the wise believing souls.

❖ Perceiving what peace would be brought forth to you by walking along the way of wisdom, and what grace and meekness you will get, you should cast away any slothfulness, go along that way, and never retreat before the solitude of the wilderness. By dwelling in such tents, you would get the heavenly manna, and eat the bread of the angels<sup>2</sup>.

By setting forth to that horrible maze of the wilderness, the righteous will be granted food from heaven<sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ The angels’, because it came down from above by angels according to God’s command. According to the revered **St. Athanasius:**, the prophet means to say that God, not only fed their bodies by material food, but fed their souls by spiritual food, which is called ‘the bread of angels’ by the apostle.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

The great stores of heaven opened up wide, and on them came down a new manna they did not know before, did not labor to plant, reap, grind, or prepare, but was a ready prepared meal for instant consummation by all, with no discrimination between rich or poor, big or small; but for all to find satisfaction.

❖ Who were they who fell down in the wilderness along the journey to the promised land (Hebrew 3: 17)? Were they not those who sought to eat meat (Numbers 11: 33)? Were they not those who were not satisfied with the manna and the water that gushed from the rock? Were they not those who have overcome the Egyptians and crossed over the Red Sea? But on account of that they craved for pots of meat (Exodus 16: 3), they were denied the entrance into the Promised Land. Are not we afraid to follow that

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning wheat, which is the righteousness of the word

<sup>2</sup> In Lev. 17.

<sup>3</sup> In Josh. 4: 1.

miserable example? Are we not terrified by the fact that gluttony may probably deny us the anticipated goods? I can say to you that not even the wise Daniel would have seen his visions, if he was not purified first by fasting. I should tell you that out of fatty food comes vapor that dims the lights of the mind brought forth by the Holy Spirit. “*Men ate angels’ food*” (Psalm 78: 25), which differs from all other kinds of food; It is not meat, nor wine, after the fancy of men<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

- ❖ Getting the strength to carry out their assignments through meditating in the truth and wisdom, we find written in the psalm that the angels share the food with the Hebrew men of God, to come to be (table partners). However, concerning that specific verse, saying: “*Men ate angels’ food*” (25), our mind should not be so shallow to assume that angels – the ministering spirits of God (Hebrew 1: 14)<sup>2</sup> -- partake of, and feed forever on a certain kind of material food like that which came down upon those who came out of Egypt (Exodus 16: 15; Psalm 78: 25).
- ❖ As the demons, presiding beside the altars of the Gentiles, sustained upon the smell of the sacrifices offered on those alters; So are the angels, attracted by the blood of the sacrifices offered by the children of Israel, and the fragrance of incense, as spiritual symbols, preside beside the altars, and feed upon such kind of food<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ Upon those who came out of Egypt, who followed the pillars of cloud and fire, and entered into the wilderness, came down from heaven a simple and delicate kind of food, described as “*angels’ food*” (25)<sup>4</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

**“*He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; And by His power He brought in the south wind*” (26)**

**“*He also rained meat on them like the dust, featherhead foul like the sand of the sea*” (27)**

**“*And He let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their habitation*” (28)**

If the devil was called ‘the prince of air’, God, having the authority over air, storms, and tempests. caused the east wind to blow, to drive the fowls to the required direction, toward the camp.

Winds are often described as being unstable; Yet the Almighty God, who is preoccupied with the winds of our inner souls, is alone capable of directing them to our edification, and of calming them down in due course.

He did not rain on them fire because of their lack of faith, but in His longsuffering, He rained on them meat, uncountable featherhead fowls like dust and sand of the sea. He gave them their heart desire, in the hope that they would repent and regret their thoughts of denial and disbelief.

**“*So they ate and were well filled; for He gave them their own desire*” (29)**

Instead of remorse, they ate and were well filled with the food, harmful for their health; rejecting the healthy “manna”. He did not only give them meat to eat, according

<sup>1</sup> عظة 1: 9، ص 25.

<sup>2</sup> On Prayer 27: 11 (ACW).

<sup>3</sup> De Principiis 1: 8: 1 (Cf. Butterworth).

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on Song of Songs 1: 4.

to their hearts' desire, but He let the foul fall in the midst of their camp, to spare them the labor of collecting them.

God, in His longsuffering, gave them what they thought He could not provide, not as a demonstration of His might, but to give them the chance to repent. Yet, instead of repentance *"they ate and were well filled"*. There was no fault in eating, but in being overcome by desire, and in not reconsidering their behavior, despising God, and trusting Him no more.

***"They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, (30)***

***"The wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choicest men of Israel" (31)***

While God's mercies dwell upon the humble, His wrath comes against the haughty proud.

God rained on them meat to eat; but when they did not give thanks to Him for it, ate and were filled, and got haughty, the wrath of God came against them for their denial.

❖ By *"the stoutest of them"* he means the haughtiest, about whom is said: *"Their eyes bulge with abundance"* (Psalm 73: 7).

**(St. Augustine)**

Some believe that the expression *"the choicest men of Israel"* does refer to those chosen by God, but those chosen by the people, being strong men of war who could defend them during their journey to the promised land. Those, having been overcome by their desire and lack of faith, were not able even to defend themselves.

***"In spite of this they still sinned, and did not believe in His wondrous works" (32)***

Their desire conceived and gave birth to the sin of gluttony together with denial; to produce a fruition of physical and spiritual death. The banquet turned into a collective funeral for the stoutest and the choicest among them, probably because they were the greediest in eating; or on account of that they were the ones who have led the movement of disobedience and rebellion against God. They were not killed by the sword, but by their greed and evil desire.

They sinned, yet they did not learn their lesson; They saw those killed by the evil desires; yet they did not return with repentance to their God, the Maker of wonders.

### **3- THE GRUMBLING OF MAN AND HIS CHASTISEMENT:**

***"Therefore their days He consumed in futility, and their years in fear" (33)***

The journey to Canaan that could have been done in few days, took a duration of forty years; God *"consumed their days in futility, and their years in fear"*. Denial, grumbling, and lack of faith; produced a fruitless futile life. While if man return to his God with repentance, he would enjoy the divine promise: *"I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust; the great army which I sent among you"* (Joel 2: 25).

Having rejected faith, they got connected to futility which consumed their days, living without a goal. And as their lack of faith turned the wilderness into a maze, instead of reaching the Promised Land, they were driven to terror and death (33).

The wilderness turned into a graveyard for innumerable counts of them, and consumed the whole generation that came out of Egypt, except for Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh.

God did not wish for them to die, but, with their complete choice, they adopted the way of disbelief; and therefore, *“their days He consumed in futility”*.

Having fallen under chastisement, and seen death reaping the stoutest and the choicest among them, they remembered that God was the Rock in whom they take refuge, and the Most High who cares for them; and came back to Him in apparent piety, while their hearts did not abide in Him; by which they fell in the sins of deceit, lying, and hypocrisy.

Such is the law of human nature of men after their corruption. When God present to them free gifts in abundance, they rebel and deny; and when He chastises and kills, they return to Him and seek Him; yet in fear of further chastisement, and not in longing for Him. Seeking Him, yet not with the whole heart, He admonishes them, saying: *“The pride of Israel testifies to his face, but they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him for all this”* (Hosea 7: 10).

That is how the long history of Israel with God reveals. They enter with Him into a covenant, which they do not care to keep, but breaks for no reason. And when they return to Him after being chastised, they proclaim their repentance by words and not by deeds, to turn into liars and deceptive.

- ❖ The life of those going to perdition are swift; and even though they may seem long, it is no more than vapor which will soon disappear.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“When He slew them, then they sought Him; they returned and sought diligently for God” (34)***

In the book of Isaiah, God admonishes them, saying: *“When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make prayers, I will not hear”* (Isaiah 1: 12, 15). To receive their worship as a sweet fragrance, God seeks from them a return from the whole heart.

- ❖ *“When He slew them, then they sought Him”*; not for the sake of the eternal life, but for fear that the vapor (their life) would very soon come to an end. They sought Him not in truth, but for fear that they would have the same fate of those who perished before their eyes.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ How could I get what I seek? By not seeking what God does not intend to grant; what is not befitting to ask from the Great King; by seeking, not what is temporal; but the spiritual blessings. By approaching Him, as well with no malice in heart, and with pure and holy hands, used in giving holy alms; If I approach Him as such, I shall certainly get what I seek<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ Whoever spends his days in futility, his time will soon come to an end; whereas he who spends them in good works, his days will be abundant and futile.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1 Tim. Hom. 8

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“Then they remembered that God was their Rock, and the Most High God their Redeemer” (35)*

*“Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, and lied to Him with their tongue” (36)*

Although they perceived that God is their Rock, capable of protecting and sustaining them, they returned to Him by their mouths and not by their hearts; for they loved the world and not God; they returned to God, not for the love of Him, but for fear that they might lose the temporal goods, or fall under the afflictions of this world..

- ❖ We should perceive that God’s chastisements are not haphazard nor without a goal; but are intended for man to forsake disobedience, to seek God’s care, to remember His goodness, and to recognize His might. When God struck the Israelites, they were committed to resort to Him, and prayed to Him to come to their rescue.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“For their heart was not steadfast with Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant” (37)*

- ❖ What was on their tongues differed from what was in their hearts, which are bare before the eyes of God.

The heart would be upright with God when it seeks God for God’s sake.

- ❖ Let us beware of praying to Christ with our mouths, when we stay silent with our life.

He properly prays to Christ, who rejects the temporal pleasures; he who, by his behavior and not by his words, say: *“The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Galatians 6: 14); and he who generously gives to the poor (Psalm 112: 9) <sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ Do not ever ask, seek, or knock, just by your voice, but by your life as well<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

#### **4- GOD’S MERCY IN THE MIDST OF HIS WRATH:**

*“But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath” (38)*

Despite their lies and hypocrisy; yet, being Compassionate and Longsuffering, who wishes for the salvation of mankind, and not their perdition, God often turned away His anger, presenting opportunities for repentance. Yes indeed, if it is not for God’s mercies on us, who could ever be saved?!

According to Rabbinicals<sup>3</sup>, verse 38, is the center of the whole book; coming exactly in its middle; It proclaims God’s great work of salvation in history, as the centerpiece of prayer and worship. This verse, speaking of the compassion of God, the Forgiver of sins, who turns His anger away from man; together with the two following verses; are recited when someone is being chastised with 40 *“If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, then the Lord will bring upon you*

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 88.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon Marin 16: 8.

<sup>3</sup> Kiddusin 30a.

*and your descendants extraordinary plagues – and serious and prolonged sicknesses”* (Deuteronomy 28: 58-59) <sup>1</sup>.

The two verses (38-39) talk about the meaningless repentance, carrying deception; to say to those who bear the appearance of repentance:

*“O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away”*(Hosea 6: 4).

- ❖ God dealt with them, not according to their denial, but according to His compassion; He did not destroy them according to their worthiness.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again” (39)***

In His exalted love, God remembered the weakness of man; how he is like a breath that passes away, not to come again; hence he is worthy of the divine love and compassion, to abide and become strong.

- ❖ He remembered that they are but flesh; namely, they lean toward the will of the body; And that their spirits after coming out of their bodies do not come back to this world; namely, their spirit goes forth after the desires of their body, and does not return in repentance.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert” (40)***

He brought them out to the wilderness to proclaim His exalted care for them; and to let them know that He is the only refuge for them.

Yet, as they often rebelled against Him. Instead of enjoying God’s company with them, to turn the wilderness into a garden, they turned it into a cause for the grief of God on them.

***“Yes, again and again they tempted God, and provoked the Holy One of Israel”***  
**(41)**

They returned with their hearts, not to God, but to the pots of meat in Egypt, to the life of bondage. Because they kept on tempting God, *“They provoked the Holy One of Israel”*; namely, they opposed His divine might, or doubted it, He admonishes them, saying: *“They have put Me to the test now ten times, and have not heeded My voice”* (Numbers 14: 22).

## **5- SALVATION FROM THE BONDAGE OF PHARAOH:**

In order to abide in faith, and to practice love, we are committed to be filled with hope in the Lord, through remembering His prior dealings with us; That is why He says:

***“They did not remember His power; the day when He redeemed them from the enemy” (42)***

Although it was not easy to forget His works, yet sin blinded their memory concerning God’s goodness and blessing on them. Hence came the commandment, saying: *“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life”* (Deuteronomy 4: 9). And the apostle Paul, from whose heart and memory, the cross never

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<sup>1</sup> Stuhmuller, p. 27.

departed, says: “You, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified” (Galatians 3: 1).

**“When He worked His signs in Egypt, and His wonders in the field of Zoan” (43)**

Here He reminds them of the plagues He brought upon the Pharaoh and his people because of them, calling them signs and wonders.

**“turned their rivers into blood, and their streams, that they could not drink” (44)**

The River Nile, which was worshipped by the Egyptians as a god who grants them life, turned for them into a source of filth and death; proclaiming God’s wrath that brought the spirit of terror and perdition among them.

**“He sent swarms of flies among them, which devoured them, and frogs which destroyed them”(45)**

They were attacked by swarms of flies (mosquitoes) which tormented them. Those swarms did not fear nor cared for Pharaoh’s army, authority, nor his majesty.

And instead of fish, the River Nile got filled with frogs, which invaded every place in their homes including their bedrooms and kitchens; and the heaps of those they killed got rotten and became the source of defilement and sickness.

**“He also gave their crops to the caterpillar, and their labor to the locust” (46)**

**“He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost” (47)**

**“He also gave up their cattle to the hail, and their flocks to fiery lightning” (48)**

Their crops were devoured by pests, and their labor was in vain. And as the vines were the drink of the rich, and the sycamore was the food of the poor, the plague of hail and frost struck both the rich and the poor. Hail and frost are not common phenomena in Egypt; Yet God changes the laws of nature to chastise the wicked. And because of the evil of man, the cattle, as well, perished by the wrath of nature.

**“He cast on them the fierceness of His anger; wrath, indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of destruction among them” (49)**

God sent the angel of destruction to kill the firstborn of the Egyptians, in retaliation to what the Pharaoh and his men did when they killed all the male infants of the Hebrews.

❖ In a vision seen by the prophet Ezekiel, he saw the Great King sitting on His high throne above the stars Ezekiel 10: 1).

And like “a Potter who has power over the clay to make from the same lump one vessel for honor and another for dishonor; What then if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory” (Romans 9: 21-23).

While sending His angels to His saints to fill them with good life and peace, God casts the fierceness of His wrath and indignation over the cruel rebels, “by sending angels of destruction among them” (49) <sup>1</sup>

**(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)**

❖ I wish to add that God does not execute all His actions by Himself, but He sometimes sends intermediaries, whether to punish or to heal; as we see in the Psalm, saying: “He

<sup>1</sup>عظة 14 على نشيد الأنشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

*cast on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of destruction among them” (49).*

For them, did not lead them to God's punishment himself, but he used to do the evil angels of the implementation of the task of punishment.

May use the Lord as well as pure angels to punish some people. But it happens sometimes that the Lord rejects the use of such intermediaries, and signs the sanctions themselves, as is the case with Babylon.

When the wounds are minor and heal fast, only a doctor or to send his student assistant, and addresses the way the patient. May sometimes be a patient in need for amputation of one of its members and to use the scalpel, however, also does not go to the doctor himself, but chooses one of his aides are able to do this work, and send to address the patient.

When the wounds are superficial and curable, the physician sends one of his aids to treat the patient. But in case the wounds are serious, and the damage spread all over the body; the situation then needs the services of the master physician himself. Likewise, if the sins are simple, God does not punish the sinners by Himself, but through intermediaries; but if the sins are very serious, as it was the case with Babylon, God hastens to bring the punishment by Himself<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

***“He made a path for His anger; He did not spare their soul from death, but gave their life over to the plague” (50)***

❖ The angels who brought forth the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians, as it came in a translation by ‘Simachus’, were called: “the angels of destruction’, the same way this same prophet called the day of Judgment ‘an evil day’, in the sense that in it, God’s punishments will come upon the non-repentant.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“And destroyed all the firstborn of Egypt, the first of their strength in the tents of Ham” (51)***

God’s wrath came in stages upon the Egyptians, with the hope that they would repent. He denied them the water to drink, then disturbed them by the frogs, then struck their cattle and crops, and finally He destroyed their firstborn with no exception, that grief came forth into every house, from the palace of Pharaoh to the captive inside the prison.

❖ God deals with those He intends to chastise with a great deal of mercy and compassion. With the Egyptians, He started by striking their possessions, like their cattle and crops, and when they did not repent, He destroyed their firstborn. If they did repent after the first strike, He would have spared them the second one.

❖ Saying “*in the tents of Ham*”, refers to the fact that Egypt was a portion of Ham the son of Noah.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

## **6- THE ENTRY INTO THE PROMISED LAND:**

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<sup>1</sup> عظمات للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكلين سمير كوستي L.II.6

***“But He made His own people go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock” (52)***

Now, having destroyed the vicious wolves, God made those who were humiliated go forth like sheep and flock under the care of a Good and a Heavenly Shepherd, guiding them from the land of bondage to a land that flows with milk and honey.

From the beginning, He brought them forth to the bottom of the sea, and brought them out singing and praising; to give them the feeling of surety that they will be safe in their journey across the wilderness.

***“And He led them safely, so that they did not fear; But the sea overwhelmed their enemies” (53)***

An amazing contradictory portrait: the weak and helpless came to be safe, exulting without fear; while the strong and mighty wrestled with death in the bottom of the sea.

***“And He brought them to His holy border, this mountain which His right hand had acquired” (54)***

He led them to the border of the holy land, where He intended to set His temple, and to turn its mountains into holy mountains.

It is an magnificent portrait of God’s care for us while we are in the wilderness of this world, to bring us forth to the deposit of the heavenlies, and to let us enjoy the divine Sanctuaries.

***“He also drove out the nations before them, allotted their lands to them as an inheritance, and made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents” (55)***

That was realized by the hands of Joshua the son of Nun.

❖ If you perceive what peace would be brought forth by walking along the path of wisdom, and what grace you may get, you should therefore cast from yourself any slothfulness, proceed along that path, and never retreat before the seclusion and isolation of the wilderness; As once you reside in those tents, you will get the heavenly manna, and eat the angels’ food<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

## **7- A COLLAPSE IN THE ERA OF THE JUDGES:**

Having settled down, and come to inherit the promised land; Instead of praising and giving thanks to God, they fell into idol worship, and diverted to iniquities, in the era of the Judges

***“Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies” (56)***

Settling down in the promised land, their hearts and minds went astray from God, seeking the temporal pleasures, and the satisfaction of their lusts through idol worship.

***“But turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers. They were turned aside like a deceitful bow” (57)***

Their entrance into Canaan, and their enjoyment of the successive conquests, did not take away from them the spirit of apostasy and deceit. They repeated the history of their rebellious fathers, practiced their sins, and did not keep God’s covenant. Bringing along with them their corruption to the land of inheritance, they came to be like a bow that sends forth arrows without a goal.

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<sup>1</sup> In Lev. 17.

*“For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their carved images” (58)*

## **8- GOD FORSAKES SHILOH:**

*“When God heard this He was furious, and greatly abhorred Israel” (59)*

What came here brings back to mind what happened in the days of Eli the high priest, when the glory of the Lord forsook His people; the Philistines captured the ark of God, the neck of Eli the priest was broken, his two sons were killed in the war, and his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas gave birth to a son she called ‘Ichabod’, meaning (the glory has departed from Israel) (1 Samuel 4: 21-22).

If God got angry over His people who often rebelled against Him, while being in the wilderness, enjoying His unique care; How much more would he be angry, and even greatly abhorred, when He finds that they haven’t learned a lesson from the past, and carried the same spirit to the promised land?!

Before the persistence of the people, whom He brought forth out of the land of bondage into the promised land, on sacrificing to idols over every hill, and under every tree, God disregarded them, which is the most severe kind of chastisement; as through disregarding them they would certainly loose everything, and be brought to perdition.

*“So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He has placed among them” (60)*

By forsaking Shiloh, where the tabernacle of the meeting was, God proclaimed His abhorrence of His people; as the most horrible sins were committed its doors; and wooden images were set over every hill. The divine glory departed, and ‘Ichabod’ (the departure of glory) came in its place.

God allowed the Philistines to capture the ark of the meeting in Shiloh, as a chastisement to His people who rejected Him and sacrificed to the idols.

*“And delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemies’ hand” (61)*

By allowing the ark of the covenant, that represents His glory, to be captured by the Philistines, God demonstrated the seriousness of the situation. He showed that He would rather endure the reproach of the enemies who assumed that their god Dagon has defeated the God of Israel, rather than to endure the treason of His own people who have enjoyed His wonders.

*“He also gave His people over to the sword, and was furious with His inheritance” (62)*

*“There fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers”* (1 Samuel 4: 10), for God was no more on the side of His own inheritance. His jealousy made Him chastise them in such seemingly harsh way.

*“The fire consumed their young men, and their maidens were not given in marriage” (63)*

*“The fire consumed their young men”*. Namely, the fire of God’s wrath came upon His denying people whom He delivered to the fire of war. *“And their maidens were not given in marriage”*. As the sword in war consumed the young men, the maidens remained without marriage, and the songs of wedding were never heard from their mouths; as it came in the prophet Isaiah: *“In that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying: ‘We will eat our own food, and wear our own apparel; Only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach”* (Isaiah 4: 1).

***“Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation” (64)***

By the priests he refers to Hophni and Phinehas the sons of Eli the priests who fell by the swords of the Philistines.

*“And their widows made no lamentation”*. The widows made no lamentation on the loss of their men, for their sorrow over what happened to the people as a whole has swallowed every personal sorrow.

- ❖ The relatives of those killed in war made no lamentation on them, because of the extent of the general grief, and anguish that overshadowed every grief on individual level.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

## **9- THE KINGDOM OF DAVID IS ESTABLISHED:**

***“Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, like a warrior shouting because of wine”***  
(65)

The period of chastisement will soon pass by, and the people will enjoy a new beginning, when God grants them the strength of resurrection. God seems like someone awoke from sleep to work diligently in the life of His people.

*“The Lord neither slumber nor sleep”* (Psalm 121: 4). Yet, getting up to Judge after an extended period of silence in longsuffering, He would seem as though awakening from sleep.

This phrase is used in the morning, in the liturgy of the feast of resurrection – the Christian Passover – to declare the resurrection of the Lord Christ as though awakening from sleep. He, on whom death has no authority, awakes like a warrior overcoming death and destroying the authority of Satan over the believers. By His resurrection He established His church, like a unicorn (rhinoceros), set in the whole world to partake of His eternal glory. (According to St. Athanasius: [The unicorn is an unconquerable beast, by whose horn it can overcome any other animal. Like a unicorn, according to the psalmist, when the temple of God was built, all the nations submitted to the power it represented].

- ❖ We hear those who attempt to justify that very harmful ailment that comes over the soul, through a repulsive way of interpreting the Holy Book; claiming that there is nothing wrong in being angry over those who sin, as long as God Himself is said to become furious and angry over those who do not know Him, or who Knew Him then denied Him, according to the text: *“God was furious and greatly abhorred Israel”* (59); or according to the words of the prophet, praying: *“O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure”* (Psalm 6: 1). They do not perceive that by so doing, they are committing a very serious and harmful sin, by referring to the divine Person, the Source of every purity, one of the worst shortcomings of man. Such things should never be referred to God.

If such things are literally interpreted, we could say as well that God sleeps, according to the text: *“Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord?”* (Psalm 44: 23); although it is said somewhere else: *“The Lord neither slumber nor sleep”* (Psalm 121: 4); And that He stands and sits; according to the text: *“Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool”* (Psalm 66: 1). And *“The Lord awoke as from sleep, like a warrior shouting because of wine”* (Psalm 78: 65); while He *“alone has immortality, dwelling in an unapproachable*

light” (1 Timothy 6: 16); Not mentioning the ‘ignorance’ and ‘forgetfulness’ that are often mentioned in the Holy Book.

And finally the description of body members referred to Him, as though He is a man. Like hair, head, nose, eyes, face, hands, arms, fingers, belly, and feet. It would be really horrible to take them all in a literal sense, and should not be considered at all in our mind.

When we read about God’s wrath and anger, we should not understand them in a way unbecoming to God, who is above any lowly human emotion; and we should perceive that He is the divine Judge and Avenger on every injustice committed in this world.

And according to these terms and their significances, we should be fearful of Him, being the One who deals with us according to our deeds, and should beware not to do anything against his will; for the human nature, specially of those whose conscience is not at peace, used to fear those whom we know to be firm, and be careful not to do wrong against those of hot displeasure, as is the case for certain human judges, who are actually fair and impartial, although would be called otherwise by those who are punished fairly by them, according to the spirit of the law<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Cassian)**

***“And He beat back His enemies; He puts them to a perpetual reproach” (66)***

The enemies of Israel did not enjoy the joy of conquest for long; for the hand of the Lord struck them with the tumors (1 Samuel 5); and their cries for pain went up to heaven.

***“Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim” (67)***

Although God honored Ephraim by having Joshua the great leader, and Gideon the judge come from them, and by designating Shiloh within their territory to be the place for the tabernacle for the duration of three centuries; Yet now, “it is weighed in the balances, and found wanting”; and God rejected Shiloh to have this honor any longer.

It is a prophecy of the division of the kingdom in the reign of ‘Rehoboam’, and of ‘Jeroboam’ of the tribe of Ephraim taking over all the tribes, except for Judah and Benjamin, to form a separate kingdom of Israel, with Samaria as its capital.

***“But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved” (68)***

According to the prophecy of Jacob, the tribe of Judah took prominence, and from it came the Lord Christ, the Savior of all mankind. And the tabernacle with the ark of the Covenant was moved to the village of Jearim in the land of Judah, then to Mount Zion.

Here he refers to the tribe of Judah in whose possession the temple of Solomon has been; hence it became very strong like the unicorn (Rhinoceros), He also refers to the church of the New Covenant, based upon the (one) baptism.

***“And He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He has established forever” (69)***

***“He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfold” (70)***

Having been a shepherd of sheep, God set David as a shepherd of His people, and said to him: “I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel” (2 Samuel 7: 8).

***“From following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance” (71)***

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian: *De institutes caenoboum.*, 8: 2-4.

Having been compassionately used to follow the ewes with young, while wandering about searching for grass; and to feed the little lambs, David was highly qualified to take over his responsibility as a king to faithfully shepherd the people of people.

***“So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands” (72)***

The prophet David was upright before God, and his heart never went astray from obeying His commandments, faithful to God and His people.

❖ We remember how Jacob shepherded the flock of sheep of Laban, his father-in-law, faithfully laboring and watching over them; and how he shepherded his own children, guided them, and taught them the basics of the shepherding work.

We also remember how Joseph used to shepherd his father’s flock of sheep, together with his brothers; and how in Egypt he became a leader of a huge population, and guided them like a good shepherd, guiding his flock.

And how Moses used to shepherd the flock of sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law; then was chosen by God to shepherd His people; How he carried his rod over his shoulder, went ahead of his people, and guided them in the wilderness for a duration of forty years; watched and labored for their sake as a good shepherd; and when it so happened that God intended to destroy them because of worshipping the calf, Moses prayed to God for their sake, saying: *“Now, if You will forgive their sin – but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written”* (Exodus 32: 32). That is how a good shepherd delivers himself to the account of his flock; a watchful leader gives himself up for the sake of his people; and a merciful father embraces and raises his children.

With such great wisdom, Moses knew how to teach Joshua the son of Nun, his disciple full of the Spirit, to succeed him to shepherd such a great flock.

Then came David to shepherd the flock of sheep of his father; then chosen by God to shepherd his own people, *“and he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart”* (72). And when it happened that David gave his order to count the people against the will of God; and the wrath of God dwelt upon them, and started to perish, David did not hesitate to deliver himself to the account of his flock, praying to God: *“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).

That is how all the watchful shepherds used to deliver themselves to the account of their flocks<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Aphrahat, the Persian wise man)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Demonstrations, 10: 2.*

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 78**

### **YOUR WORKS TESTIFY TO YOUR LOVE**

- ❖ Your love is an incessant song;  
You have created everything for my sake;  
And did not  
In all generations, Your works testify to Your exalted love;  
You always wished to embrace all mankind, and to set out of them children  
for yourself;  
You are their Rock, their Refuge, their Joy, and their pleasure;  
Whoever acquires You will be in need of nothing;
- ❖ Yet the story of mankind with You has been always a story of rebellion and denial;  
While Your own story with them has been one of love and longsuffering;  
You always gave them whatever they sought;  
Yet, instead of seeking your love;  
Their hearts foolishly flowed with rebellion and denial.
- ❖ Under chastisement, man would tend to return to You;  
Yet, he often seeks Your gifts, and not to get attached to You;
- ❖ O my Lord, grant us the upright, faithful, and pure heart;  
That seeks because it truly loves you;  
That desires to see You, on account of that You are its satisfaction, joy, and  
glory.

## PSALM 79

# A CRY-OUT OVER A DEFEAT BEFORE THE GENTILES

There was a controversy among scholars concerning the identity of the author of this psalm and the date of its writing; whether it is a prophecy of the desolation to come upon Jerusalem and the temple by the Gentiles or it is a record written after it has already taken place.

Some believe that the author is the prophet Jeremiah, because it includes a lamentation like those written by Jeremiah amid the desolation that came upon Jerusalem beloved by him.

The author portrays the holy city and the temple – the Sanctuary of God, treaded over by the Gentiles, the streams of blood of the innocent running around Jerusalem, and the survivors becoming a derision and disgrace before the Gentiles.

### Its divisions:

<b>1- A complaint by the Psalmist</b>	<b>1 – 4</b>
<b>2- A prayer by the Psalmist</b>	<b>5 – 12</b>
<b>3- A praise to God by the Psalmist</b>	<b>13</b>

### 1- A COMPLAINT BY THE PSALMIST:

A dirge and a prayer for Israel, destroyed by enemies.

A psalm of Asaph

***“O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance; Your holy temple they have defiled; they have laid Jerusalem in heaps” (1)***

The Psalmist pours his complaint before the Lord. Amid the desolation and the disgrace that came upon him, he found his refuge in God – his Mighty Father.

The holy city and the temple of God, used to have a special place in the hearts and minds of the believers, for they were the inheritance of the Lord, and not that of the Psalmist, nor of the believers.

The Psalmist was terrified because of the defilement that came upon the divine sanctuaries by the heathen Gentiles; and of the city of God that turned into heaps of ruins.

As that desolation did not happen in the time of Asaph, this psalm could be a prophecy of what will happen to Jerusalem in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, in those of Antichus Epiphanes, or by the hands of Titus, the Roman commander.

The defilement that happened by the Gentiles was because the defilement done by the Jews themselves to the holy city and the holy temple. that the Lord God said by the prophet Ezekiel: *“Therefore, as I live’, says the Lord God, ‘surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things, and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish you. My eyes will not spare, nor will I have any pity”* (Ezekiel 5: 11).

- ❖ The promised land, and the city of Jerusalem in particular, has been the inheritance of God, on account of that in it Solomon built the temple of God, and in it the statutes of His law were practiced.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***The dead bodies of Your servants, they have given as food for the birds of the heaven, the flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth” (2)***

Because of the multitude of dead bodies, and no one to bury them, they were food for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth. It was such a horrible scene and a sorrowful situation! When Goliath, the Philistine warrior intended to deride young David, he said to him: “*Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field*” (1 Samuel 17: 44); to which David responded by saying: “*This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, that all the earth will know that there is a God of Israel*” (1 Samuel 17: 46). Most of the Gentiles and the Christians count the burial of the dead as a holy task.

Rejecting the enjoyment of the word of God, the heavenly food, the people themselves became food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.

***“Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them” (3)***

Like it was said by the prophet Jeremiah: “*And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; they will have no one to bury them – them nor their wives, their sons, nor their daughters – for I will pour their wickedness on them*” (Jeremiah 14: 16).

A bitter portrait of the blood of those killed turning into a river all around Jerusalem, the city of God; conforming to a portrait of the believer who apostates back to evil, and offers no repentance; who would become a disgrace, shame, and defilement, and would not enjoy the forgiveness and purity.

According to St. Augustine, if we take here the word ‘Jerusalem’ as being the earthly city of Jerusalem, we shall understand the shedding of their blood around it in a literal sense. And we may also take it as being the church, extending, bearing the fruit, and growing on the level of the whole world. As against her, the persecution is so violent everywhere that the blood of martyrs, representing a heavenly treasure, is shed like rivers<sup>1</sup>.

***“We have become a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and derision to those who are around us” (4)’***

The book of Obadiah prophesied about Edom who rejoiced over the people of God on the day of their affliction; when they derided them, and cut off those who escaped and delivered them to their enemies. And in the psalms it came: “*Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem, who said, ‘Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation’*” (Psalm 137: 7).

According to **St. Augustine**, the neighbors of the earthly Jerusalem are the nations around it who rejoiced on its calamity. Whereas the neighbors of the free Jerusalem – our mother – are the enemies of the church all over the world<sup>2</sup>.

## **2- A PRAYER BY THE PSALMIST:**

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ps. 77 (78).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ps. 78 (79)

***“How long, O Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?” (5)***

With bitterness, the psalmist admonishes God, feeling that the cruel chastisements that came upon the people are without limits, and that the divine mercy is no more! He beseeches God to spare His people from being burned by the fire of His divine jealousy.

❖ You are my Lord, O Jesus!

*“Lord, where are Your former loving kindness?”* (Psalm 89: 49); How long, O Lord? Will be angry forever? I beseech You; have mercy on me *“Do not hide Your face from me”* (Psalm 27: 9).

You, whom they scourged, and on whom they spat! I confess that I have sinned, transgressed, and am worthy of judgment!

My remorse is not enough to atone for my sins. Yet Your mercies surpass all my iniquities.

❖ God’s anger and jealousy are not like human reactions, as the followers of Many think!

But, under the term ‘anger’, is understood displeasure on evil; and under that of ‘jealousy’, (chastity) or (holiness) are meant; so that the soul does not disregard the law of her God, and perishes by practicing adultery behind His back. While anger and jealousy by humans are violently practiced, they are calmly done by God; about whom it is said: *“Although You are sovereign in strength, You judge with mildness”* (Wisdom 12: 18). But it is obvious enough from these words that because of sins, troubles come over men, even though the glory of the martyrs glitter by their perseverance, and they endure the yoke of chastisement with piety, as stripes by the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**St. Jacob El-Serougy** talks often about God’s wrath, as being in essence, mercy and love for man, giving several examples of that.

❖ God’s command to the prophet Jonah, was to go to bring the Gentiles back to repentance.

He sent him to proclaim to the people of Nineveh that, unless they forsake evil they would lose all their prosperity.

He said to him: Go and talk in the ears of the people of Nineveh the preaching which I tell you.

If God’s intention was to strike Nineveh because of the multitude of their iniquities, He would not send a prophet to warn them.

If He sets His face on harming them, He would, all of a sudden, strike them with His wrath..

But He sent Jonah to them to reconsider their situation, and to seek His mercy to be saved.

After raising His hand to strike and destroy the sleepy city, He called and waked her up to spare her being stricken while sleeping.

Jealousy surpassing justice against that miserable city; He sent her His grace to wake her up to repent.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 78 (79).

Although God's wrath came out to destroy the city, Compassion proceeded to shut her gates before it.

If not for those mercies, what would be the need to send a preacher?!

He sent him to that location to forsake evil, so that by repentance t may have rest, and avoid corruption.

Once they knew that wrath is coming down from the Most High, they resorted to repentance to be spared.

When the king inquired from the prophet, the later did not flatter him, and gave no heed to his threats.

He asked him to seek from His angry Lord on their behalf, to tell them what they should do to make him spare them of His wrath.

By fasting, men, women, and even the little children, everyone according to his or her capacity, stood in line to confront the divine wrath. ... A great fast made void the great wrath; ... the whole population, together with their beasts put on sackcloth.

By fervent prayer it was befitting of the king to adorn himself with dust; And weeping for him was the gold to pay back all the debts.

Now, wise man, stands up, and rejoices with us; Change your sackcloth, because the divine wrath is no more!

Get up from the dust, for the Lord is pleased by our response. End your supplication, for the city is already covered with mercies.

**(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)**

***“Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You, and on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name” (6)***

The psalmist here seeks the intervention of God against the heathen nations, used by God as a tool to chasten His people, for they abused God's assignment, and came to reproach and deride God Himself.

If God chastens His people who know Him; the nations – the tool of chastisement -- who do not know God; are in turn, worthy of chastisement for blaspheming God, and for destroying His people beyond all limits.

Those nations indeed, worshipped idols, and denied the existence of the true God; yet on another aspect, Israel, even though they know God and worshipped Him, yet they often mixed His worship with idol worship, defiled His temple, broke His commandment, and were not faithful to His covenant.

The psalmist wonders how God could allow for his people to be chastened by the heathen nations with such violence and cruelty; and leave those nations unpunished!

According to St. Augustine, this verse is a prophecy to be realized concerning the nations, opponent to God, rather than a wish by the psalmist. He does not utter it as a curse out of grudge, but as a prophecy he saw by the Spirit; the same way he prophesied about the evils to come over Judas the traitor, that sounded, as well, like a wish by the prophet<sup>1</sup>.

***“For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place” (7)***

Here, the psalmist shows the horrible crimes committed by the nations. If God said that whoever touches His people, touches the apple of His eyes, those nations, not only touched the people of God, but they devoured them, and then laid waste their

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 78 (79).

dwelling place. They knew no mercy, and sought desolation, even though they got no benefit out of it.

To fall in the hands of God is far better than to fall in the hands of man, who in his evil, knows no limit for his violence, and in whose heart mercy has no place.

According to **St. Augustine**, the dwelling place of Jacob here, is that city where the temple of God is, where He commanded the assembly to offer the sacrifices, to practice the rites of worship, and to celebrate the feast of the Passover<sup>1</sup>.

***“Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us! Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us, for we have been brought very low” (8)***

Does God punish man for the sin done by his ancestors?

*“The word of the Lord came to me again, saying: ‘what do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”? ‘As I live”, says the Lord God, ‘you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine, the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die’” (Ezekiel 18: 1-4).*

Yet, in case the son persists on the evil of his ancestors, and even surpassed them, God will remind him of their sins, on the day of his chastisement.

Here, the psalmist confesses that they are sinners after their fathers and grandfathers, and are worthy of every chastisement; yet He seeks from His God to visit them speedily with His mercies; for the chastisement has come to be so intense that they are in humiliation; and he fears that, through falling into despair of God’s mercies, they would be destroyed.

Because, in His love for His believers, God wants them to remind Him of His divine mercies, as a sign of their trust in Him; and in His compassion, the psalmist says: *“Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your loving kindness; for they have been from old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgression; According to Your mercy, remember me” (Psalm 25: 6-7).*

Saying: “We have been greatly impoverished”, instead of “*we have been brought very low*”, Father Onesimus of Jerusalem, comments: [this way shows that sins drive away the true richness, that is the love of God].

❖ Bt saying “We are greatly impoverished”, he wishes for God to visit us with His mercies, for the sake of our poverty, namely our weakness; by which we come to keep His commandments, to avoid falling under judgment<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, for Your name’s sake” (9)***

Here, the psalmist does not justify himself, nor his people, but confesses that all need salvation, not out of any good work or worthiness on their part, but for the sake of the glory of God’s name, He who loves His believers, and forgives their sins. The believer has nothing to offer to God to enjoy His mercies, except the glory of the name of

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On Ps. 78 (79).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 78 (79).

the Lord Himself. Here, the psalmist seeks to approach God, the Lover of mankind; and to reach Him; By this He glorifies the name of God.

**St. Augustine** interprets the expression “*God of our salvation*”, the Healer, by saying: [Having been greatly impoverished, we became very ill, and are in need of the divine Healer].

❖ Wishing to get help, the psalmist does not deny the grace, nor the free will. By adding: “*For the glory of Your name, O Lord, deliver us*”, he means to say that man is not glorified in himself, but “It is God who is glorified”. He says: “*Provide atonement for our sins, for Your name’s sake*”, and not for our sake; For what do our sins deserve but punishment? ... As sin is iniquity; If You deal with us according to our iniquities, who could abide<sup>1</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

**“Why should the nations say: Where is their God? Let there be known among the nations in our sight, the avenging of the blood of your servants which has been shed” (10)**

The nations deride the divine Hand that allowed them to chasten the believers; and they even denied the existence of God Himself. On another aspect, even if His people sinned, God will not be silent on the innocent blood shed by the nations.

The prophet Moses pleaded with the Lord his God on behalf of his people, saying: “*Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with a great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say: He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people*” (Exodus 32: 11-12).

❖ Lest the nations would reach an evil ending through despair, assuming that the true God does not exist, or that He does not care, nor is merciful toward His own<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“Let the groaning of the (captive) come before You; according to the greatness of Your power preserve those doomed to die” (11)**

Amid their captivity, Your people could not offer You praise; as their life turned into bitter groaning, heard by no one except by Him who searches the heart and mind. They are groans by those whose life became closer to death than to life. No one can bring them back from this death but the mighty arm of the Grantor of life.

The psalmist calls those in captivity: “*those doomed to die*”.

**“And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom, their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord” (12)**

According to **father Onesimus** of Jerusalem, the neighbors here are not men of the surrounding nations, but rather the demons who would not cease to oppose them and provoke them to commit sins. As to saying: “*into their bosom*”, he believes that the reproach to return to them, comes, not from outside, but is within them and would never

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 78 (79).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 78 (79).

forsake them. It is as though God reveals their own corruption, disgrace, and shame, which are within them and in their bosom.

### **3- A PRAISE TO GOD BY THE PSALMIST:**

*“So we, Your people, and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever. We will show forth Your praise in all generations” (12)*

By faith, the psalmist saw the divine intervention, by which the groans of the heart turned into praises of thanks to God; and by which those doomed to death became like heavenly creatures, perpetually praising God.

Daringly, he says to the Lord: *“We, Your people, and sheep of Your pasture”*.

❖ His care could never be interpreted; His compassion be perceived; His goodness be limited; and His love be examined<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Your words strike me strongly in my chest; and encompass me on all sides<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ He is such a wise Craftsman!

Who is He, who prepared the womb to receive the fetus?

Who is He, who grants life to the lifeless things within you?

Who is He who provides us with muscles, and bones; and covers us with flesh and skin?

Who is He, who, once the baby is born, milk will flow from the breast of his mother?

How could the child grow to become a toddler, a young man, and a man; then proceed to old age; without the possibility of such precise transformation to be noticed from day to day<sup>3</sup>?

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> العناية الإلهية 84: 5 (ترجمة عابدة حنا بسطا).

<sup>2</sup> Confessions, 8: 1: 1.

<sup>3</sup> Catechetical Lectures, 9: 15.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 79**  
**TURN THE GROANING OF MY HEART INTO AN UNCEASING PRAISE TO**  
**YOU**

- ❖ My Lord, my soul groans inside me;  
You intend to set it as a sanctuary for You;  
To turn it into a heavenly Jerusalem;  
But the enemy will always attempt to defile it;  
To turn it into a defiled place for him to dwell;  
You wish to set out of it an exultant heaven;  
And he wishes to set a grave out of it!  
He intends to kill my depths;  
To turn it into a lifeless corpse  
He exults to see the birds of prey pick it up!  
And the beasts of the field devour it.  
You wish to set Your fruitful paradise inside me;  
And he intends to make it a stinking pool of blood.
- ❖ Do not forsake me; as I am helpless!  
Take Your wrath away from me;  
Shine Your grace on me;  
For Your name's sake, proclaim Your mercy on me;  
Take away the reproach and disgrace from me;  
Restore in me the gladness of Your salvation;  
Set me free from the captivity of the enemy;  
For You are my Savior and glory, who lift my head up.  
To You are the glory, the honor, and the praise;  
From generation to generation, forever, Amen.

## PSALM 80

# THE DIVINE LIGHT AND THE SUFFERING CHURCH

Although there is much controversy among the scholars concerning the circumstances in which this psalm was written; yet most of them believe that it is the psalm of the church suffering the divine chastisement because of sins; who is in need of the One presiding over the cherubim to shine on her with the light of His face, to enjoy the divine mercy; who is the vine beloved by God who planted her; and who is in a perpetual need of His care.

According to **St. Augustine**, this psalm concerns the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and His vineyard (His church); concerns the Head and the body; the King, and the people; the Shepherd and His flock. It includes the whole secret of the Holy Scripture. If the church amid her continuous afflictions feel as though in the darkness of temptations; Her heavenly Head is the “Sun of Righteousness” who shines on her, and grants her the enlightenment.

- 1- Shine on my darkness 1 - 3
- 2- How bitter is the chastisement! 4 - 7
- 3- We are the plantation of Your right hand 8 - 13
- 4- Look down from heaven and visit us. 14 – 19

### The title:

**Prayer for Israel’s restoration.**

**To the chief musician. Set to ‘the lilies’. A testimony of Asaph. A psalm.**

Came the title in the Septuagint: "to Asaph, in the Hereafter. A testament to the two variables; praise the Assyrians."

**Father Anthimos, Bishop of Jerusalem** said: [This Psalm tells shift things around and change them. What was intended and shall after this free time in the title of the fully for the two variables. As for the words of Fidel to the Assyrian captivity that includes Israelis, however, the Assyrians. As Athanasius said, Galilee: The Assyrian means impossible that the Jews worship the crucified Christ.<sup>1</sup>]

### 1- SHINE ON MY DARKNESS:

*“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell between the cherubim, Shine forth” (1)*

According to some, the names, “Israel” and “Joseph” both refer to the whole people of Israel.

God’s care for Israel refers to His care for the people He liberated from the bondage of Pharaoh, and to His leading Joseph whom his brothers devoured like wolves. God, who used to care for the Old Israel, is still the One who cares for His church “the new Israel”.

❖ He was sold, and the price was cheap – thirty pieces of silver (Mathew 26: 15). Yet He purchases the world at a great price – His precious blood (1 Corinthians 6: 20; 1 Peter

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<sup>1</sup>الراهب القس صموئيل السرياني: تفسير المزامير سنة 1988.

1: 19). “*He was led as a lamb to the slaughter*” (Isaiah 53: 7); Yet “*He shepherds Israel*” (1); and now He shepherds the whole world<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Gregory, the Neizianzen**)

“Joseph”, meaning (addition from God) refers to the Gentiles whom the Good Shepherd drew as new members of His church; about whom the Lord Christ says: “*And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring; and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd*” (John 10: 16).

- ❖ The interpretation of the name ‘Joseph’ will benefit us much. Meaning ‘an increase’, He truly came to increase the grain of wheat intended to fall into the ground, and dies, to produce much grain (John 12: 24); namely, to increase the people of God<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

The word “*lead*” (1) here refers to the past (2 Samuel 6: 3), as well as to the present (Ecclesiastes 2: 3), and to the future (Isaiah 11: 6).

“*You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth*” (1). The psalmist also says: “*The Lord reigns, Let the people tremble; He dwells between the cherubim; Let the earth be moved*” (Psalm 99: 1)

In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet called the living creature “a cherub”. And it is amazing how the cherub is closely connected to our salvation. At the beginning of the Holy Book, he appeared holding a flaming and turning sword to guard the way to paradise, so that man would not reach the tree of life; on account of that, with his falling nature, man could not approach the way of life. And at the end of the Holy

Book, when man got the right to enter into heaven itself, having his nature glorified in Jesus Christ, the true Lamb, he appeared together with the heavenly twenty-four elders, partaking of the song of the Lamb, the true Lamb -- the song of our salvation (Revelation 5: 9). In between the beginning and the end of the Holy Book, two cherubs appeared over the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle of the meeting and the temple, a sign of the divine presence; And God used to talk to Moses through them.

The presence of two cherubs over the ark of the covenant, that represents the divine throne, refers to that God, dwelling among His people, talks to them, and deals with them through His mercy and love.

Being two, refers to the role of the heavenly creatures toward us: praying for us, and “*ministering for those who will inherit salvation*” (Hebrew 1: 14). And by drawing the figure of a cherub on the curtains of the tabernacle and on the veil (Exodus 27-25), in a winged man-like form, proclaims the closeness of human nature to the divine presence.

Having knowledge of the cherub, man became familiar to him. The Gentiles knew him, particularly the Chaldeans, albeit adding to him things on their own, the way the rest of the Gentiles distorted all the facts of faith which they orally received through tradition.

Therefore, by seeing the cherub, we remember our human nature that enjoyed salvation through its union with God the Father, in Jesus Christ our Lord, through His Holy Spirit. As to his four faces, they refer to the sanctification of all aspects of our new nature: the mental (the man), the spiritual (the eagle), the work (the oxen), and the authority (the lion).

Following Philon the Jew, **St. Clement of Alexandria** said that the word “cherub” means (knowledge). Meaning an abundance of knowledge, or an overflowing of

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<sup>1</sup> *Oration 29, On the Son, 20.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 79 (80).*

wisdom, the name “cherubim” therefore refers to the power of knowledge, and of the vision of God. They meditate in the beauty of Deity in its first proclamation; enjoy a divine wisdom, and pour the flood of their wisdom over man, inferior to them; as though, through the spiritual knowledge, our life turns into a chariot carrying God inside it.

That is what **St. Jerome** also believed, who saw in the cherub a symbol of the storehouse of knowledge, working in our nature, to lift it up and set it forth among the heavenly hosts; working in our nature, ruling over lusts like a lion; soaring in the high things like an eagle; working hard like an oxen; and with reason like a man. We draw such knowledge from the four gospels; and according to the words of St. Jerome: [Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the four-man team of the lord; the true cherubim; namely the storehouses of knowledge; with their bodies full of eyes, and glittering like lightning; with their feet straight and lifted up high; and with their back winged, ready to fly to all directions; holding one another, connecting together like wheels within wheels, and rolling forward with the breath of the Holy Spirit<sup>1</sup>].

- ❖ The Cherubim is the throne of the glory of God; interpreted as: God presides on the perfection of knowledge. Although we perceive the cherubim as heavenly hosts, yet, if you so wish, you could become cherubim as well. . If the cherubim are the throne of God, listen to what the Holy Book says: “*The soul of the righteous is the throne of wisdom*”. You may say: How could we come to the perfection of knowledge? Who can realize such a high level? You have the way to realize it: “*Love is the fulfillment of the law*” (Romans 13: 10); as it is also said: “*God is love*” (1 John 4: 8)<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

**St. Gregory the Nezianzen** clarifies for us the meaning of the saying: “*God’s presides over the cherubim*” (1).

- ❖ Some of the things mentioned in the Holy Book are not facts (but symbols); Some facts are not mentioned; and some are true and mentioned. Do you wish for examples? We read in the Holy Book that God “*sleeps*” (Psalm 44: 23); “*awakes*” (Jeremiah 31: 26); “*becomes angry*” (Psalm 79: 5; Isaiah 5: 25); “*walks*” (Genesis 3: 8); and “*dwells (sits) between the cherubim*” (Psalm 80: 1). Is God influenced by such human emotions? Did you ever hear that God has a physical body? That would be an untrue mental portrait. We actually used words derived from our human experience and applied them, as much as we could, to aspects of God. For example, God’s isolation from us – for reasons known to Him – in a way simulating non-activity, or lack of interest, that we call “God sleeps”, And when God suddenly does something for our good, we say that: “He awoke”. When God punishes us, we say that “God is angry”. And when He works in different places we say: “God walks”. We also say “God sits on the throne”; which is just a human way of talk; as God does not stay in one place, as much as He does in saints. God’s swift motion is called “flying” (Psalm 18: 10); Watching over us we call “the face of God” (Psalm 4: 6; 34: 16); and His giving and taking we call (the hand of God” (Psalm 145: 16); and so on<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Gregory the Nezianzen**)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps., hom 10.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps 79 (80).

<sup>3</sup> العظة اللاهوتية الرابعة رقم 30 عن الابن، 22ز

❖ “*There was no room for them in the inn*” (Luke 2: 7); There was no room here for Him who created the whole earth!

She fed Him on her milk; He who sustains all, and grants life to every living being;

“*She wrapped Him in swaddling cloths (rags), and laid Him in a manger*” (Luke 2: 7); He “who (sits over) the cherubim” (Psalm 80: 1).

A heavenly light shone over Him, He who sheds His light on the whole world.

The heavenly hosts said praises for Him, He who is glorified before the ages.

A star led those who came from afar to Him, He who became poor for our sake.

As to the Mother of God, she kept all that, and hid it in her heart; receiving all secrets.

Praising you, O exalted and holy Virgin, surpasses every praise, because from You, our Lord Jesus was incarnated.

To Him is the glory, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit; now, forever, and to the age of ages, Amen<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory, the wonder maker)**

How magnificent is the commentary by **St. Augustine** on this verse, saying that God seeks from us to ask Him to come; for He longs to come.

“*Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, Stir up Your strength, and come and save us*” (2)

**St. Augustine** presents to us a symbolic interpretation of this supplication, saying:

❖ As ‘Ephraim’ means (fruitful); ‘Benjamin’ means (son of the right hand); and ‘Manasseh’ means (he who is forgetful); He asks God, therefore, to appear before him who is “fruitful”, “the son of the right hand”, the “one who is forgetful”, so that he no longer forgets, but You would dwell in his mind to save him<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the psalmist mentioned these three tribes for one of the following reasons:

a- For, as God promised to increase them, the psalmist reminds Him of His promise, and pray to him to realize it.

b- Because those three tribes made a pact with Syria to attack Judah, the psalmist prays to God to save Judah from their evil.

c- In the movement of the camp of Israel out of the wilderness of Sinai, those three tribes used to go ahead of the rest of tribes on the northern side (Numbers 10)

❖ By so saying, the psalmist clearly proclaims his anticipation of the coming of the Lord in the body to the earth, to give salvation to all, against “the evil Assyrian”; namely, Satan.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

“*Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved*” (3)

If some find it difficult to understand the incarnation of the divine Word, and His dwelling among us for the sake of our salvation; It is a well known fact that Man, bears a natural law, that makes him long to see God. Therefore, do not marvel that when

<sup>1</sup> البشارة بالتجسد الإلهي، 2005، تعريب القمص تادرس يعقوب ملطي ونادية أمين مرقس، عظة 2.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps 79 (80).

mankind deviating from the worship of the true God, longing to see God by their own eyes, made idols for themselves, and counted them as gods.

Even the prophet Moses, after so many years dealing with God, seeks to be shown the glory of God (Exodus 33: 16-18).

And in the book of the Song of songs, the daughters of Jerusalem ask the bride of the Song: “*Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Where has your beloved turned aside, that we may seek him with you?*” (Songs 6: 1). He came down to our world to care for our hearts, being His gardens, filled with beds of spices and lilies; intending to transfigure in our depths, to shine His face on us, that we shall be saved.

The prayer here is, therefore, a supplication to God to let us enjoy His work, care, and grace.

❖ We have gone astray from You; and shall not return unless You, Yourself, restore us.

“*Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved*” Has He a darkened face by any means? No He has not; but He put before His face a cloud of the body, as though a veil of weakness. When He was hanged on a tree, He was not seen the same way as He sat on His throne in heaven When You covered your face, we became ill. Cause your face to shine, to heal us<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Restore us, O Lord, to the freedom and comfort we used to have. As to the Father’s face, It is His only begotten Son, still equal to Him, the Ray of His glory, and the image of His Person. When He incarnated, His face appeared to us, and we could clearly see Him.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ That is why, he who longs to see the face of God, even if he lacks the sound judgment, yet we can say that he bears the spirit of piety. That was what made Moses dare to say to God: “*If I have found grace in Your sight, show me Your glory (face)*” (Exodus 33: 16-18). And finally, that was what let the Gentiles make the idols. For they foolishly wished to see whom they worshipped by their own eyes<sup>2</sup>.

(Peter Christologus, Archbishop of Raphina)

## 2- HOW BITTER IS THE CHASTISEMENT:

“*O Lord God of hosts, How long will You be angry against the prayer of Your people?*” (4)

According to the Septuagint, as well as the Coptic version, it came as: “O Lord God of almighty, How long will your wrath be against the prayer of Your servant?”

God, being the Mighty One, ordains all things as is befitting. When He hides His face, we become greatly disturbed, and horribly speechless.

When His response to our prayer is delayed, we sometimes assume that He rejects it, and wonder: “*How long?*” (Psalm 4: 2).

❖ Now, O Lord, You were angry against the prayer of your enemy. Will You also be angry against the prayer of Your servant? You are obviously in truth, angry as a Father who reforms, and not as a judge who condemns .As it is written: “*My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing. Set your heart right and be*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps 79 (80).

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 147.

*steadfast*” (Sirach 2: 1). Do not assume that God’s wrath passed away because you returned. God’s wrath passes away from you, only that you will not be eternally condemned; But “*He scourges every son whom He receives*” (Hebrew 12: 6) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

God is called here: “**Lord God of hosts**”. If the heavenly hosts have such amazing abilities, How much more would their Lord and Creator have?!

When God delays His response to a prayer, man sometimes assume that God’s wrath has concealed the prayer from His attention!

“*You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in measure*” (5)

A portrait of the bitterness of the soul when tears drop over bread because of intense grief, to become food or drink for man.

According to **St. Ambrose**, tears should be within, and not beyond a certain measure, lest they would come to be for the perdition of the soul; the way the apostle Paul feared lest the repentant adulterer would be “*swallowed up with too much sorrow*” (2 Corinthians 2: 7).

❖ God will give us “*the bread of tears*”, and will “*give us tears to drink in measure*” (5); Yet, this measure will be according to the sins of each of us<sup>2</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ Even our bread we shall eat while crying, and our cup will be filled with tears in measure; namely, our tears shall be measured according to our iniquities.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ What is this measure? Listen to the apostle say: “*God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able*” (1 Corinthians 10: 13). The measure, therefore, is according to what you are able; The measure is meant to discipline, and not to destroy you<sup>3</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

❖ As crying has several meanings, so has laughing; Neither of them has a single meaning; and each of them is sometimes commended, and other times rebuked.

Life, concentrated on lusts more than on the love of God, is considered like laughing, which would itself, for some, become a god; like when bellies or riches are gods for some; And when for some, who love entertainment so much, and intend to be funny, to the extent to be as though counting laughing as god, for which they build an altar, and offer sacrifices.

Anyway, there is he who laughs and is worthy of being commended. God says: “*He will yet fill your mouth with laughing*” (Job 8: 21). That conforms with “joy” being a fruit of the Spirit; for “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace*” (Galatians 5: 21). He, whose laughs, conform with joy is to be commended. Any grief that contradicts this kind of laughing, and opposes the joy of the Holy Spirit is worthy of rebuke; as such grief “*will not support Jerusalem*” (See Luke 19: 41; 23: 28) Why so? Because man does not repent in the right time befitting for repentance<sup>4</sup>!

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps 79 (80).

<sup>2</sup> In Lev. 8.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps 79 (80).

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on Ecclesiastes 71: 4.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

- ❖ The apostle Paul teaches us not to forsake those who commit a sin for death; but commit them to eat the bread of tears (for repentance). But, their sorrow should be in moderation; according to the verse: “*Give them tears to drink in measure*” (5); “*lest such repentant be swallowed up with so much sorrow*” (2 Corinthians 2: 7); as the apostle also said to the Corinthians: “*What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and the spirit of gentleness?*” (1 Corinthians 4: 21). He may use the rod, yet gently; according to the words: “*Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die; You will deliver his soul from hell*” (Proverbs 23: 13, 14) <sup>1</sup>.

What the apostle meant by the rod is clear by his condemnation of the sin of sexual immorality with close relatives, rebuking the Corinthians “*for being puffed up, and not rather mourned*” (1 Corinthians 5: 1), when they should have grieved instead; commanding them to deliver the one who had his father’s wife to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ We should counsel those who are sorrowful because of their evil doings, in a way different from the counsel we give to those who weep on the sins of their mind. The former should be purified by utter and true sorrow, lest they become more indebted by evil; and also because of the lack of the tears of remorse. Saying: “*I have given them tears to drink in measure*” (5) <sup>2</sup>, means that the soul, in her remorse over lust, should drink tears in a measure according to the extent of her alienation from God, that brought dryness to her eyes because of sin<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Gregory the Great)**

“*You have made us the scorn of our neighbors; and our enemies laugh among themselves*” (6)

What brought more bitterness on them is that their neighbors, not only started to deride them; but they fought among themselves, probably over who will take the bigger loot, or who will have the larger space of their land as a pasture for their sheep.

- ❖ The Hebrews used to scorn the Edomites, the Moabites, and the Ammonites, their neighbors at that time. Now they, themselves, became the scorn of all of them.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

According to **St. Augustine**, “*our neighbors*” are the Gentiles whom we preach the Lord Christ raised from the dead; who see in that a kind of contradiction, about which they enter with us into controversy. But they ultimately believe in what we preach. Those who used to deride us for worshipping a dead God, are now glorifying the Crucified!

“*Restore us, O God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved*” (7)

The verse here conforms to the third verse, and to the last verse of this psalm (19). The first demand of the believer from God, amid his troubles, is to shine with the light of

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<sup>1</sup> *On Repentance, 1.*

<sup>2</sup> بإخضاعهم وإذلالهم من قِبَل الأشروريين، أعطى الرب الشعب اليهودي فيضاً من الدموع، فصارت لهم خبزاً: “صارت لي دموعي خبزاً نهاراً وليلاً” (مز 42: 3).

<sup>3</sup> *Pastoral Care, 3: 29.*

His face on him; it is his continuous demand in life, and even the last, in the moments he delivers his spirit, and departs from this world. There is nothing that surpasses the enjoyment of the light of the face of God, the Grantor of enlightenment, glory, and eternal salvation.

Commenting on this verse and the like, **St. Augustine** says that, if returning to Christ is realized by faith, no one can come to Him unless he is so granted by the Father<sup>1</sup>.

❖ When God says: “*Return to me; and I will return to you*” (Zechariah 1: 3) the first part of the verse provoking us to return to God, concerns our will; whereas in the second part, promising to return to us, it concerns the grace of God. The ‘Pelagians’ may take it as a justification of their thoughts which they boast, saying that God’s grace is given according to our worthiness. This line of thought contradicts the faith of the Catholic Church, and does not conform with the grace of Christ. It is as though He returns to us according to our worthiness; and we are granted His grace by His returning to us. They miss the point that our return to God is in itself a gift from Him, or else, it would not be said in the prayer: “*Restore us, O God of hosts*” (7), and: “*Will you not revive us again?*”, and: “*Restore us, O God of our salvation*” (Psalm 85: 6, 4) For, what does returning to Christ mean, but to believe in Him; and nevertheless He says: “*No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father*” (John 6: 65) <sup>2</sup>!

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ All the heavenly and the earthly hosts submit to Your might, O Lord God. By Your mere appearance, we can overcome our enemies, and be restored to what we were.

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

### **3- WE ARE THE PLANTATION OF YOUR RIGHT HAND:**

***“You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it” (8)***

This analogy of the church of the Old, as well as that of the New Covenant, often came in the Holy Book; a beloved and a magnificent Analogy, that reveals how much God cherishes and cares for His people. The vine is a weak plant which needs care, and its fruit is much loved and abundant. Yet, if it becomes barren, it is fit for nothing.

❖ God does not wish for us to be planted in Egypt (the love of the world), nor in any other corrupt and evil place; but intends to set us on the mountain of His inheritance. The words “*You have brought, and planted it*” (Psalm 80: 8), sound as though He talks about little children whom He leads to school, to be provided with every kind of knowledge!

Let us read this verse and the next one to understand how He does that: “*You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow and the mighty cedars with its boughs*” (8, 10).

He does not plant it in the valleys, but on the hills, on high places.

He does not intend to leave those coming out of Egypt in lowly places, but leads them from the world to faith.

He intends to set them on high places, and not to crawl on the ground.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Grace and Free will, 10.*

<sup>2</sup> *Grace & Freewill, 10.*

He does not intend to let the fruit of His vine touch the ground; He intends for its branches to grow without being entangled with any other tree; but to stick to the mighty and high “cedars of God”; namely, to the prophets and the apostles; for our branches to grow together with theirs. If we lean on them, our branches will come to be bound by the mutual love, and will produce a rich crop<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ As long as the vine is fruitful, its owner will surround it with a hedge and protect it more than he does to any other plant in his garden; But once its fruit becomes corrupt, he will neglect and forsake it. That is what happened with the Israelites.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ In case someone who is not keen to hold fast to his church, is weakened, he would claim that she is a weak plant; She who has overcome all kings, cast her shadow over the whole world, and got stronger through suffering.

Blessed is He who made her greater than the vine of Egypt (see psalm 80: 8)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. (Mar.) Ephram the Syrian)**

***“You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land” (9)***

Caring for his vine, the vinedresser does not wait for it to show its need for anything, but will hasten to provide it beforehand with all its needs to help it grow, to take deep root, and to fill the land with its branches and fruits.

***“The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedar (of God) with its boughs” (10)***

As to those shadows that covered the hills, and the boughs that covered the mighty cedars of God; the former refer to the law, whose shadows are received with spiritual understanding by the hills, through the grace of the New Covenant. The boughs are the prophecies perceived by the church, and by which she got covered.

The hills may refer to the men of faith in the New Covenant; and the cedars of God to the heavenly hosts. By the coming of the incarnate Wisdom of God, the spiritual facts of the law and the prophecies were revealed before the believers.

- ❖ The Vinedresser is the Lord, who has several experiences in moving vines: *“He brought a vine out of Egypt, and planted it”* (8); *“The hills were covered with its shadow and the mighty cedars (of God) with its boughs”* (10). Those words were said by the bride of the song to show her love for the Groom and her readiness to encounter Him on His coming when the Groom perpetually dwells in the depths of her heart *“lies all night between her breasts”* (Song 1: 13).

**(The scholar Origen)**

***“She sent her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River” (11)***

Preaching the gospel spread over the whole earth, and covered, not only the hills and the cedars, but sent her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River.

By the Sea here, he means the Mediterranean Sea, and by the River, the Euphrates (Genesis 15: 18; Deuteronomy 11: 24; Joshua 1: 4; Psalm 72: 8).

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<sup>1</sup> In Exod. Hom 6: 10.

<sup>2</sup> ترانيم ضد جوليان عن الكنيسة 1: 9، تعريب عايدة بشاي.

***“Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit?” (12)***

The old Israel lost her hedges, when she no longer enjoyed the divine presence, the divine promises, and the spiritual understanding; And the demons (the passersby) could corrupt her fruits.

God Himself is our Stronghold who protects and hedges us. In Satan’s complaint against ‘Job’, he said to God: *“Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land”* (Job 1: 10).

***“The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it” (13)***

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the boar out of the woods, and the wild beast of the field, are Nebuchadnezar, Antichos, and the like; and in particular the devil who had authority over them.

While, according to **St. Augustine**, the boar out of the woods refers to the Gentile, counted by the Jews as unclean; as he comes out of the woods, and not out of the vine (the church of the Jews).

#### **4- LOOK DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND VISIT US:**

***“Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine” (14)***

If the Jews groan because the Gentiles have entered into faith; the psalmist, on his side, sees their entrance into faith as a divine gift; as the Lord of hosts looks down from heaven and visits this true vine.

The church, as well as every believer in her, need the looks of the Lord, that brings forth strength, hope, and joy. His looks are in truth a divine visit and an exalted care. The look of God carries in it an active divine work.

❖ The prophet asks God to return and look down on this vine (the church), in His capacity as a Physician and a Vinedresser. Being human and sick, she needs the care of the Physician. And being likened to a vine, that got corrupted, it needs a Vinedresser to reform it, to cut off what is useless in it, to keep what is fruitful, and to destroy the worms which infested its roots, namely the devil, the corruptor of faith.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, and the stock that You made strong for Yourself” (15)***

In the Septuagint, the Coptic, the Volgata, and the Syrian versions, etc. it came as “And on the Son of God”, namely, the Savior Messiah.

If the right hand of God refers to the Word Son of God; by His incarnation and His crucifixion He planted the church “the divine vine”.

And being the subject of pleasure of God the Father, He was chosen by Him, as a Savior and Head of the church “the divine bride”.

***“It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance” (16)***

Planting the church by Jesus Christ, namely, by His right hand, God burned the evil of the Gentiles, and consumed it by His Holy Spirit. Receiving the Gentiles, does not imply disregarding the sin and corruption; for although He loves all men, yet He does not

endure sin. While giving enlightenment to the repentant returning to Him, the divine fire consumes evil and iniquities. The Jews – the old vine -- having persisted upon denying faith in the Savior Messiah, is burned by the divine wrath.

- ❖ Nebuchadnezzar and those who followed him, because of Your anger, burned that vine, and destroyed its city. And the Romans did the same because of the anger of Your only begotten Son, Your Face, and the image of Your Person; whom they crucified.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Let Your hand be upon the Man of Your right hand; upon the Son of Man whom You made strong for Yourself” (17)***

According to several scholars, the talk here is about the Lord Christ, the Son of Man, the second Adam, the Subject of the pleasure of the

Father, and the One chosen by Him to be the Savior of the world.

***“Then we will not turn back from You. Revive us, and we will call upon Your name” (18)***

As our Christ sat at the right hand of the Father as our Firstborn, our hearts flared with the divine love, and with longing to set forth to the divine bosoms, to enjoy the eternal life, to glorify His holy name, and to find our pleasure in the worship, the praise, and the setting forth of the heart to heaven.

- ❖ Because we have, O Lord, the true Life, turned back from You, we became dead with our iniquities. Now, grant us our life back, so as not to turn back again from You as we did. And so that we would not be called upon, by the name of any human (Judah), nor of any tribe; but only by Your name, namely ‘Christians’.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved” (19)***

- ❖ Here, the prophet repeats his saying, to confirm and to hasten the coming of the Son of God and His Face to the world; to shine upon mankind, and to consummate the salvation for all.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ At the time of our Lord, a great light shone, to scatter the darkness that blinded the world.

The light of the Father shone upon the lowly creatures, to shed light upon the gloomy path for those walking along it.

The Sun of Righteousness came down, and walked on earth; and the dense shadows were scattered by His splendor (Malachi 2: 4).

When He spread His rays on all directions, the world exulted, after being gloomy before He shines.

He drove away the vanity that prevailed upon all nations, and showed to the world the ways of life, to walk along.

He brought forth healing over humanity, that was sick, and all persistent pains were extinguished.

He poured His healing over the wounded, held them fast, and extinguished the flame of afflictions on the weak.

He enriched the world with His help; and opened up His storehouses, to give the needy.

The blind saw; the paralytics walked; the demons were driven away; and those bowed down stood upright.

He gave hearing to the deaf, light to those in the darkness; purified the leprous, and gave forgiveness to the sinners.

He came down like rain upon the sick in the land of Judah, that they set forth like new roots.

He drove out the demons who had authority over humanity; and by the breath of His nostrils, He took away the harm out of many.

He cured for free, and was not angry when they denied; He bandaged their wounds, and they reviled Him by their crafty questions.

He was hated by the people despite His healing work; and was rebuked despite His several gifts.

He was believed by the uncircumcised, and was denied and doubted by the circumcised<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. (Mar.) Jacob El-Serougy)**

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<sup>1</sup> الميمر 17 على الكنعانية (مت 15: 21-28؛ مر 7: 24-30) (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 80  
WHO WILL LIGHTEN MY DARKNESS BUT YOU**

- ❖ My God, my depths groan inside me;  
Darkness has prevailed upon me;  
By Your Love, O Sun of Righteousness; You came down from heaven to me,  
You carried me on Your shoulders;  
You received me as a member of Your body;  
On the cross, You shone upon those sitting in the darkness;  
Your splendor destroyed the gates of the abyss.  
Your love filled our souls with hope.
- ❖ You ascended to heaven, and let our hearts ascend together with You;  
Can we enjoy the divine light, unless You shine on us?  
Can the body have comfort, unless it abides in You, O the amazing Head?  
Can the vine bear fruit without the effort and care of the vinedresser?  
Can the flock move forward, unless the shepherd goes ahead of it?  
Can the church exist without You?  
O Who dwells between the cherubim, hold us steadfast in You.  
Turn our souls into a heavenly chariot.
- ❖ A cloud has temporarily concealed our prayers;  
Give ear to our soul, O Shepherd of Israel, and Guide of Joseph!  
She seeks nothing but to acquire you;  
By our supplications, we only seek to return to You;  
How long? Cause Your face, O Lord, to shine on us:  
Rescue us from the bondage of the ruler of the hosts of darkness;  
As You rescued Your people from the bondage of Pharaoh;  
Plant us into Your stabbed side'  
To let our hearts flare with the fire of Your love.
- ❖ Surround us with Your Holy Spirit as a wall of fire;  
So that the boar out of the woods would not force its way into it;  
And the wild beast of the field would not devour it;  
You are the hedge of our salvation, and the refuge of our souls;  
You are our life, gladness, and glory;  
Let Your hand be with me, to cry out, saying:  
“I wish You bless me, and widen my territory”;  
“I wish Your hand be with me, to keep evil from following me”

## PSALM 81

### JOYFUL FEASTS

Many of the early church fathers noticed that three psalms came under the title ‘**For the sake of the winepresses**’ (in the Septuagint version); and that they correspond to the major Jewish feasts: the Passover, the Pentecost, and the Tabernacles. The winepresses produce wine that refers to the spiritual joy. Churches were called ‘**winepresses**’, on account of that they partake of the crucifixion of their Christ, who has trodden the winepress alone. As though the church, in truth, is a fellowship of crucifixion together with Christ; an exultant life, and an unceasing feast! These three psalms are: 80, 81 (80), and 84 (83).

The psalm in our hands is a call to enjoy a true, unceasing feast, through Christ Jesus, our Passover, and the Fountain of our heavenly joy.

1- A call to praise	1 – 3.
2- A call for liberation	4 – 7.
3- A Satisfying God	8 – 10.
4- Self- crushing	11 – 12.
5- God, the Grantor of conquest	13 – 15.
6- God, the Grantor of satisfaction	16.

#### THE TITLE:

To the Chief Musician. on an instrument of Gath. A psalm of **Asaph**.

In the Septuagint version it came as: “**In conclusion; For the sake of the winepresses**’

The titles of many psalms include the words; “**in conclusion**” or “**finally**”, to refer to the fact that Christ is our Goal, in Whom we enjoy the spirit of praise and joy.

“**For the sake of the winepresses**” Namely, for the sake of the churches of the crucified Christ; in whom we have the honor to partake of His crucifixion; to suffer together with Him, to be glorified together with Him.

❖ As there are three holy celebrations: the Passover, the Pentecost, and the Tabernacles; There are, as well, three psalms which have the title: “**For the sake of the winepresses**” ... There are no winepresses where there are no vine and an abundance of grape crop ... The Lord Savior says: “*I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me*” (Isaiah 63: 3). That is why He “*brought a vine out of Egypt, and planted it*” (Psalm 80: 8). And according to Jeremiah: “*I had planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn and become a wild vine?*” (Jeremiah 2: 21)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The term “**winepresses**” is given to the churches of the whole world. This psalm tells about the rejection of the Jews; and the faith of the world Gentiles in God, like clusters of grapes<sup>2</sup>.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 13.

<sup>2</sup> تفسير المزامير، الناشر الراهب القس صموئيل السرياني، مز 80 (81).

**St. Augustine** often called the churches “**winepresses** or **olive presses**”; where grapes or olives are trodden by feet, or crushed between rocks. Without pressing or crushing we would not enjoy the (spiritual) wine, or the (holy) oil ointment. For the believer, pressing is a gift for edification; while for the wicked it is a disgrace.

- ❖ The term “winepresses” is taken as the secret of the church acting now. In the presses we notice that pressure gives two products: (the wine or oil) which are preserved, and the (trash) which is cast away<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

According to Adam Clark, this psalm was sung in the feast of the trumpets (Leviticus 23: 24), and in the first day of the Jewish year.

According to others, it was sung, as well, in the feast of the tabernacles, the feasts of the new months, the celebration of the creation of the world, and the liberation of Israel from the bondage of Pharaoh. While others believe that it was sung in every joyful celebration.

## **1- A CALL TO PRAISE:**

***“Sing aloud to God our strength; Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob” (1)***

If God intends for our journey in life, with all its troubles, to turn into an unceasing feast, the secret of our joy is in two main things: The enjoyment of God our strength, and the practice of the deposit of the heavenly life. Concerning ‘God’, it is written: “***Sing aloud to God our strength***”; as nothing will bring gladness like God, being our strength, support, and joy. And concerning ‘the deposit of the heavenly life’, it is said: “***Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob***”. The verb ‘**shout**’ came in other locations as ‘scream’, ‘cry out’, ‘shout for joy’, and ‘make a shout of conquest’. This verb is often used to express the worship of angels, partaking of the joy of the earthly creation. And some believe that, as shouting here, refers to the inability of human languages to express certain emotions, the hearts join together to shout from their depths, and with the spirit of unity.

The psalmist calls on us to utter a collective praise, in a fellowship with the heavenly creatures, with the spirit of conquest, to the **God of Jacob**; he who experienced the power of God in his relationship with his violent brother Esau; how he let him find favor in his sight, and kept Esau from doing him any harm. If Jacob refers to the life of strife, “*having striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed*” (Genesis 32: 28); Being the children of Jacob, the striver, we are called to praise God amid our unceasing strife!

- ❖ “**Rejoice in God our Helper**”; when other rejoice in their gods, namely, their bellies.

He who bursts with joy, finding no words enough to express it, he resorts to shouting: “***makes a joyful shout to the God of Jacob***”<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

- ❖ The prophet exhorts those who were spared from harm by their enemies to rejoice spiritually, and to raise a praise of thanksgiving to Him who supports and saves them.. And he calls on the nations to thank God who helped and saved them against the might of Satan.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 81 (80).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 81 (80).

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

❖ Let us make a shout to God in conquest; not refer it to ourselves, but to the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“Raise a song and strike the tambourine, the pleasant harp with the lyre” (2)***

If we ask the psalmist: How shall we praise the Lord, and exult in the God of Jacob? He will answer: I shall provide you with the psalm, namely the teaching and word of the Lord; and you have to play it with your instruments, namely, with your bodies, souls, spirits, emotions, and all your senses. You should be wholly transformed into musical instruments, played together to present a symphony of love to God.

It is written: *“David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was wearing a lined ephod”* (2 Samuel 6: 14).

❖ Take from me David the psalm he wrote through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; play it with the musical instruments; and sing it with the tambourines, the harps, and the lyres. Take the divine teaching, and let yourselves be like a tambourine (made out of dead animal skins); namely, put your ugly lusts to death, by offering your bodies a holy living sacrifice which would bring pleasure to God.

Let your souls and bodies be in conformation and harmony in praising God, like a flute and a harp.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

❖ *“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance”* (Luke 7: 31-35). The prophets sang spiritual songs, preaching salvation for all; and they cried as well, hoping that their sad lamentations would draw the stony hearts of the Jews.

The Holy Book teaches us to sing to the Lord (Psalm 46); and to respectfully dance, according to the command of the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel to *“pound his fists and stamp his feet”* (Ezekiel 6: 11). God does not seek funny moves by an ecstatic body with the applause of women; but seeks the respectable dancing of the soul through rising up the body by the good works; when we attach our harps to the willow.

The Lord, commanding us to pound the fists and stamp the feet, and to sing; sees before His eyes, the wedding of Christ, the beloved Groom to His bride the church; a magnificent wedding in which the Spirit unites with the Word; and the body with the Spirit.

That is the wedding which the prophet David attempted to celebrate, and to which we are invited ... He exhorts us to hasten toward this joyful scenery ... ***“Raise a song and strike the tambourine, the pleasant harp and the lyre”*** (2-3).

Can't you imagine the prophet dancing? ... Can't you hear the voice of music and the stamping feet of the dancers?

It is the wedding! ... Take for yourself a lyre, that when you enjoy the touch of the Spirit, your inner strings would respond to the echo of good works; ... Take hold of a harp, so that there would be harmony between your words and your works; And take a tambourine, that the Spirit would grant you to sing through your inner body<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 13.

<sup>2</sup> In Luc 7: 18-35.

***“Blow the trumpet at the time of the new moon, at the full moon, on our solemn feast day” (3)***

The trumpets were blown at the time of every new moon. The Jews used to send some persons to the top of a hill or a mountain at the time of the new moon; and the moment they see it appear, they blow the trumpet; and the chief of the Sanhedrin, to announce that it conforms with the astronomical calculations, he cries out ‘*Mikkodesh*’, namely, (*Holy*); to which the people respond by crying out the same word twice.

Then the trumpets are blown everywhere.

**According to Eusabius, bishop of Caesarea**, this custom was cancelled after the preaching of the Holy Gospel, which is a trumpet heard by the whole earth in a famous feast.

- ❖ ***“Blow the trumpet”***; Namely, preach loudly and daringly; ... Do not be afraid! But, as said by the prophet somewhere else: *“Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet”* (see Isaiah 58: 1).

**What is the new moon**, but the new life? *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation”* (2 Corinthians 5: 17). What is the significance of blowing the trumpet at the new moon? Preach with confidence the new life, and do not be afraid of disturbing the old one<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ According to **St. Athanasius**: God commanded Israel to blow material trumpets, as a testimony of their release from the bondage of Egypt. ... And He commands the New Israel (the Christians) to blow (or to warn) by the spiritual trumpet, namely, the Holy Bible at the new moons, namely, once their minds are renewed by Christ the Lord.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ In the old, God called through His prophet Moses to keep the feasts at designated dates, saying: *“Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year”* (Exodus 23: 14). These feasts are: The Passover, or the feast of the unleavened bread; the Pentecost, or the feast of the weeks, or of the harvest; and the feast of the Tabernacles, or of the ingathering. At those three occasions, the priests used to blow the trumpets to exhort the people to keep the feasts.

According to the Scripture, the trumpets are sometimes, used to call to feasts, sometimes to fasting, and sometimes to war. In the Book of Numbers, it came that God spoke to Moses, saying: *“Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the assembly”* (Numbers 10: 1-2). This also conforms to God’s call now to those who love him.

They not only blew the trumpets at the time of wars (Numbers 10: 9); but there were, as well, trumpets to be blown at the times of the feasts; as according to the law: *“In the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets”* (Numbers 10: 10).

Never underestimate this as something of little value; for it is actually amazing and fearsome! ... The voice of a trumpets make man alert and awe-stricken more than any other instrument. And lest they might be taken as human proclamations, they

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 81 (80).

sounded very loud like those heard on the mountain “*that all the people who were in the camp trembled*” (Exodus 19: 16); when they were given the law to keep<sup>1</sup>.

(Pope, Abba Athanasius the apostolic)

## 2- A CALL FOR LIBERATION:

*“For this is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob” (4)*

We, the children of the new Israel, namely, the Christians, are committed to perpetually celebrate, not the appearance of the new moon, but the appearance of the **Sun of Righteousness**, who brought joy to our hearts; ... to perpetually testify to His work in us; ... and to transform

our whole being to praise with the gladness of heart; so that our life would become a spiritual trumpet blown loudly in the whole earth.

*“This He established in Joseph for a testimony,, when he went out over the land of Egypt, where we heard a language we did not understand” (5)*

Previously, God called His people by the name of ‘Jacob or Israel’; when the people were committed to strive with the spirit of joy and praise. Here, speaking about His people in Egypt, He calls them by the name of ‘**Joseph**’; for all went down to Egypt because of Joseph.

❖ As when Joseph went down to Egypt, he heard a language he did not hear before, the language of the Egyptians; the children of Israel, coming out of Egypt, heading to the wilderness, heard the statutes of God, which they did not hear before.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

❖ Coming out of the land of Egypt, we, as well, heard a language unknown to us. ... Who among us knew about the Bible? Who knew about the apostles? Who knew about the prophets? ... Coming out of Egypt, we heard things new to us; and learned a language we did not know before<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ **Joseph**, by his faith, has been tempted in the waters of strife, and passing through the temptation, God set a covenant with him; as, according to David: “*This He established as a testimony in Joseph*” (5).

**Moses**, as well, by his faith, has done amazing works: He struck the Egyptians by ten plagues; divided the Red Sea, crossed over with his people, while the Egyptians drowned in its midst; Casting a tree in the bitter water, it became sweet; By faith, God sent Manna from heaven to satisfy his people; and by holding up his hands Amalek was defeated “*His hands were steady until the going down of the sun*” (Exodus 17: 12 – the Syrian Pechito version); By faith he twice ascended Mount Sinai, and fasted forty days; And by faith he defeated Sihon and Og, the Emorite kings<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ephrahat, the wise Persian)

As the word ‘**Joseph**’ could be translated as (**increase**), According to **St. Augustine**, [By being sold to the Egyptian Potiphar; coming to be in Pharaoh’s palace, after passing through a multitude of troubles and temptations; then his marriage to an Egyptian, Joseph could be a living portrait of the Lord Christ, who, by being rejected by

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<sup>1</sup> *Paschal Letters, 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms, homily 13.*

<sup>3</sup> *Demonstrations, 1: 14 (Of Faith).*

His own, and delivered to the Gentiles to be crucified, He drew the Gentiles to become His own flock; saying: *“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd”* (John 10: 16). An “**increase**” happened through the entry of the Gentiles into faith in Christ. And the way Joseph’s bones were carried out of Egypt (Genesis 5: 25), So will the church get out from the love of the world to the heavenly dwelling place! ... That is Joseph’s testimony, when he went out of Egypt (5).

❖ *“This He established in Joseph for a testimony”*. As the word ‘Joseph’ could be translated as (**increase**); Joseph, who was sold in Egypt is a symbol of Christ who crossed over to the Gentiles. ... There, Joseph was glorified after temptations; And here, Christ is glorified through the sufferings of the martyrs. Since then the Gentiles were referred to ‘Joseph’, because of the ‘**increase**’; *“For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman”* (Isaiah 54: 1). ... Yet, they were committed to come out of the land of Egypt<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“I removed his shoulder from the burden; his hands were freed from the basket”* (6)

Under the yoke of bondage, the children of Israel were committed to carry burdens on their shoulders beyond their endurance; and to fill their baskets with mire for the bricks, and carry them with their hands. We, likewise, under the yoke of the bondage of sin, are committed to carry on our shoulders bitter burdens, and to defile our hands with mire and corruption.

❖ Having endured such horrible yoke in Egypt, the children of Israel cried out with moaning to God, who had compassion on them, saved them, and *“removed their shoulders from the burden, and their hands from the basket”*. Likewise, God saved us from the burdens of our sins, and from the corruption of the mire and mud.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

According to **St. Jerome**, while God liberated the old Israel from carrying the baskets full of mire and mud; He grants the new Israel (the church) to have her baskets filled with the crumbs remaining from the bread which He blessed and by which He satisfied the multitudes! In the persons of the twelve disciples, the church carries the baskets filled with the flood of the divine blessing for the multitude of believers.

❖ While we were in Egypt, in bitter bondage, we carried the baskets of mire and bricks, and searched for the straw. ... We had no wheat; ... We had no divine Manna coming down from heaven; ... We had no bronze serpent, raised up on a pillar to heal us; ... We had no water flowing from the rock; ... Nor we could hold up our hands to defeat Amalek. In Egypt we were slaves, sitting in the mire, and building cities for Pharaoh.

*“He removed his shoulder from the burden, and His hands were freed from the baskets”* (6). That is why our own Moses says to us: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden (with sins), and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11: 28)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 81 (80).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 13.

- ❖ Let us remember all the saints from the beginning; and see what they have endured. While doing good, talking good, and holding fast to every truth, they were despised and afflicted by others until their last breath. Yet they prayed for their persecutors, according to the command of the Savior (Luke 6: 28; Matthew 5: 44). Have you been sold like the righteous Joseph? (Genesis 37), and been cast in two pits (in the well and the prison like him)? Did your hands carry baskets of mire and bricks (6)<sup>1</sup>? Have you been abused like Moses from his childhood to his last days (Hebrew 11: 25)? Have you been chased like David by King Saul who envied him; or even by his own son, who intended to kill him (2 Samuel 1: 11-27; 18: 33)? Or have you been cast into the sea like Jonah (Jonah 1: 15)? What have you endured in your life?

(St. Parnovius)

***“You called in trouble, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the water of Maribah” (7)***

Amid their anguish the people of Israel cried out to the Lord; and as is written: *“And the Lord said: I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I have known their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them”* (Exodus 3: 7-8).

He says: *“I answered you in the secret place of thunder”*. What is that place? Some believe that He refers here to the appearance of God through the clouds, to talk to Moses, to proclaim His mercy to His people, and to terrify their enemies with His thunder. While some others believe that He refers here to the Lord’s way of dealing with His people and His believers, speaking to them as though in a secret way that bears some kind of divine awe.

But unfortunately, despite the exalted compassion of God, and His intervention to save, the old people revealed denial at the waters of Maribah (Exodus 17: 7; Numbers 20: 7-13).

- ❖ Whenever you are in trouble, do not get disturbed; Call Me, and I, by my mercy and compassion, will listen to you. *“I answered you in a secret way in the thunder”*; I was there in the middle of the storm that almost destroyed you, and the violent waves that cast you here and there.

*“I tested you at the water of Maribah”*. This phrase accurately tells how Moses and Aaron disobeyed God at the waters of Maribah (Numbers 20: 7-13); the reason why they were not allowed to enter into the promised land. .... Simon the sorcerer was tested “at the water of Maribah”, when he received baptism through hypocrisy. ... This, likewise, could be addressed to us: *“I tested you at the water of Maribah”*<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ When you called Me, O Israel, in the time of your trouble, I responded to your call and saved you. I did not appear to you in Person, but, hidden from your eyes; by a mighty wind I dried up the sea, made you cross over, and saved you from your anguish. Yet, you revealed your non-gratitude on My goodness, when you rebelled at the water of Maribah.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

<sup>1</sup> يبدو أنه يُشير إلى البئر والسجن اللذين ألقوا فيهما يوسف الصديق (تك 37: 24؛ 40: 15).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 13.

### 3- A SATISFYING GOD:

***“Hear, O My people, And I will admonish you! O Israel, if you listen to Me!”***

(8)

- ❖ He does not talk to strangers, but to people belonging to Him; He says: *“Judge between Me and My vineyard”* (Isaiah 5: 3)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god”*** (9)

As it is man’s nature to deny, God admonishes His people against worshipping any foreign god beside, or instead of worshipping Him.

- ❖ He whose belly is his god; whose anger is his god; whose gold is his god; Anything that man covets and worship would be his god<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ God has seen men do in an evil way, what is against nature; has seen them practice certain deadly abominations, which is not fitting for anyone to refer to or to talk about ... By practicing such abominations, they, not only be counted among irrational animals, but animals would even be better than them; as it is said: *“The ox knows its owner; and the donkey its master’s crib”* (Isaiah 1: 3)<sup>3</sup>.

(Abba Shenouda the Archimandrite)

***“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it”*** (10)

God, who is capable of liberating from the bondage of Pharaoh, would not leave His people hungry or needy; but He will provide, whenever the believer opens his mouth with faith and trust in God his Savior; the same way the little birds open their mouths before their mother.

- ❖ Open your mouth with thanksgiving for my goodness, and I shall add to your gifts and talents.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Do you wish to receive food from the Lord? Do you wish to feed upon the Lord Himself, your Savior? Listen to Him saying: *“Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it”* He is both the Lord and the Bread; He exhorts us to eat; He is our Food; The wider you open your mouth, the more food you get; It is something in your authority, not in Mine; If you do not get everything, you will, at least, get a part<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ By You I begin; and by You, I trust, I shall end!  
I shall open my mouth wide, and you will fill it!  
To You, I am the land; and you are the Farmer!  
Plant your voice in me, O who planted Himself in His mother’s womb<sup>5</sup>!

<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 81 (80).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 13.

<sup>3</sup> Fragment on Ecclesiastes.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 13.

<sup>5</sup> القمص تادرس يعقوب ملطي: ألحان الميلاد للقديس مار أفرام السرياني 7 يناير 1997، ص 11.

(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)

- ❖ God did not say: “Open your mouth, and I shall teach you”; but He promised to give both: He said to Moses: “*I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say*” (Exodus 4: 12). And here He says: “*Open your mouth wide and I will fill it*” (10); which means that there has to be a will on man’s part to get what God gives. “*Open your mouth wide*” implies the proclamation of man’s will; while “*I will fill it*” refers to the grace of God<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Blessed are those whose mouths God opens to speak! He opens the mouths of the prophets and the apostles, and fills them with eloquence, as proclaimed by the apostle Paul who says to the Ephesians: “*Pray for me that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel*” (Ephesians 6: 19).

Therefore, it is God who opens the mouths of those who utter the divine words<sup>2</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

#### 4- SELF-CRUSHING:

***“But My people did not heed My voice; And Israel would have none of Me”***

(11)

God, on His part, intends to fulfill all the needs of His people; Yet the problem is in the diversion of the people’s heart, and in their intention to have none of God Himself.

According to **St. Augustine**, those people who did not listen to the voice of their God, are nothing but the precipitate to be cast away from the winepress; while the oil would be kept holy for the Lord.

- ❖ This talk also came in the prophet Isaiah, saying: They heard the teachings of the Lord, and did not heed His voice; and saw His signs, and did not believe.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsel”***

(12)

God gives every man his heart’s desire: he who seeks Him will find Him; and he who does not, will be given over to his own stubborn heart; and would get what he desires. It is written: “*They shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies*” (Proverb 1: 31). When the Jews rejected the Lord Christ, and said: “*We have no king but Caesar*”, they were given their heart’s desire, when Titus, the Roman leader was sent by Caesar, took over Jerusalem, and destroyed the temple.

- ❖ It is befitting of us to know with upright faith that everything, either happen according to God’s will, or allowed by Him. Everything good happens through His will and care; And anything contradictory is allowed by Him. But once the Lord’s care is taken away from us because of our sins, of the hardness of our heart, or of allowing Satan and the shameful body passions to prevail over us; The apostle Paul confirms that: “***For this reason God gave them up to vile passions***” (Romans 1: 26); and: “*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind*

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<sup>1</sup> Questions on Exodus, 9.

<sup>2</sup> In Exod. 3: 2.

*to do those things which are not fitting*” (Romans 1: 28); And the prophet says: “*My people did not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsel*” (11-12)<sup>1</sup>.

(Father Pavnotius)

## **5- GOD, THE GRANTOR OF CONQUEST:**

*“Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways”*  
(13)

If man seeks the evil passions of his body, and refuse to submit to God; In the winepress of temptations, he would not become joyful spiritual wine, nor holy oil, but valueless precipitate to be cast to trash. ... However, if he returns to the Lord, his Savior, He will reclaim him from the trash, make him holy, filled with the joy of the Spirit, and bearing the sweet fragrance of Christ, instead of the stink of death and corruption.

*“I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries”* (14)

Sanctifying the freedom of will, God leaves it to man, to choose, either the way to his perdition, or to submit to God, who will subdue his enemies, as He previously did to Pharaoh and his soldiers.

❖ I will give you over to your free will; will put before you the race path; And will grant the crown only to him who conquers; I will leave the conquest to your own effort (with the grace of God)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“Those who hate the Lord would cringe before Him, and their punishment would last forever”* (15)

Those who hate the Lord assume that they are capable of destroying His people; but those wicked people will fall into an eternal humiliation, while the children of the Lord will abide in glory forever.

## **6- GOD, THE GRANTOR OF SATISFACTION:**

*“I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you”* (16)

The psalmist ends the psalm, saying that God will satisfy His people with the finest of the wheat, and the water He brings for them out of the rock would turn in their mouths into delicious honey.

Comparing between the food of the rich and that of the poor, **St. John Chrysostom**, referring to the physiological ailments that inflict some of the rich because of their extreme submission to the lust of food and drink; says that pleasure does not depend upon the kind of food, but upon man’s longing and need for food. And, commenting on God’s saying, on the tongue of His prophet: “*and with honey from the rock, I would satisfy you*” (16), he says that, although God did not bring honey from the rock, but water; yet, because of their intense exhaustion, labor, and strife, water turned to

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 3: 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms, homily* 13.

honey in their mouths. That is concerning the table of the poor, but that of some of the rich, even what is sweet would turn in their mouths into bitterness (see proverb 27: 7) <sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ “*The finest of the wheat*” is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the mental bread, on whom the souls feed. And He is also the Rock, from which the flowing waters are His divine teachings.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Intending to show the abundance and riches of the divine grace, the prophet calls it “*the finest of the wheat*” ... Christ is the Wheat, and is also the Rock (1 Corinthians 10: 4), whose water quenched the thirst of the children of Israel in the wilderness. He so satisfied their spiritual thirst with honey, and not with water; that those who believed, and received the food, tasted honey in their mouths. “*How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey in my mouth*” (Psalm 119: 103).

Finally, that is the reason why our Lord ate honey after His resurrection; ... The Rock Himself ate honey, to provide us with honey and sweetness; that those who drank the bitterness of the law, would afterwards taste the sweetness of the gospel<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ In the wilderness, God brought forth water out of the rock (Exodus 17: 6), and not honey. Honey is the wisdom, the sweetest among the food of the heart. How often have the enemies of the Lord, once they returned to Him, have not only eaten the finest of the wheat, but the honey of the Rock as well -- the wisdom of Christ. How, when they enjoyed the gladness of His words, the knowledge of His secrets, and the understanding of His parables; they clapped and applauded for joy; ... That honey comes only from the Rock, “*and the Rock was Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10: 4). Many, who have been satisfied by that honey, cried out, saying: How sweet it is! Nothing could be sweeter<sup>3</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> لا يستطيع أحد أن يؤذي إنساناً ما لم يؤذ هذا الإنسان ذاته.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 13.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, 81 (80).

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 81

### YOU ARE MY UNCEASING FEAST!

- ❖ By Your love, you came to our earth;  
To turn the valley of weeping to a joyful paradise;  
To turn the journey of my life to an unceasing feast.  
Amid my sufferings, I sing Your love;  
And shout loudly together with Your believers with the spirit of gladness and exultation.
- ❖ My whole being turned into musical instruments;  
My body brought to death its evil passions;  
To become a tambourine, that sounds the gladness of Your righteousness;  
And my soul became a sweet harp, whose strings would never fail;  
All my emotions and senses have become a lyre;  
All of them work together with the joyful evangelic trumpet;  
Receive the symphony of my love as a sacrifice of praise to You!
- ❖ Count me as a son of Jacob, wrestling and prevailing by Your grace;  
Lead me By Yourself, away from the servitude of the devil;  
Grant my shoulder rest from the burden of my sin;  
Cleanse my hands of the mire and filth;  
In my anguish, I call You to save me;  
You appear to me in the clouds, to enjoy Your encounter.
- ❖ Who can preoccupy my mind but You?  
You are the secret of my life and resurrection;  
You are the heavenly Bread that satisfy my soul;  
I will open wide my inner mouth, and You will fill it with Your grace.
- ❖ You are the pleasure of my heart;  
I enjoy submitting to You;  
I find conquest against the devil, the enemy of mankind;  
You grant me an eternal glory, that the enemy cannot corrupt.
- ❖ You give me Your body as the finest of the wheat;  
That I would never need the food of the world;  
You flow for me living water, O the divine Rock!  
Tasting it, I find it sweeter than honey!  
You are my satisfaction, presenting to me every sweetness!

## PSALM 82

### THE DIVINE JUDGE AND KING OF THE EARTH

This psalm provides us, in a concise way, the plan and the goal of salvation, and reveals the exalted love of God for mankind. The psalmist opens the scenery with the portrait of the Savior as a Judge who finds pleasure in His believers, who are sanctified in, and by Him; setting out of them a holy congregation, which He calls “*the congregation of the mighty*”. Being the Creator God, He granted His believers the sonhood to God, and stands among them, cherishing them.

As to His plan for the salvation of humanity, He sums it up in the phrases 2 – 4; in which He, being the Creator and the Judge of all the world, comes down to us as a poor Man, allows Himself to be tried, and His own to deliver Him to the Gentiles who crucify Him. He accepts injustice, and does not open His mouth; to lift up the burden of sin from us.

Being the Wisdom of God, He delivers Himself up to the ignorant; And being the Light, to be judged by the children of darkness. By that He destabilizes the foundation of the earth, to become Himself the foundation over which His church is built, and His kingdom is proclaimed; To judge the earth for its corruption, to destroy the corruption, and to grant His righteousness to the nations. By that He reigns over all the nations, after turning the earthly, to (almost) heavenly creatures.

<b>1- The divine Judge and the congregation (the mighty) of gods</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- Delivering Himself to justice</b>	<b>2 - 4</b>
<b>3- The darkness attacks the light</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4- Out of the dead, He sets (almost) heavenly creatures</b>	<b>6 – 8</b>

#### 1- THE DIVINE JUDGE AND THE CONGREGATION OF GODS (THE DIVINE COUNCIL):

The Word of God often proclaims Himself as the ‘Divine Judge’; not to terrify men; but in truth, as He anticipates His encounter with them, to bring them forth to the eternal glories. He wishes to proclaim that He stands in the congregation of the mighty, He judges among the gods.

***“God stands in the congregation (assembly) of the mighty; He judges among the gods” (1)***

Some believe that this psalm talks about God, being the Judge of judges, and of the kings. If He allowed for setting certain human authorities, and commanded us to submit to them; Yet these rulers are committed to perceive that they are ministers to God, set to support the weak, to defend the oppressed, and to run the people’s affairs. It is befitting of them to become God’s representatives; as “*Divination is on the lips of the king; His mouth does not transgress in judgment*” (Proverb 16: 10).

If, by sanctifying man’s free will, God allows for the presence of wicked rulers, He allows them to practice their work with the hardness of their hearts. However, He is the Judge of all; as It is said to the judges: “*Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Now, therefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, no taking of bribes*” (2 Chronicles 19: 6-7).

In a sermon on this psalm, **St. Jerome's** attention was drawn that the Holy Book speaks of God in human terms, so that we could perceive His dealings with us. It sometimes speaks of Him as "**standing**" among the saints (see Psalm 82: 1); And we hear Him say to the prophet Moses: "*As for you, stand here by Me*" (Deuteronomy 5: 31); And when Adam was holy, he used to stand as though with God. But once Adam and Eve sinned, "*they heard the sound of the Lord God "walking" in the garden ... and they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God*" (Genesis 3: 8). The Lord **moved** to say to Adam: "*Where are you?*" (Genesis 3: 9).

As to "**sitting**", the Lord appears as a Judge or a King; The prophet Isaiah says: "*I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple*" (Isaiah 6: 1). And the prophet Daniel says: "*I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of days was seated ... the court was seated, and the books were opened*" (Daniel 7: 9-10). ... Some, therefore saw Him **standing**, some **walking**, and others **sitting**; And when He allows for us to pass through temptation, we even see Him as though **sleeping** (Matthew 8: 24); to which David say in his psalm: "*Awake, why do you sleep, O Lord?*" (Psalm 44: 23).

According to **St. Cyril the Great**<sup>1</sup>, the "*congregation (assembly) of the mighty*" here, refers to the Pharisees (Luke 11: 42); having been greedy, lovers of ugly profit; while at the same time, they were very particular as far as the literality of the observation of the statute of tithes is concerned, despite their disregard of the truth, the justice, and the love of God.

❖ The Mighty One stands among the congregation of His mighty children, about whom He Himself says on the tongue of Isaiah: "*I have nourished and brought up children; and they have rebelled against Me*" (Isaiah 1: 2).. By the "congregation or assembly" we understand they are (the people of Israel); although they were sometimes called a church.

The apostles never called (the church) "an assembly", but they always called it "a church"; whether it is to distinguish between the two; or on account of that there are some differences between the word "assembly", from which the term (synagogue) was derived, and that in which the church was called "Ecclesia "., the complex is a meeting of the flocks, named *flocks*. As for the meeting was more appropriate for creatures reasonable such as human beings...I believe it is obvious among which "congregation of gods", the Mighty One was standing<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ Some say: Let us just draw the portrait of Christ together with His Mother 'the Theotokos', and that would be enough!

Your non-pious words show that you utterly despise the saints. It is obvious that, in banning the icons, you refuse to give the saints their due honor. ... While you draw icons of Christ, being the Glorious; you deprive the saints of the glory they are worthy of; and call the truth hypocrisy. The Lord says: "*I glorify those who glorify Me*"; and inspires the apostle to say: "*Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ*" (Galatians 4: 7); And, And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also

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<sup>1</sup> In *Luc. Ser. 84*.

<sup>2</sup> On *Psalms 82 (81)*.

glorified together (Romans 8: 17) You are not making war against the icons of the saints, but against the saints themselves.

**St. John** the Evangelist who leaned back on Jesus breast, said: “*When He is revealed , we shall be like Him*” (1 John 3: 2). As anything on fire becomes fire, not out of its nature, but by union, burning, and mixing with fire, the same way concerning the body taken by the Word of God through union with His Person: The body partook of the Divine Nature, while the manhood not losing its features; By such a union, God remains unchangeable, not only by the work of the Divine Grace, as it is the case with the prophets, but also by the coming of the Grace Himself. The Holy Book calls the saints “gods”, saying: “*God stands in the congregation (assembly) of the mighty; He judges among the gods*” (1).

**St. Gregory** interprets these words, saying: [God stands in the congregation of the saints to designate the glory that each of them is worthy of. During their life on earth the saints were filled with the Holy Spirit; And when they consummated their path, the Holy Spirit did not forsake their souls nor their bodies in the grave<sup>1</sup>.

❖ The holy dwelling places where the Holy God has found rest; namely, the ‘Theotokos’ (the mother of God), and the saints; having chosen to cooperate with the divine choice, God dwelt in them, and called them gods; not by nature, but by adoption; as we call the red hot bar ‘on fire’, not on account of its nature but because it shared work with fire.

He says: “*You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy*” (Leviticus 19: 2). That is first, then comes the choice of goodness; which, once we choose it, God will help us have more of it; as we read in the holy Scripture: “*I will walk among you*” (Leviticus 26: 12). “*We are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in us*” (1 Corinthians 3: 16); “*He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease*” (Matthew 10: 1); “*He who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also, and greater works than these he will do*” (John 14: 12); “*If indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*” (Romans 8: 17); And, “***God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods***” (1).

Hence, being gods, not by nature, but because they have partaken of the divine nature, they should be honored; not on account of that they are so worthy, but because they bear inside them, Him who is worshipped by nature.

We usually keep away from a red hot iron, and refrain from touching it, not on account of its nature, but because it partook of what is hot by nature. **The saints are honored because God glorified them**, and through **Him they became fearful for the enemies**, and profitable for faith. They are not gods by nature, but on account of that they were ministers who loved God. We honor them because the King is honored through the honor presented to his beloved servants. They may indeed be obedient servants, and close friends, Yet they are not the king himself.

When man prays with faith, presenting his case in the name of a certain saint, God will respond; on account of that **He accepts the honor given to His faithful minister**. That is why those who approached God through the apostles enjoyed healing by their shadow, and even by the aprons that touched their bodies. Yet, those who intend to worship them like God are condemned, and are worthy of the eternal fire; Likewise, those

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<sup>1</sup> عن الصورة لمقدسة، الدفاع الأول، 19.

who stubbornly refrain from honoring the ministers of God, will also be condemned for their haughtiness, as though they refrained to honor God Himself. The children who mocked Elisha were examples of this, they were devoured by bears (2 Kings 2: 23) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. John of Damascus)

## 2- DELIVERING HIMSELF TO JUSTICE:

***“How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked?” (2)***

If it is evil to do injustice, it would be more so to judge others unjustly. The wise Solomon, says: *“Moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there”* (Ecclesiastes 3: 16).

***“And show partiality to the wicked”***. If the judges and rulers judge unjustly; those who commend their evil doing, partake of their wickedness.

There is nothing greater than for the Creator to deliver Himself to His creation; and for the divine Judge to be judged by human hands. He before the splendor of whose greatness, the cherubim cover their faces by their wings, calls Himself humble and poor, and even an orphan.

He delivered Himself to the verdict of crucifixion and death, to take away our sins from us, to let us enjoy His righteousness, and be worthy of the eternal inheritance.

❖ The following phrases, if addressed to the civil judges, the meaning would be obvious; but if addressed to judges in the church, it is understood that they are the bishops and the priests: ***“How long will you judge unjustly?”*** He who corrupts the justice is an *‘unjust judge’*, about whom the Holy Scripture says: *“he does not fear God nor regard man”* (Luke 18: 2). ***“How long will you judge unjustly?”*** I have given you authority on my flock, the people of God; you are committed to be judges rather than to be wolves<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

❖ ***“How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked?” (2)***. And, *“How long will your hearts be hard?”* (Psalm 4: 2 The Volgata). Will it be until the coming of the Light of the heart? I gave a law, which you stubbornly opposed; I sent prophets, with whom you unjustly dealt, killed, or helped those who did Now, the Heir Himself, has come! Is it to be killed? Is it not for your sake that He intended to be like a son under guardians? Is it not for your sake that He became hungry and thirsty, as someone in need? Is it not for your sake that He cried out: *“Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart”* (Matthew 11: 29)? Did He not, while Rich, become poor, that through His poverty you might become rich (2 Corinthians 8: 9) <sup>3</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

***“Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy” (3)***

Here, the Lord rebukes the judges of Israel, who: they do not defend the cause of the fatherless, the widow’s case does not come before them”(Isaiah1: 23) *“They surpass the deeds of the wicked; they do not plead the cause, the cause of the fatherless, and the right of the needy they do not defend”* (Jeremiah 5: 29).

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 14.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms 82 (81).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms 82 (81).

According to **St. Augustine**, the talk here is addressed to the Jews who rejected the Lord Christ who came to them like a fatherless, humble, poor, and miserable; whom they intended to kill, saying:” this is the heir come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance”(matthew21: 38).

- ❖ He does not say: Defend the righteous, the prophet, or the priest; who are supposed to endure the injustice, but He says “*Defend the poor and the fatherless*”; those who cannot endure injustice on a account of their poverty or weakness.

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

***“Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked” (4)***

- ❖ Putting the unjust on the same level of the vicious beast; and the poor on that of the lamb; he says: Free him from his hands, namely from his violence and oppression.

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

### **3- THE DARKNESS ATTACKS THE LIGHT:**

There is nothing worse than to see the ignorant condemn the wisdom to death, and walk in the light to quench the divine light.

How amazing, that He let them practice their hearts’ desire; so that, by His cross, the foundations of the earth would shake, the rocks Would , the creation would proclaim its; and the sun and the moon would refrain from giving their light. The foundation of the earth shake, so that He would become the Foundation of the heavenly building in us; And the outer darkness dwells, so that we would seek His divine light in our depths; He, being the Sun of Righteousness, in whose wings the healing is, would shine on us, we, who sit in the darkness,

Out of us, who died of sins, like our father Adam, He would set the children of the Mighty One; ... Instead of falling, we would stand to challenge death; And Hell would have no authority on us, nor its gates would be able to shut us in; But the gates would open up before us, to enter, hidden in the Firstborn, risen from the dead.

***“They do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness; All the foundations of the earth are shaken” (5)***

Their ignorance was not something by the way, that could be excused; but it was an ignorance out of free will. It is unfortunate to see men of justice, not knowing justice, judges twisting justice, and men not understanding their duties!

***“They walk about in darkness”***. Their inner insight is darkened, and they loved the darkness rather than light because their deed were evil (John 3: 19). ***“They left the path of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness”*** (Proverbs 2: 13).

- ❖ ***“They do not know, nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness” (5)***. ***“Had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”*** (1 Corinthians 2: 8). And those, as well, had they known, they would not have sought to have Barabbas released, and Jesus crucified. But, as blindness, we spoke about, has occurred partly in Israel, until the consummation of the entry of the Gentiles; that blindness of those people led to the crucifixion of Christ.

***“All the foundations of the earth are shaken”***. They are, and will be shaken, until the is realized. As, the moment ***“the Lord yielded up His Spirit, ... the earth quake, and the rocks were split”*** (Matthew 27: 51). ... And if by ***“the foundations of the earth”*** we understand, those who are rich with the abundance of earthly things, it was previously

said in truth that they will be shaken, through receiving the lowliness, poverty, and death, to become the subject of love and honor in Christ<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Those whom I called gods are wicked judges because of their iniquities; they do not know Me, nor understand My judgments (5). “*They walk about in darkness*”; they barely find their way in the darkness, because they forgot the light. Those to whom I said: “*You are the light of the world*” (Matthew 5: 14), have forsaken the light and became darkness<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ “*All the foundations of the earth are shaken*” (5). Here you see the kind of punishment that would dwell on the wicked rulers; Because of the wicked judges the foundations of the earth are shaken ... They rejected Christ who should have been their Foundation, on which the architect built (1 Corinthians 3: 10), and put their own foundations on the ground<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

#### 4- OUT OF THE DEAD, HE SETS ALMOST HEAVENLY CREATURE:

It was not possible for the Hades to close its gates on Him, nor for the grave to shut Him in; But He is raised to condemn in us every earthly desire, and to destroy the authority of death on us; Reigning on us, we, who were previously earth, by Him we shall be almost heavenly creatures.

**“I said, ‘You are gods’, and all of you are children of the Most High” (6)**

To the Jews who got furious against the Lord Christ, because He said that He is the Son of God, making Himself equal to God, He said: “*Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, ‘You are gods’? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken); do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming’, because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?*” (John 10: 35-36).

As the wicked judges and rulers shut up their ears, could not endure the word of advice, and persisted on walking in the darkness, the psalmist asks God to condemn the earth by Himself, and to give justice to the oppressed. On another aspect, the believer seeks from God to judge the earth, and to take away from him and his brethren the temporal desires and the love of the earthliest; that all may bear the heavenly mind.

Presenting a spiritual commentary on what came in Leviticus 16: 17: “***There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel***”; the scholar Origen says: [I believe that he who follows Christ would force his way together with Him into the tabernacle, and ascends together with Him up to heaven, **would still be called human**, but would become, “like an angel of God”, in whom the words of the Lord are consummated, saying: “*I said, ‘You are gods’, and all of you are children of the Most High*” (6). Let us then be one Spirit with God; and in the glory of His resurrection, cross over to the level of “angels”, and no

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 14.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 14.

<sup>3</sup> In Lev. Hom. 9: 11.

more be men<sup>1</sup>]. In other words, as our Lord Jesus Christ sets forth to the Sanctuaries to atone for us, no man could be with Him, unless he is unified in Him as a member in His Holy body; to be counted as a heavenly creature who bears His heavenly life in him,

❖ There are many children of God, according to the Scripture, saying: “*You are gods, and all of you are the children of the Most High*” (6) But only One is **the Son of God** by nature; the only begotten Son of the Father; through whom all the rest are called children. The same way, there are many Spirits, but only One **Holy Spirit** who truly proceeds from the Father Himself, and who grants the grace of His name and sanctification<sup>2</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ We are gods, not by nature, but by grace; “*As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God*” (John 1: 12). I have created man for this goal, that all mankind would become gods, “*I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High’*” (Psalm 6; and John 10: 36) I made you gods, the way I made Moses a god to Pharaoh (Exodus 7: 1) We were born equal, whether emperors or commons; and we shall die equal; Our humanity is of one kind<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ As I said to Moses: “*I have set you today god to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet*”; I have likewise set you gods to judge among people, the way God judges; and you will be called the children of the Most High, having partaken of His justice. St Cyril says that the Christians, by receiving the Son of God, and confessing His deity, have become “*gods, and the children of the Most High*”, by grace and not by nature; for God the Father and His Son, by nature, are One; Namely our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ What names has God taken from me, and what names has He given me?

He who Himself is ‘God’, called me the same. Yet, concerning Him, He is God, according to the nature of His essence; whereas I, have only got the honor of the name. “*I said You are gods, and all of you are the children of the Most High*” (6). He called me god, only as an honor.

And He Himself is called “*Man*”, “*the Son of Man*”, “*the Way*”, “*the Gate*”, “*the Rock*”, etc. All these names He has taken from me<sup>4</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*I said you are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High*” (6). When those are so told by God, they receive a sonhood they did not have before. He, on the other hand, is born from the beginning as the Son of the Father; He, beyond any beginning and any time, is the Son of the Father, like Him in everything.; **eternal from an**

<sup>1</sup> Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (8: 14).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 14.

<sup>3</sup> عظمتان عن أتروبيوس.

<sup>4</sup> يرفض البابا أنثاسيوس كلمة "مشابهاً" بل كما سبق ورأينا أن إيماننا الأرثوذكسي يستخدم لفظاً دقيقاً وهو "واحد مع الآب" أو مساوي للآب في ذات الجوهر".

**eternal; Life from Life; Light from Light; Truth from Truth; Wisdom from Wisdom; King from King; God from God; and Power from Power<sup>1</sup>.**

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ We are committed to pray for those who are still “*earth*”, and who did not start yet to become “*heaven*”, to have the will of God consummated in them as well as it did in heaven, namely in us; we, who by our faith, have become “*heaven*”. We should pray that those who have not yet believed those who are still “*earth*”, because their initial birth from it would be reborn from water and Spirit, and start to become “*heaven*”<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ If we are the children of God; if we have already become His temple; If we (by receiving the Holy Spirit), live sanctified and spiritual; ... If we lift our eyes up from earth to heaven; If we lift up our hearts, filled with God and Christ, to the high and the divine places; I wish we do not do anything unbecoming of God and Christ, as we are exhorted by the apostle<sup>3</sup>.

**(Cyprian the martyr)**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says: [The Word of God became Man (John 1: 14) to learn from the Man (the Lord Christ), how can man become god]. And he adds: [It is also possible for the Gnostic to become god, according to the saying: “*I said you are gods; and all of you are the children of the Most High*”].

- ❖ We are enriched by the Spirit of God, for His Spirit came to dwell in us. We took our place among the children of God. Yet we did not lose what we actually are – humans according to nature; although we cry out, saying: “*Abba, Father*”<sup>4</sup> (Romans 8: 15)!

**(St. Cyril of Alexandria)**

- ❖ The inner work together with the labor of love from the heart, bring forth purity; and purity brings forth the true peace of heart; and this peace brings forth humility; and humility makes man a dwelling place of God. Whereas the evil spirits together with the devil their leader, are cast away from that dwelling place; by which man becomes a temple of God, holy, enlightened, pure, rich with grace, and filled with every sweet fragrance, compassion, and gladness; becomes a bearer of God (Theophorus), and would rather become god, according to the saying: “*I said you are gods, and all of you are the children of the Most High*” (6).

**(St. Parnovius)**

- ❖ If you lift your inner sight up to God, and make sure of seeing Him fully; then seek from Him anything you want in the name of Christ Jesus; It will be given to you the moment you ask. For through your true belief in Him, your union with Him will be realized; and what you seek will be according to His will; whether it is for the sake of your own salvation, or for that of your neighbor. At this very moment, you will have a fellowship with the divinity through the spiritual union with God, according to the words: “*I said you are gods*” (6). At that time, there will be nothing between you and God; neither distance, nor time; and the instant you utter your words, there will be the response to them; For “*He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast*”

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 11 : 4.

<sup>2</sup> *On the Lord Prayer*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Jealousy and Envy*, 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Letter 1*: 35.

(Psalm 33: 9). ... Is this not what happens with the transformation of the Holy Sacraments?!

**(Father Gregory the Great)**

In strong words, **St. Clement of Alexandria**, speaking about the activity of baptism in the life of believers, says: [The same thing happens with us as well, to whom Christ became an Example: Once we are baptized, we become enlightened, and being enlightened, we become children, and as children we become perfect; and being perfect, we come to be immortal; according to the words: "*I said you are gods; and all of you are the children of the Most High*" (6)].

[This work is called by many names; namely: grace, enlightenment, perfection, and cleansing.

It is **cleansing**, as by it we are cleansed of our sins.

It is **grace**, as by it the punishments of our transgressions are taken away from us.

And it is **enlightenment**, as by it we see the holy light of salvation; Namely, by it we clearly behold God in a way we call perfection; lacking nothing; as what would be lacking in him who knows God<sup>1</sup>?)

- ❖ You will notice how the wisdom of God gives the title 'gods', not only to the heavenly beings, who are more exalted than us, but gives it likewise to the holy men among us who are distinguished by the love of God (Psalm 82: 1; 95: 3)<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Dionosius the)**

- ❖ If they believe that Christ is called God on account of that Deity dwells in Him; It is the same case in many saints, whom the Holy Book calls gods, "*to whom the word of God came*" (John 10; 35); By that, they put Him among men, and they even compare Him with them, the same way it was said to Moses: "*I made you god to Pharaoh*" (Exodus 7: 1); and the way it is said in the psalm: "*I said you are gods*" (6)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ "*I said you are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High*" (6) ... Yet we are gods, not by nature, but only by grace.

*"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God"* (John 1: 12).

I have created man for this goal, to make gods out of men.

Just imagine the greatness of our honor; being called both gods and children!

I shall make them gods the way I made Moses god to Pharaoh; so that, being gods, you become children of the Most High<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ He is the true God, the One with the true Father; Yet all the other creatures, to whom He said: "*I said you are gods*" (6), they only have this grace from the Father, by their fellowship in the Word by the Spirit; In Him who is the Light from Light, and the power of the essence and the image of the Father<sup>5</sup>.

**(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)**

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<sup>1</sup> Paed 1: 6.

<sup>2</sup> Celestial Hierarchy, 12: 3.

<sup>3</sup> On the Christian Faith 5: 1: 23.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 14.

<sup>5</sup> Four Discourses Against the Arians, 1: 3: 9.

***“But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes” (7)***

As some have become haughty on account of their positions or the authority given to them, the psalmist confirms to them that they are still like all other men; and it is befitting of them to perceive that death will eventually come to them, to take away their positions and authority, and to bring them down from their thrones, to stand like all men before the Great Judge.

According to father Serinus, “*the princes*” are the angels who fell off their diverse ranks and from their heavenly positions, as a fruit of their evil. He also believes that, the same way they have got diverse ranks according to their previous angelic life; they got diverse contradictory ranks according to the level of their evil.

- ❖ “*But you shall die like men*” (7). So you can see that men die; while God does not. Adam, as long as he obeyed the divine command, did not die, he was like a god; but once he tasted the forbidden fruit, he died, according to the words of God: “*In the day that you eat of it, you shall die*” (Genesis 2: 17)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ As long as someone is not a liar, and still holds fast to the truth; he would not be a man, but to him and to those like him, God would say: “*I said you are gods; and all of you are the children of the Most High*” (6); and the phrase “*But You shall die like men*” (7) would not be added.

It is obvious that the killer Satan did not, from the beginning, hold fast to the truth “*because the truth is not in him*”. And the truth is not in him because he deceived himself by himself. Accordingly, he is counted as the most evil among those deceived; on account of that they are deceived by him, while he has created the deception for himself<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ I am not like you; and I do not practice the lowliness you are well-trained to do. I have not come on My own, nor Am I self-sent like you; but I come from heaven, and He who sent Me is True, and not like Satan Your sender, the devil of lies, whose spirit you have received, to dare to prophesy lies; he who stirred you up to invent words of God; ; he is not the truth, “*for he is a liar, and the father of it*” (John 8: 44).

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

- ❖ As it is by a kind of violence that man sins; it is therefore required to reform him through meekness (humility). By pride man sins, and he is committed to go through humility to be chastised. All the proud call themselves ‘mighty people’; That is why others come from East and West, to sit together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8: 11) See, You are mortal, and bear a corruptible physical body; “*Like one of the princes you shall fall, and like men you shall die*” (7).

Satan is proud because, being an angel, he has no mortal body; whereas you, having received a mortal body, you should be humble because of your great weakness that makes you fall like one of the princes. This, therefore, is the first gift from God that leads us to confess our weakness; “*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 1: 31); As “*For when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Corinthians 12: 10)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 14.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20: 242-244.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 39 (38). 18.

- ❖ As long as you corrupt the truth, and cheat your wisdom by injustice, you will die the way those with human counsel die, the kind of death resulting from sin; and you will fall by your own free will from the honor given to you, the way the heathen rulers fall, and the way Satan, one of the archangels has fallen.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Some demons tempt man as human; and some others tempt him as an irrational animal.

**The first kind** of temptations brings forth unto us vain glory, pride, envy, judgment; those kinds which do not come upon the dumb animal.

Whereas **the second kind** provokes into us wrath and sexual desire, things we share with the irrational animals; which are horrible, and degrade the rational nature.

Concerning the thoughts that come forth over man as human, the Holy Spirit says: *“I said you are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High”; but you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes*” (6-7).

Whereas, concerning the thoughts that come over man as an irrational animal, the Holy Spirit says: *“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 come to you”* (Psalm 32: 9)<sup>1</sup>.

(Father Oghris the monk)

- ❖ As the grace we have got could be taken away from us, or could change; as it was the case with the Jews; what they were told, do not apply to us; namely: *“I said you are gods, and all of you are the children of the Most High; but you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes”* (6-7). The reason is that, while they received the grace of **bondage** to God, we received that of **adoption** which would never change; as we are taught by the apostle Paul: *“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’”* (Romans 8: 15). We, in truth, call God *“Our Father who art in heaven”* when we approach to receive the Holy Sacraments, on account of the grace given to us by the Spirit... For it is the Spirit who qualifies us to call God *“Our Father”*. Being all sinners, and because of the sins we committed, and still commit since our baptism, we should get communion in those Sacraments on a regular basis<sup>2</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Feloxinus)

- ❖ Lamenting the fall of Satan and his angels, the prophet Ezekiel, says:

*“Son of man takes up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him,*

*‘Thus says the Lord God: **You were seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, You were in Eden, the garden of God.***

*Every precious stone was your covering: the sardus; topaz; diamond; Beryl; onyx; jasper; sapphire, turquoise; and emerald with gold.*

*The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes, on the day you were created.*

*You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.*

<sup>1</sup> الفليوكاليا: الأبى أوغريس الراهب 7- عن "الأفكار الشريرة الأخرى"، 19.

<sup>2</sup> حول سكنى الروح القدس، 2003، ترجمة نانسي جرجس، صوم 27.

*You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.*

*By the abundance of your trading, you became filled with violence within, and you sinned;*

*Therefore, I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God;*

*And I destroyed you, O covering cherub from the midst of the fiery stones.*

*Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;*

*You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;*

*I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you.*

*You defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities; by the iniquity of your trading” (Ezekiel 28: 11-18).*

**And the prophet Isaiah says:**

*“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning?!*

*How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!*

*For you have said in your heart:*

*I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation, on the farthest side of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14: 12-14)*

The Holy Book tells us that Satan was not the only one who fell down from his previous blessed status; but the dragon, and one -third of the stars, will fall as well (Revelation 12: 4).

The apostle Jude says: *“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).*

And we, as well, were told: *“... But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes” (Psalm 82: 7);* which indicate that several princes have fallen<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Serinus)**

***“Arise, O God, judge the earth; For You shall inherit all nations” (8)***

He did not say: ‘Judge the heaven and earth’, because heaven is sinless. He who is earth will be judged; but he who, by Jesus Christ, became heaven, will be glorified, and will not be judged.

❖ *“Arise, O God, judge the earth”*; Arise, for our boat is tossed by the mighty waves. Arise, O God, judge the earth, for the wicked judges will die like Adam, and will fall like one of the princes. Arise and judge; bring forth salvation to Your creation ... Arise, You have suffered for our sake, died for our sake, and resurrected to give us salvation.

Let us say it in another way: You who came in humility, Come as a Judge and liberate us<sup>2</sup>!

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Now, He sits and grants forgiveness; But when the end comes, He arises for judgment; as it is written: *“Arise, O God, judge the earth” (Psalm 82: 8)*<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Cassian Conferences 8: 8.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms, homily 14.*

<sup>3</sup> *On the Epistle to the Hebrews, 7: 6.*

❖ Arise from the dead and judge the earth, that was puffed up when it crucified You.

His inheritance is realized by love, by which He plants the earth by His commands, and by His mercy filled with compassion; destroying the earthly desires<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Psalms 82 (81).*

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 82**

### **HOW AMAZING YOU ARE, O THE GREATEST JUDGE**

- ❖ How amazing You are, O Divine Judge in Your work and love;  
While You are the Judge of all, You still tell us to submit to every human ordinance;  
To give honor to whom honor is due;  
And to submit to those of authority.  
But You remain the Judge of judges, and rulers.  
Above every high;... Who could be higher than Him?  
Do not let humanity devour one another.
- ❖ In humility, while being the Judge of the whole world, You sit together with Your believers and honor them.  
You set out of them children for Yourself; not by nature, but by adoption.  
You honor Your servants by calling them gods;  
For the sake of the authority You give them.
- ❖ In Your humility, You set Your servants judges.  
For our sake, You accepted to bear the oppression of Your creation with an amazing longsuffering.  
You came to be together with the fatherless, the poor, and the miserable.  
As though You are one of the poor!  
The hearts of those who suffer and are forgotten were comforted;  
When they found the Savior as one of them.
- ❖ It is befitting of the judges to defend the humble and the fatherless;  
And to do justice to the afflicted and the needy;  
As that would be to the account of the Savior Himself.
- ❖ Mankind got clothed in darkness;  
And charged against the true Light;  
The sun, the moon, and all nature, were ashamed because of the corruption of men;  
The earth was shaken, and the rocks were split;  
To proclaim their protest unto mankind;  
Yet the Divine Judge abides on His love, enduring suffering and disgrace, even to the death of the cross.  
By His death He brought death to death;  
And by His resurrection He granted us the resurrected life.
- ❖ By His ascension He turned our earth into heaven;  
We no longer fear the judgment;  
For we have become heaven;  
He will arise, and judge the earth;  
But heaven will be filled with glory.

## PSAM 83

### ENEMIES ON ALL SIDES

This psalm starts in the form of a collective lamentation; but ends as usual by a praise to glorify and thank God on His work with His people amid their affliction. Scholars differ as to the occasion when this psalm was written. Many believe that it suits what came in 2 Chronicles 20, concerning when several nations made a confederacy against King Jehoshaphat. Then, *“the king sought the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. So Judah gathered together to ask help from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. Then Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and prayed to the Lord seeking His intervention. And the Lord saved them by a strong hand and a mighty arm”*.

It is the story of the church in all eras; and even the story of every true believer, when the devil and the hosts of darkness are stirred up against him; But the Lord grants him the conquest.

Adam Clark believes that this psalm suits the confederacy against Jehoshaphat king of Judah, for the following reasons:

- (1) The Ammonites were the main factor in the war
- (2) Edom came to support them (2 Chronicles 20: 1, 22; Psalm 83: 8)
- (3) Many strangers from Syria and beyond the Dead Sea: the Ishmaelites and the Hagarites (Psalm 83: 7-8).
- (4) The appearance of Jahaziel, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, to proclaim that the war is the Lord's, and not that of the king nor of the people (2 Chronicles 20: 14-15). He probably is the author of this psalm.

<b>1- A cry-out to God</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- An evil confederacy</b>	<b>2 - 5</b>
<b>3- The names of the confederates</b>	<b>6 - 8</b>
<b>4- A supplication for salvation</b>	<b>9 - 17</b>
<b>5- A victory for God's glory</b>	<b>18</b>

#### **The title:**

##### **A Song. A Psalm of Asaph.**

This is the last of the psalms of Asaph. Because there are many things in common between it and what came in 2 Chronicles 20, Some scholars believe that Asaph, here, is 'Jahaziel' mentioned in 2 Chronicles 20.

Although this psalm bears the type of a collective lamentation, yet it is still called 'a song'

#### **1- A CRY-OUT TO GOD:**

*“Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace, and do not be still, O God”*

(1)

In the Septuagint version it came as: “Who is like You, O God? Do not hold Your peace, and do not be still, O God”

- ❖ As there is no one like you; we look up to no one but You. So **“Do not keep silent, O God, and do not hold your peace”** We are speechless; So intercede to our account. That is the voice of a righteous man with a peaceful conscience<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

Seeing the enemies allied together against God, and stirred up against His people; the situation needs just one word from God; hence the psalmist cries-out saying: **“Do not keep silent, O God; do not hold Your peace, and do not be still”**. God oftentimes, seeming as though silent and not caring for the stirred-up enemies, the believer stands confused. But if God seems as though silent, it is to exhort us not to be silent ourselves, but to pray to Him to arise and to rebuke the wind, so there would be great calm (See Mathew 8: 24 etc.).

- ❖ Who is like You, O God? No one is like You!. **“Do not be silent; do not hold Your peace”**. It is a man of the church who talks; *“out of whose heart flow rivers of living water”* (John 7: 38). Seeing a great crop, but few workers; a multitude of believers, but few teachers to teach them; many heretics, and many adversaries, but few warriors to the account of Christ’ he cries-out: **“Do not be silent, O Lord, Do not hold Your peace!”**<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ O God, Who is like You?! ... Likeness could be either in essence or in the way. God has no likeness in essence; namely in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – One Deity of three Persons, with no difference in essence. The likeness between the righteous and God could be in the way; not natural in them, but through grace from Him. ... While God, the Holy and the Just, all His features are natural in Him, and not gained; Man, on the other hand, if he has got certain of God’s features, they would not be natural in him, but partial and gained.

The prophet, therefore, says: Who is like You, O God, in essence?! As to saying: **“Do not be silent!”** It means: Do not be any more long-suffering on the wicked, but hasten to avenge against them.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## 2- AN EVIL CONFEDERACY:

**“For behold, Your enemies are in tumult; and those who hate You have raised their head” (2)**

The enemies are stirred-up, gathered together in tumult, like hungry wolves intending to devour the people of God, like a flock of sheep. They raised their heads up in haughtiness against God Himself, as though they have triumphed on Him.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, what came here is a prophecy of what was going to happen later on, when Cyrus, king of

Persia, was going to allow the rebuilding of the temple and the holy city; When the surrounding nations would be stirred-up on the Jews, but

God would support Zerubbabel to overcome them.

The adversaries against the church of God are characterized by the following features:

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 15.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

(1) They cry out loudly, yet in a vague language, on account of that they are irrational, and their animosity is for no good reason.

(2) They haughtily raise their heads even against God Himself, as well as against His believers. While the Lord says: “*Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart*” (Matthew 11: 29); The haughty, on the other hand, follow the one who said: “*I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest side of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High*” (Isaiah 14: 13-14).

(3) They craftily plot against those under the protection of God, intending to utterly cut off the church of God, and wipe her name out.

**St. Augustine** notices that the psalmist did not say: “They raised (their) heads”, but said: “*They raised (the) head*”; as though the enemies

have reached the point when they all gather together around one head; that head of the one about whom is said: “*Who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped*” 2 Thessalonians 2: 4). So that, if this psalm is a cry-out coming from the heart of the whole church, she cries out when the antichrist comes, who, in his haughtiness, “*sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*” (2 Thessalonians 2: 4). All the wicked gather together under the leadership of the antichrist to oppose the church in the entire earth. That is when the church seeks from her God not to remain silent, as the affliction has reached its maximum; and the antichrist assumes that no god could stand before him.

❖ “***Behold, your enemies are in tumult*** “. The heretics talk, while the church people hold their peace; they are in tumult, while we keep silent; They blaspheme, while we are not offended ... He says it well: “*They are in tumult*”, They produce only noise, confusion, and division. ... “***Those who hate You have raised their head***”. The heretics are a great multitude; while Your believers are but a few<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)<sup>2</sup>

“***They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones***” (3)

As the Lord’s enemies gather together against His believers, and resort to deception and craftiness in planning their plots, the believers seek from God to support and protect them.

Commenting on the words: “*in tumult*”, and, “*consulted together*”, **St. Augustine** says that they make more noise than a talk or a conversation. The enemies oppose the church by the spirit of violence and tumult, and make plans without understanding, nor prudence, or rational debate.

❖ “***They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones***”. They only think of how to make men of Your church stumble, and to fall into their trap<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 15.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

***“They have said, ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more” (4)***

If ‘Israel’ here refers to the church, being the New Israel, the enemy, helpless to cut it off from the world, proclaims what is in his heart, by saying: *“that the name Israel may be remembered no more”*. That is what will happen when the two (witnesses) will be killed at the end of time; when *“those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another”* (Revelation 11: 10).

The enemies will seek nothing less than to utterly cut off the people of God, so that they are remembered no more.

❖ ***“They have said, ‘Come, and let us destroy their nation”*** ... The way Herod and Pilate – as an example – who were enemies, came to be in peace together to persecute Christ; and became in their friendship more horrible than they have been in their animosity, So are the heretics, who are diversified among themselves in their evil, will come together to practice a greater evil<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“For they have consulted together with one consent. They form a confederacy against You” (5)***

The enemies come together with one heart, and have one goal, namely, to cut off the people of God from being a nation; the way all the Jewish leaderships did against the Lord Christ.

According to **St. Augustine**, the evil adversaries against the church of God form a confederacy among themselves to become stronger. They bear the spirit of unity in evil.

❖ ***“They have consulted together with one consent”*** ... How miserable creatures we are, the people of God! when we cannot come together, the way the evildoers do<sup>2</sup>!

❖ ***“They form a confederacy against You”***. The way You talked to us through Your prophets; the Heretics did the same through Mani, Mercion, Arius, and Valentinus<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

### **3- THE NAMES OF THE CONFEDERATES:**

***“The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hegerites” (6)***

The psalmist mentions here the names of the nations, adversary against the church, which, according to **St. Jerome** are 11; being unable to reach the figure 12, of perfection. As we mentioned in many locations, the figure 12 refers to the kingdom of God on earth; as men in the four corners of the earth believe in the Holy Trinity (4 X 3 = 12).

Both St. Augustine and **St. Jerome** believe that the name of each of those nations refers to its nature.

a. ***“The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites”***. The word ‘**Edom**’ is translated as (the earthly); and the word ‘tents’ is the right expression, as the Edomites do not live in houses with well-established foundations, but in temporary tents.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 15.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

b. The word “**Ishmaelites**” refers to the fact that they have the appearances of (listeners); but they actually do not care much for God.

c. The word “**Moab**”, means (from the father); who was born a fruit of the illegal and unholy relationship between ‘Lot’, the father, and his daughter.

“**The Hagerites**”, Those who were before citizens, then became strangers, not of the household; And being strangers, they come against their father’s house<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

“**Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre**” (7)

“**Gebal**” A part of Edom, East of the Dead Sea; meaning a fruitless barren valley. The prefix ‘Ge’ means (valley); and the suffix ‘bal’ means (empty).

“**Ammon**”; means (non-peaceful people), or (people of grief), referring to that they were confused people who put their trust in unworthy mobs, and not in true believers.

“**Amalek**”; namely (lickers of the ground); As the enemies of the people of God do not subsist on the heavenly bread, but lick the ground like serpents.

“**Philistia**” means those who drink from the cup of the devil and die by the poisonous dryness. In Latin, it means (a strange race). And according to **St. Augustine** it refers to those who get drunk by the luxuries of the world.

“**Tyre**”, according to **St. Augustine** means (narrowness) or (affliction); as said by the apostle: “*Tribulation and anguish on every soul of man who does evil*” (Romans 2: 9).

❖ “**Gebal**” means a barren valley; The Lord’s enemies are not mountain people, but from the barren valley; their wisdom is not from high above, but from down below; they are not from heaven, but are entirely from the earth.

According to the holy Scripture, the humble man who sacrifices everything he has for Christ’s sake, is a valley and a field, not barren but fruitful.

“**Ammon**” applies, no doubt to the deceptive people, referring to the heretics, who are not followers of Him who says: “*I am the Truth*” (John 14: 6), but of him who is the father of lies.

“**Amalek**”, meaning (lick); As they leave nothing to the church, but lick all its foundation. They do not feed upon the words of the Holy Bible, but lick the ground like a serpent<sup>2</sup>.

❖ “**Philistia**”; The Hebrew name **Phelistim** is translated as (a cup of poison). All the heretics drink from the cup of Babylon, about which the prophet Jeremiah says: “*Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, that made all the earth drunk*” (Jeremiah 51: 7). The word ‘Babylon’ refers to (confusion). ... “*A golden cup*”. The teachings of the philosophers and the eloquence of the speakers (among the heretics) are like a golden cup from the outside, while in the inside it is full of deadly poison, which they hide by the shine of gold.

“**With the inhabitants of Tyre**”; ‘Tyre’ is located in a narrow region; hence the word indicates (narrowness). There is no heart, wide

for Christ; as said by the apostle Paul to the (2Corinthians 6: 12)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

(St. Jerome)

***“Assyria also has joined with them; they have helped the children of Lot” (8)***

Assyria supporting Moab and Ammon confirms that this psalm was written before Assyria becomes a great empire.

The Assyrian is ‘Nebuchadnezzar’, the enemy of God, who took His people captives; he also refers to the devil who seeks to captivate the children of God.

❖ Now, the word ‘Assyria’ is most probably used as a symbol of the devil *“the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience”* (Ephesians 2: 2) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“Assyria also has joined with them”*. The others took the lead, and these followed suit. Let us see who those followers are!

*“Assyria”* symbolizes the devil, in whom there is no doubt of his deception and revenge; as is written in the psalm: *“That You (the Lord) may silence the enemy and the avenger”* (Psalm 8: 2). He is the one who makes us sin, and he is the one who accuses us to be punished. *“Assyria also has joined them”*, The devil (Assyria) is their prince and leader; and not Jesus the Righteous King and Ruler.

*“They have helped the children of Lot”*; **“Lot”** means turn away from God, as the Jews did. The heretics partake of the blasphemes of the Jews<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

According to **St. Augustine**, *“the children of Lot”* means (the children of lowliness or of descent)

❖ The apostate angels are truly interpreted as (the sliding down angels), as by sliding down from the truth they became the followers of the devil. About them the apostle says: *“For 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). Those unseen enemies (spirituals) work through unbelievers to oppose the people of God<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

#### **4- A SUPPLICATION FOR SALVATION:**

***“Deal with them as with Midian, as with Sisera, as with Jabin at the brook Kishon” (9)***

Midian, Sisera, and Jabin, those three have corrupted the earth, and became like refuse.

**“Midian”** means (not caring for authority). They were enemies of the people of God, who did not care for judgment to come.

**“Sisera”** were enemies of the people of God; not of the flock of God, but followers of the devil; violently stirred up like wild horses.

**“Jabin”**; refers to those who, leaning upon their own wisdom, and not upon the glory of God, corrupt the earth like refuse.

He starts here with a prophetic prayer; by which, according to St. Augustine, he tells beforehand what will dwell upon those people, rather than cursing them. In the

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms 83 (82).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms 83 (82).

names mentioned here, he sees symbolic meanings, beside historical facts; he says: [Symbolically, Midian means (a corrupt rule); Sisera means (ceasing to rejoice); Jabin means (wise). But historically, they refer to the enemies who were defeated by the people of God, (the wise man), about whom the apostle says: “*Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disrupter of this age?*” (1 Corinthians 1: 20) <sup>1</sup>.

**“Who perished in Endor, Who became as refuse on the earth” (10)**

- ❖ Those who boast their army, whose king is the Assyrian who used to say: “*I will ascend into heaven*” (Isaiah 14: 13), will not only be cut off the earth, but will be on it like refuse<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

**“Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb, Yes, all their princes like Zeebah and Zalmunna” (11)**

God destroyed the army of Midian; Oreb was killed on the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb was killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They were proud to call themselves crows and wolves, to end up like these birds of prey and wild beasts. Zeebah and Zalmunna were followed, caught, and killed by Gideon, the judge of Israel. Once God stands, all His enemies will scatter, “*Flight shall perish from the swift. The strong shall not strengthen his power, nor shall the mighty deliver himself*” (Amos 2: 14).

- ❖ “**Oreb**’ means (draught), ‘**Zeeb**’ means (wolf), ‘**Zeebah**’ means (victim of the wolf), and ‘**Zalmunna**’ means (shadow of riot); All those correspond to evil overcome by the goodness of the people of God, ‘**Kishon**’, means (the torrent flood) where their cruelty was swept away, and ‘**Endor**’ where they perished means (fountain of renewal), where the physical birth is taken away and destroyed; as they did not care for the birth that leads to life, where they , nor die.

All these are symbols overcome in truth by the people of God, as sung by the psalmist<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“Who said, ‘Let us take for ourselves the pastures of God for a possession’” (12)**

The goal of the adversary princes and rulers was to force themselves into the temple of God and His dwelling place in us. The evil enemy will not cease his opposition, until he sets himself a god in the hearts of mankind.

- ❖ “**Who said, ‘Let us take for ourselves the dwelling places of God’**”. They claimed and thought of themselves as men of the church<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

**“O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind” (13)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms 83 (82).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 15.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms 83 (82).

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

The ungodly opponents of God would become “*like the chaff which the wind drives away*” (Psalm 1: 4); Whereas those who attach themselves to the word of God, will abide forever.

❖ “*O my God, make them like (a wheel)*”, never to settle down, never to have a steady place, always on the move, backward. So are the heretics, they are never steady in their teachings and views, but change them all the time.

“*like the chaff before the wind*”. Having denied the law of faith of the 11 apostles. the psalmist seeks 11 punishments against them<sup>1</sup>.

❖ “*My God, make them ...*” Notice the attitude of the prophet, he does not pray against them, but for their sake. He says: O my God, the God of all, those who put their foundations in craftiness, make them without foundations altogether! Make them like a wheel that runs here and there, and never abide in their craftiness<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

“*As the fire burns the woods, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire*” (14)

The mountains covered with forests often suffer huge fires, the way it happens in the forests of the U.S.A., where thousands of acres are consumed by fire that sometimes lasts for several days.

The fire of the Holy Spirit burns the heart with love; whereas the fire of evil is a sign of curse (see Hebrew 6: 8); “*The people shall be like the burnings of lime; like thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire*” (Isaiah 33: 12).

According to **St. Augustine**, the fire and flame here refer to God’s verdict of punishment on the wicked.

❖ As “*the flame that sets the mountains on fire*” to burn the pride in them<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Having kindled for themselves the fire of wrath and bodily lusts, let it burn and consume them. That is what God says in a prophecy by Isaiah: “*All you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with sparks; Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled*” (Isaiah 50: 11).

(Fr. Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*So pursue them with your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm*” (15)

About the portion of the wicked, the righteous ‘Job’ says: “*Terrors overtakes him like a flood; a tempest steals him in the night. The east wind carries him away, and he is gone*” (Job 27: 20-21).

“*Frighten them with your storm*”. The demons are always terrified; as it happened to the armies that attacked Jehoshaphat, when the angel of God terrified them, and drove them away. That is how the Lord defends and protects His people.

❖ “*Pursue them with your tempest*”. ... He did not say ‘Kill them’, but “*pursue them*”, to return to you<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 15.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 15.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

***“Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O Lord” (16)***

As terror dwells upon them, they fall into shame for their animosity against God and His people (Isaiah 26: 11); they will be ashamed for they have foolishly stood before the Almighty God. Yet the goal of all this is their salvation, and not their perdition; as He says: ***“Let them be terrified of Your Name, that they may seek your name”***.

**St. Augustine** says: [I dare to say that it is better for the proud to fall into a clear and obvious disobedience, so as to become sad; as their fall was initially caused by their joy with themselves. St. Peter was better off when he cried, being ashamed of himself, than when he dared to be proud of himself. That is what the blessed psalmist confirms by saying: ***“Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O Lord”*** (16) <sup>1</sup>.

According to **St. Augustine**, although this prophecy proclaimed ahead the shame that will dwell upon those enemies, yet some of them will eventually return to the Lord and seek His name before the coming of the day of ultimate judgment.

❖ ***“Fill their faces with shame”***, and not with punishment. Why does not he seek their perdition? The words of inspiration give the answer by saying: ***“that they may seek your name, O Lord”***. For once they seek, they will get; those who were deceived by the heretics, and return to the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; Yes, let them be put to shame and perish” (17)***

In case they do not return to the Lord by repentance, and seek His name, they will perish; There will be nothing before them except ***“shame and everlasting contempt”*** (Daniel 12: 2).

The wicked have no other choice but to return to God, or the everlasting perdition; there is no other way between the two: either the kingdom of God or the kingdom of darkness!

❖ ***“To be put to shame and perish”***. He who feels ashamed of his sins would be close to forgiveness They will perish as heretics, or be saved as men of the church; the same way you say: Let the adulterer perish; not because we wish him perdition, but for the adultery to be destroyed in him; the adulterer would then be saved, not as an adulterer, but as righteous and pure<sup>3</sup>.

❖ Notice that destruction here does not mean perdition but rather salvation. What is to follow? ***“That men may know that You, whose name alone is Jehovah, are the Most High over all the earth”*** (18). I wish he who intends to be haughty, be puffed up; But we will say: ***“You are the Most High over all the earth”***. We shall not preoccupy ourselves with, to what extent will that person boast; as we have God, the Lord of all<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

## **5- VICTORY FOR THE GLORY OF GOD:**

***“That men may know that You, whose name alone is the Lord (Jehovah), are the Most High over all the earth” (18)***

<sup>1</sup> مدينة الله 14 : 13.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 62.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 15.

As it happened with Jehoshaphat; As much as the nations and peoples conspired against the people of God, God transfigured as

‘Jehovah’, present with His people, the Most High over all the earth.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, it is befitting of us to praise the lord, and to give him thanks for all His amazing works; not only when He saves us from evil, but also when He allows for us to go through troubles and afflictions, which we may count as evils. : [Let us thank God for everything; not only when He saves us from evil, but when we suffer from these evils<sup>1</sup>].

❖ To know how sound our interpretation is, let us draw your attention to how the Holy Spirit say: “***Let them be put to shame and perish***” (17); How will they perish? “***That they may seek Your name, O Lord***” (16); namely, to perish to evil, and be saved to the truth, for you alone “***are the Most High over all the earth***”. ... Not the multitude of heretics, nor the evil spirits, nor the uncountable days of Vlantinus, nor Basilides who claimed the existence of 365 gods, nor the multitudes of gods beyond count; ... but, “***You alone is the Most High over all the earth***”, to whom is the glory, forever, Amen<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Statues, 17: 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms, homily 62.*

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 83**

### **WHO WILL SUPPORT US BUT YOU?**

- ❖ Seeing the hosts of injustice gather together against Your church;  
My depths cry out to You;  
Until when will you keep silent? Until when will You hold Your peace?  
Behold, Your enemies make a tumult, and plot against You.  
They put in their heart to destroy Your church;  
And to take away Your Holy name.  
They conspired together and vowed not to hold their peace until they realize their goal.
- ❖ Let them go back to old history, to find out that,  
All along the generations, the war of the wicked have never ceased;  
They have lifted up their heads;  
To become like chaff before the fire.
- ❖ We confess to You that we love them the way You do!  
Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O Lord.  
Instead of opposing You, they may get attached to You;  
Instead of animosity, they may get to enjoy reconciliation;  
That Your name be glorified in all the nations;  
And You be praised by the whole earth.

## PSALM 84

### DWELLING IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

The author of this psalm is most probably the prophet David; It is a magnificent song about the longing toward the dwelling in the house of the Lord, or even standing at its threshold as doorkeepers.

The sons of Korah used to sing this joyful psalm. The wrath of the Lord has indeed dwelt upon their father Korah, together with Dathan and

Abiram and their folks, because of their rebellion and their aggression on the priesthood; when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up (Numbers 16: 32); But the descendants of Korah were gatekeepers for the tabernacle of meeting (1 Chronicles 9: 19; 26: 1-19).

Their name came as the sons of Korah in ten psalms: 44 – 48; 84 – 88; all of which are psalms of joy, without any reference to grief. They experienced the sweetness of service in the house of the Lord, even standing as gatekeepers; they tasted the sweetness of the fellowship with God.

These psalms open the doors of hope before everyone; Even if we had parents or grandparents who rebelled against the Lord, God will not hold us accountable for their sins, but will give us heavenly comforts if we walk along His path.

Some believe that the psalmist wrote this psalm to be sung by those who are unable to go to the house of the Lord because of something beyond their ability, as illness for example. The Jews were commanded to ascend to Jerusalem three times a year, to celebrate the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and the tabernacles. Yet, in the case of any compulsory reason that may keep someone from doing that, he would, by this psalm, proclaim his longing to go to the house of the Lord, and to stand at its threshold.

The psalmist believes that dwelling in the house of the Lord, refers to the longing of the soul to set forth to the High Jerusalem, the city of God.

Here the psalmist proclaims three kinds of beatitudes:

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| <b>1- The blessedness of dwelling in the house of the Lord</b>         | <b>1 - 4</b>  |
| <b>2- The blessedness of longing to dwell in the house of the Lord</b> | <b>5 - 7</b>  |
| <b>3- The blessedness of leaning upon God</b>                          | <b>8 – 12</b> |

#### The Title:

Commenting on the title saying: ‘Of the sons of Korah’, **St. Jerome** says that they are a symbol of (the sons of resurrection) who experience the deposit of the eternal life in Christ Jesus, risen from the dead.

❖ I shall present to you a rule to help you to read the Holy Book. Any psalm with the title ‘**Of the sons of Korah**’, will always be joyful, with no touch of grief. While Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, were punished for their rebellion against Moses (Numbers 19), we shall find that the sons of Korah, who did not partake of the rebellion of their father, were blessed by an eternal joy. Beside that, the name Korah means (Golgotha), which obviously symbolizes the location of the resurrection. Whoever is the son of Korah, is to be the son of resurrection, who would never be sad<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

(St. Jerome)

**To the chief Musician on the instrument of Gath, A psalm of the sons of Korah.**

‘Gath’ is a musical instrument like a guitar; And probably refers to a musical melody used to be played in the city of ‘Gath’ in Palestine.

## **1- THE BLESSEDNESS OF DWELLING IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:**

***“How lovely are Your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!” (1)***

The believers in the Old Covenant always longed to dwell in the tabernacles of the Lord; all their inner and outer being; namely, their hearts and all the body members, exulted in the house of the Lord, where the believer longed to dwell together with the Lord forever. In the New

Covenant, however, the Father sets out of us a temple for His Holy Spirit, built on the Rock (Matthew 7: 21-29); namely on our Christ the Rock of ages; to turn our depths into exalted sanctuaries.

**St. Jerome** distinguishes between three dwelling places: the **tabernacles** (tents) of the Lord (1); the **courts** of the Lord (2); and the **house** of the Lord (3).. The believer finds sweetness in the tabernacles of the Lord, however temporary, movable, and without foundations; Then he moves to the courts of the Lord, with some foundations; and from there to the house of the Lord with the real foundations.

❖ Y ambition of some people is to acquire temporal possessions; some to get rich with the wealth of this world; while some others dream of having prominent positions in the society and among people. For me, however, I have only one longing: to see Your eternal dwelling places, where the pure, and not the corrupt, gather together. ***“My soul longs for the courts of the Lord”*** (2);. Notice the order: He first longs for the tabernacles (tents) with no foundations, that could be easily moved or disassembled and carried along here or there. As to the courts, on the other hand, although not houses, yet through them we get access to the house. Our psalmist therefore, longs first for Your tabernacle; then, with great love, he longs to see Your courts; And once there, he cries out: ***“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house”*** (4)<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“How lovely are Your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts”***; the storehouses of an abundance of spiritual wheat. ***“Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations”*** (See Luke 16: 9) ***“How lovely are Your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts”***; Through them, man transforms his residence from earth to heaven<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ This psalm could have been sung by the Jewish captives in Babylon, who were longing to get back to Jerusalem, where their temple was. It however could come from those who believe in the Lord Christ, longing for the churches found all over the world, the courts and alters of the Lord, toward which they exultingly long by their hearts and bodies.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 63.

***“My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (2)***

Wherever man may be, he most probably would suffer between the longings of the flesh and those of the Spirit; He would feel as though a battle stirs up in his depths between the two. But once man enters into the house of the Lord, under the cover of His Holy Spirit, the battle would then transform into a magnificent harmony, and the soul would be satisfied from the fountains of love of the Lord, and the body would exult with its whole being.

- ❖ Fruitful and happy would be the mind and heart that, day and night, would be filled with longing for the tabernacle of the Lord. ... When death approaches the sinner, his mind would not be preoccupied with this tabernacle, but rather with the punishments to come; He would not meditate in the kingdom of God, but with terror in the fire of hell.

Just think about the extent of love and longing in the soul of the saint for the courts of the Lord. How excellent is the saying of the psalmist: I meditate in the entrance, whereas, what is inside, I know nothing about.

***“My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God”***. As you see, the soul and the body partake together of the longing for the kingdom of heaven. If it is true that the body deteriorates and ends up to nothing, and would not rise again, as claimed by the heretics, how could the body of the prophet long for the kingdom of heaven?!

***“My heart and my flesh”*** equally suffering and laboring, they would anticipate the same reward! If our strife is mutual, why should not be our reward? I beg you to listen carefully to what I say: The body in the present world labors more than the soul; the soul commands, and the body serves. The labor of the servant is something, and the exultation of the commander is something else. The soul longs for the Lord; but it is the body that fasts; lies on the ground in the cold winter; cast in prison; scourged, reviled, and roughed up, and finally martyred. The soul may suffer as well, but suffering would reach it through the body<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ ***“My heart and flesh cry out for the living God” (2)***. It may be difficult for the body and the soul of man to be in complete harmony. It is indeed as said by the apostle: *“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh”* (Galatians 5: 17). What then is the meaning of the words: ***“My heart and flesh cry out for the Lord”***? Such a prayer only comes from him whose soul completely abides in the love of God. It is the same thought expressed by another psalm, saying: *“My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You”* (Psalm 63: 1). This is the flesh that longs for the Lord, about which it is written somewhere else: *“All flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord”* (Luke 3: 6). Whereas that flesh about which the Book says: *“All flesh is grass”* (Isaiah 40: 8), does not long for the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Entering into the amazing tabernacle; into the house of God, *“with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast”* (Psalm 42: 4), David truly cries, because he dwells on earth while the eternal tabernacles are waiting for him, to enter in due time into the sanctuary of the Almighty (Compare psalm 84: 2, 3, 10). He

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 63.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

actually prefers it to all the wealth of his kingdom, as he testifies somewhere else, saying: *“One thing I have desired from the Lord, that I will seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty (joy) of the Lord”* (Psalm 27: 4); the (joy) of the Lord in His church.

The church is the icon of the heavenlies; and once the shadow is taken away, the icon will appear more clear and perfect (Compare with Hebrew 10: 1; Colossians 2: 17). The shadow is the Jewish synagogue and the law; but the icon of the truth will shine in the light of the gospel. That is why the psalmist cries because of the postponement of the good things, **the cup filled to its rim by grace and joy**<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

*“Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at Your altars, O Lord of hosts, My King and my God”* (3)

Let our souls fly to the house of the Lord; let our depths settle down in the divine bosoms; and our hearts burn with longing for the heavenly home.

❖ Here the psalmist speaks allegorically: the birds fly free in air everywhere; and yet they remember their nests, and return to them. .... So, if the birds seek their nests, why then, would the human soul not seek her dwelling place prepared for her by the Lord?

*“Your altars, O Lord, My King, and my God”* In his revelation, John saw the altar of the Lord, and under it, the souls of the righteous (Revelation 6: 9) They are under the altar of God, for they were offered as sacrifice in martyrdom for the sake of Christ; the sacrifice of the Lord Savior is worthy of being in heaven under the altar<sup>2</sup>.

❖ *“Even the sparrow has found a home and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young”* (3) ... I long for a dwelling place for myself, for a nest for my soul and body. The birds after flying here and there with no hindrance, would seek someplace to find comfort; How much more would it be for my soul and body<sup>3</sup>?

❖ As the clean birds – like the sparrow and the swallow – set their nests in high up places; So are the tabernacles, the courts, and the houses of the Lord, they are not on lower places, but high up in the kingdom of heaven<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ We, who belonged to the Gentiles before Your incarnation, O Lord, used to be lost like a bird with no nest; So were our prudent teachers. But now, having found Your beloved and beautiful tabernacles, and having taken them as (nests) to lay our young; namely, our disciples, who open up their mouths wide to feed on Your delicious words, they take them from their teachers, who are like eagles, presenting them to their young.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They are ever praising You”* (4)

We have no work in the church of God, like sharing with the heavenly creatures their eternal praising.

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer of David 4: 2: 9.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 63.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

❖ ***“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house”***, namely, in Your church; whether the present church or that of the firstborns (Hebrew 12: 23). *“They are ever praising You”*. Notice the work of the martyrs, and that of the angels; For whatever they do in heaven, we should follow their lead on earth. When we are called to praise by the psalms, and come to be slothful in our ministry, we are actually disregarding the glorification of God<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house”***. We do not dwell in tabernacles, nor in courts; For however long we stay in either of them, we shall eventually move into the house, to hear the psalmist say: ***“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house”***; the house with foundations, from which we shall not depart<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ But when this life comes to an end, we shall not seek the regular bread to satisfy our hunger; nor shall we even have communion from the Sacraments on the altar; for there, we shall be with Christ whose body we take now. You will not be in need of the talk I am giving you now; nor even of reading the Holy Bible; for we shall be seeing Him who is the Word of God, by Whom all things were created; by whom the angels feed, and become enlightened and wise, with no need for continuous debates; but drink from the only begotten Word, whom they unceasingly praise, according to the psalm saying: *“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house, They are ever praising You”* (4)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The prophet says: Blessed are those, not who hold fast to the statutes of Moses, namely the circumcised, who keep the Sabbaths, and offer sacrifices and burnt offerings; but those who regularly go to the houses of God, namely, to the Christian churches; where the Holy Spirit speaks through the apostles, the preachers, and the prophets; and where, as well, there are every kind of medication for the spiritual infirmities.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## **2- THE BLESSEDNESS OF LONGING TO DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:**

***“Blessed are those whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage (to Zion)”*** (5)

In the Septuagint version it came as: ***“Blessed is the man whose conquest is from You; Whose heart is set on ascent”***.

❖ ***“Blessed are those whose strength is in You”***. We indeed long for Your tabernacles, courts, and house; Yet to gain the desire of our hearts, which are beyond our capacity, it does not depend on our strength, but on Your help The blessed men who find their strength in the Lord are those who set their mind on ascent, a step after another. The saints reach the good things before You day after day, not thinking about the past.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 63.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 9: 6.

The saint set his heart on ascent; whereas the sinner sets it on descent. As the holy man makes progress day after another, the sinner, on the other hand goes down day after another. Blessed is the man who sets his heart on ascent<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Blessed is the man, with perfect prudence, who does not degrade himself to the earthly things of this world; but ascends with his heart up toward heaven, and thinks about the ultimate day of judgment; For such a man, his conquest comes from You.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

**St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian**<sup>2</sup> believes that the two Cherubs above the Ark of the Covenant refer to the priest and the deacon who minister to the body and the blood of the Lord ... They are committed to be always pure and sanctified, and to minister without slothfulness.

- ❖ *“Blessed are those whose strength is in You”*. It is our responsibility to work; and the Lord’s role is to help us ... *“whose heart is set on (ascending one step after another)”*, who meditate in how to keep ascending one day after another, and not to trip. The heart of the sinner, on the other hand, is set, not on ascending but on descending.

We plan to do good works, but we should leave the result completely to God. It is our responsibility to make a decision, and He brings it into effect<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“As they pass through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools”* (6)

Wondering why would God put us in an arena of contest, St. Jerome answers, that He so does in order to grant us the blessedness of conquest and coronation, and to set forth from strength to strength.

- ❖ I wish we meditate for a moment, that we are in this valley; not on a mountain, not in the garden of Eden, and not in the heights of paradise; We are in the low reaches of the earth; the earth on which the curse has dwelt; the earth which produces thorns and thistles, the food of serpents, about which Adam was told: *“You are dust, and to dust you will return”* (Genesis 3: 19). As long as we are in the valley of Baca (of tears), we are committed, not to laugh, but to weep; as the Lord Says: *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh”* (Luke 6: 21). We are now in the valley of tears, and this world is the place of weeping, and not of rejoicing ... The world to come is the world of joy ... We are now in the valley of tears, where there is no peace nor security, but it is an arena of contest and endurance<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ We should take into consideration where he has designated the place of ascent: *“through the valley of Baca (tears)”* (6). In the Book of Judges we read that when the angel came and preached repentance to the people, saying: *“As you have forsaken the Lord, the Lord will forsake you”*; *“When the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, the people lifted up their voice and wept. Then they called the*

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

<sup>2</sup> تفسير خر 25: 10-22.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 63.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

*name of that place 'Bochim', namely (the valley of weeping)" (see Judges 2: 4-5 Let us understand the valley of weeping allegorically as being this world; We are not on a mountain, namely, in the kingdom of heaven, but we are in a valley, in the darkness of this world. Through the sin of our parents we were driven out of paradise, together with Adam, to the valley of tears, where there are repentance and weeping.*

The prophet means that God created this world to be an arena where we strive against the devil, against sin, to be granted the crown in heaven.

Why did God set up such a contest? Was it not possible for Him to save us without it?

He gave us an arena where we struggle against the iniquities, to become worthy of being crowned; not as slothful, but as warriors<sup>1</sup>.

❖ By reading the Holy Scriptures, we understand how, by obeying his belly, and not obeying God, the early man was driven out of paradise to the valley of tears; How the devil used hunger to fight against the Lord Himself in the wilderness (Mathew 4: 2-3); And why the apostle cries out, saying: *"Foods for the stomach, and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them"* (1 Corinthians 6: 13)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*"The early rains also cover it with pools"* (6); namely the early rain will cover them with blessings.

*"They go from strength to strength; everyone of them appears before God in Zion"* (7)

According to **St. Jerome**, in this contest here, we gain strength, to become worthy of a greater strength there. He who does not experience the life of strength here, will not enjoy it there.

❖ Unless we are strong here, we would not be in greater strength there. The psalmist does not say: "from weakness to strength", but *"from strength to strength"*. If you wish to be a man of strength there, Be such a man here. If you wish to be crowned there, Fight here! ... He who has strength here, will acquire Christ, the 'Power' Himself there<sup>3</sup>! (1 Corinthians 1: 24).

❖ What will be the profit of those who go from strength to strength? What will be their reward? They will see the God of gods in Zion (7). *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"* (Matthew 5: 8). Seeing the face of Christ; will be a great enough reward, the ultimate Crown for the victors. *"They will see the God of gods in Zion"*. What a joy! What blessedness! What a fitting reward<sup>4</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

❖ The God of gods is the true God who appears incarnate, and is seen by the human eye in Zion. He sets forth a covenant and a statute; those who keep them, will be rewarded with blessings by their author; and will grow and ascend from a virtue to a virtue, and from sanctification to sanctification. As to saying: *"from strength to strength"*, it may be interpreted as, from this age to eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Psalms, Alternate Series 63 )PS. 83).*

<sup>2</sup> *Letter 22 to Eustochium, 10.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Psalms, homily 16.*

<sup>4</sup> *On Psalms, homily 63.*

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Faith is tested by temptations; and when man is a victor over a temptation and his faith abides, he would come under another temptation; and so on. Going forth victoriously from temptation to temptation, he is said to grow in the virtues he practices one after another; and in him the words of the Scripture are realized: “*They go from a virtue (strength) to a virtue (strength) (7)*”; until the soul reaches her goal, namely, reaches the climax of virtues, passes through the rivers of God, and gets the inheritance promised by God<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Unless the soul is salted by continuous temptations, it becomes weak and frail; according to the saying: “*Every offering you shall season with salt*” (Leviticus 2: 13)<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ I believe that temptations give a kind of strength and self defense; for temptations mix with virtues; that no virtue would appear befitting or perfect without temptations<sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ It is the right of the soul to rejoice for reaching a high position during her ascent to the climax of her desires. What would be a greater happiness than seeing God? Yet what she realizes is but a beginning of what she hopes to achieve later on. Again she hears her Groom encourages the laborers to save the spiritual vineyards, and to chase away the little foxes that corrupt the fruits. And once this is realized the bride and Groom would unite: God in the soul, and once again, the soul would dwell in God. The soul says: “I am my lover’s and my lover is mine; he browses among the lilies. He Himself who changed the human life from the shadow to the climax of the Truth. Notice the height that the bride has reached, progressing from strength to strength (7), and how she seems as though she has got all what she hoped for. What is greater than to be in the beloved, and He to be in your soul<sup>4</sup>?”

**(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)**

- ❖ **The brethren once asked an elder:** [Abba Arsany said: ‘If we seek God we shall find Him; and if we hold fast to Him, He would abide with us’; What does he mean by that? **The elder answered:** He means that we should love tranquility, and abide in works, strife, prayer, and humility, in order to purify our hearts, and to behold Christ, according to what is written: “*They go from strength to strength*” (7); namely, from work to work, and from step to step, until the God of gods appear in Zion; and as the blessed Paul says: “*We are transformed from glory to glory*” (2 Corinthians 3: 18). That will be if we hold fast to Him].

**(Paradise of the fathers)**

- ❖ Like when the fetus in its mother’s womb reaches its complete term; so are the righteous who separate themselves from the worldly life, to start the journey of ascent, according to the words: “*They go from strength to strength*” (7). Whereas the sinners, like a fetus who dies in the mother’s womb, are delivered from darkness to darkness;

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<sup>1</sup> In Num. hom 27: 5.

<sup>2</sup> In Lev. Hom 27: 12.

<sup>3</sup> In Lev. Hom 27: 12.

<sup>4</sup> عظة 6 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

they are actually dead on earth, strangled by their many sins; and once they are taken away from this life, they are led to places of darkness and Hades.

We are born to life three times: the first is crossing over from the wombs of our mothers, and brought from dust to dust; Then the two following births lead us from dust up to heaven: the first of which is through the grace we get in the holy baptism; which is truly called ‘a second birth’; Then we are granted the third birth as a result of being changed and for the sake of our good works. ... We are now in the third stage.

**(Mother Sneklitiky)**

- ❖ In the past (through the Mosaic law) terror was put in the minds of non-believers. Whereas now, through the gospel, the gift of blessedness is poured over the believers<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Khromatius)**

### **3- THE BLESSEDNESS OF LEANING UPON GOD:**

***“O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer, Give ear, O God of Jacob” (8)***

Lest the Jews would literally concentrate their thoughts on the temple of Solomon, the goal of talking or praying to the Lord of hosts in His temple, is to encounter the God of Jacob.

Jacob has not enjoyed the entry into the temple of Solomon, Yet he enjoyed the heavenly ladder, and saw the gate of heaven! ... God who proclaimed His glory in the temple on the day of its dedication, was not a New God, but an everlasting One.

- ❖ The prophet says: ***“O God of Jacob!”***, to proclaim that the Christians do not worship a New God, but the God of the fathers, who was seen by the righteous and the prophets, through the vision of the mind, enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“O God, behold our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed” (9)***

With a strong daring, we talk to the Father, being our Stronghold, Refuge, Spiritual Weapon, and Shield; Who finds pleasure in seeing the face of His Christ the Savior in our depths.

- ❖ The psalmist says: Look at us, and You will see the face of Your Christ dwelling in us<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ The face of Christ the God is said of His presence and incarnation, by which He visited the world and made salvation; We, as well, who believe in Him, are called His face and members.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (10)***

What is that one ‘day’ in the courts of the Lord, but the great day of the Lord, when He brings us forth into His eternal courts; one day with no night!

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<sup>1</sup> Tractate of Matthew 17: 3: 4.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

- ❖ That is the meaning of the “*one day*”: The kingdom of heaven is one day, where there is no night nor darkness, but perpetual light. He who is in the kingdom of heaven for one day, will be there forever<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ By saying, “*I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God*”, the prophet means that he would rather be the least in heaven, than to be the most prominent in this world<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ In case someone chooses to live in the iniquity of Babylon, and does not present repentance, his perdition would be only natural. Notice how, the Old Covenant, despite being translated from the Hebrew language to the Greek, yet it manages well to express the words, and to clarify the differences between them, to a great extent. For example, it did not say: “I would rather be (driven out) of the house of my God”, but said: “*I would rather be (rejected) in the house of the God*”<sup>3</sup> (10).

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ Normally, men long for (thousands of days), and wish to live a long life. I wish they, instead, long for the “one day”, that has neither sunrise nor sunset; an eternal day, that has neither a yesterday, nor is pressed by a tomorrow! I wish we all long for such a day. What would we do with these thousand days? Let us, instead, hasten to that “one day”, to go from strength to strength<sup>4</sup>!
- ❖ “*I would rather be (rejected) in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness*” (Psalm 84:10 LXX). He found the valley of Baca (weeping); he found the humility by which he would stand. He knows that if he attempts to stand by himself, he would fall, and if he gets humble, he will rise up. He chose to be rejected so as to rise; he chose to be in the house of the Lord, in any place in it, rather than to be out of its threshold<sup>5</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Concerning the three young men (Daniel 3), Do not talk to me about the honor that they would have gained in the royal court; But, having been righteous, they, thousand times, chose, over that honor, their humble belongings in their Father’s house, and the enjoyment of the goods of the temple; as though they say, together with the prophet: “*A day in Your court is better than a thousand; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness*” (10). They would, thousand times, rather live in their own homes, than to reign in Babylon<sup>6</sup>.
- ❖ I ask you to meditate in how Abraham has been a lover of peace and tranquility, perpetually drawn by the divine worship. The text (Genesis 13: 3) says: “*He journeyed as far as Bethel, to the place where he had made an altar*”. By calling the name of God in truth, he realized beforehand the saying of David: “*I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God, rather than dwell in the tents of wickedness*” (10). In

<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 16.

<sup>3</sup> عظات للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكلين سمير كوستي، 4 .L.II.

<sup>4</sup> Om Psalms 84 (83).

<sup>5</sup> Om Psalms 83 (82).

<sup>6</sup> الأب الياس، 365 2.

other words he preferred the seclusion that helped him to call on the name of the Lord, to life in cities. Above anything else, he realized that the greatness of the cities is not in the number of their inhabitants, but in their virtues. Hence he considered that the wilderness over-shines the whole world<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ According to the great **St. Athanasius**, the Mosaic law worship lasted more than a thousand years from the time of Solomon, and the building of the temple, to the coming of Christ. The prophet would be right to say that the Sunday of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, is better than the thousand years of the old law; for that one day is said to be the day of the courts of the Lord, by which the churches of the Lord exult.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“For the Lord God is a Sun and Shield; The Lord will give mercy and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (11)***

In the house of the Lord, the believer longs for the day of his departure to the eternal glory, which he enjoys through the mercies of God toward those who are faithful in their repentance and their spiritual growth, by the divine grace.

- ❖ ***“The Lord will give mercy and glory” (11)***. He first grants forgiveness to the sinner, then He grants him a crown<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ The love of God embraces both the mercy and the faithfulness. If He is only merciful, He by this, encourages us all to sin, that He would have mercy on us. And if he is only faithful (just), No one would have hope in repentance. That is why God has both (mercy and justice), each compensates the other. If you are a sinner, resort to the mercy of God, Do not despair, but repent. And, on another aspect, Do not be slothful; as God is Righteous, and loves the faithful<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ ***“God loves mercy and truth” (11 LXX)***; He loves the mercy, by which He comes first to help me. And He loves the truth, to give the believer what He promises (Romans 11: 20). Remember the case of Paul, who has been formerly, Saul the persecutor. He needed mercy, which he has eventually got.

*“Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief , 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: 13, 16)*. So that, as Paul gets forgiveness on such serious crimes, no one should despair being forgiven for whatever sins he may commit We see Paul acquire it, gaining the mercy, and seeking the truth The Lord made Himself, not by taking something, but by giving promises. He is not required to give back what He has taken, but to fulfill what He has promised.

***”He loves mercy and glory”***. He gives grace and glory; the grace about which the same person (Paul) says: *“I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain” (1*

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Genesis 33: 5.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms, homily 16.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Psalms, homily 16.*

Corinthians 15: 10)? And the glory that about which he says: “*There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness*” (2 Timothy 4: 8) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ I mean to say that God does not care for the Mosaic sacrifices, as much as He cares for the work of mercy, and the love for the Truth, that is our Lord Jesus Christ who says: “*I am the Truth*”. He who makes mercy and loves the truth, God will enrich him with His grace in this present world, and with the glory in the time to come; with a multitude of goodness in the two times, for he trusted in Him.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in you” (12)***

In the house of the Lord, the soul, trusting in Him, will find peace; and will enjoy His power of forgiveness of sins, and of granting the eternal glories.

- ❖ “*Blessed is the man who trusts in Him*”. He who trusts in the Lord, is he whose conscience is free of sins, who trustingly lifts his eyes up to heaven; he who with a great confidence, knows and confesses that he has delivered himself to disobedience against his Lord<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Om Psalms 83 (82).*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms, homily 16.*

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 84**

### **LET ME ENTER INTO YOUR HOUSE AND ENJOY YOUR HEAVEN**

- ❖ How lovely are Your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts.  
Where my heart becomes on fire for transforming my residence from earth to heaven.  
Let me see Your house here, so as to long for dwelling in it;  
And to present my heart to become a dwelling place for You;  
How I long for You to accept dwelling in it!  
Entering into Your holy house, I get sanctified;  
And entering into my heart, You sanctify it for Yourself.
- ❖ How amazing is Your house;  
Entering into it, the battle between the body lusts and the spiritual lusts in me, would turn into a magnificent symphony.  
My spirit, together with my body, shout for joy for You;  
Your Holy Spirit would play on their strings an unceasing song of love.
- ❖ Your house is an icon of heaven;  
Entering into it, my heart flares with longing for my heavenly home;  
My soul moans, as in her, sadness and joy would mix.  
I wonder when shall I set forth and be with You!  
When shall I abide in Your bosom!  
When shall I live in heaven!  
The sparrow sets forth to its nest;  
When will my soul set forth to Your bosom?  
Your house draws my whole being to You!
- ❖ Let me set forth to Your house;  
There, I shall partake of the perpetual praises of the heavenly creatures.  
There, I shall set forth, from the valley of tears to the blessed heavenly life.
- ❖ Let me ascend up to Your house;  
As he who sets forth with his heart to You, will only know ascent, and no descent.  
He will ascend, not on stony or marble steps;  
But on a heavenly ladder;  
On which he will go from strength to strength.
- ❖ My soul desires to stay in Your house;  
For there, You will rain on me a flood of Your grace;  
For there, I shall gain strength by Your power; and become worthy of a greater heavenly strength;  
Here, I enjoy the beauty of Your face;  
And there, I shall enjoy Your eternal encounter, face to face.
- ❖ Let me encounter You in Your house, O my Lord;  
As Jacob did on his way to his uncle Laban;  
As Solomon did on the dedication day of the temple he built for You;  
You show Yourself to the believers in all generations.
- ❖ Let me stand before You, O Father, in Your house;  
You will have the pleasure of seeing Your only begotten Son in me;

❖ When my soul sets forth to You, I desire to enjoy eternity;  
To enjoy the eternal day, with no night nor darkness!

## PSALM 85

### A PRAYER ON A NATIONAL LEVEL

This psalm represents a lamentation on a calamity that touched the whole nation; presented by the psalmist who has experienced, both on a collective, as well as on a personal level, the exalted mercies of God in the time of affliction. Remembering the past, he presents a praise of thanksgiving on the exalted dealings of God; Looking at the present his heart moans for what is dwelling upon the whole nation; And looking forward to the future, he proclaims his trust, and the exultation of his heart for the glories prepared by God.

This psalm, amid the afflictions, particularly the collective ones; reveals the practical solution which is realized, not through joyful dreams of awakening, but through the pouring of the souls together in prayers before God the Savior of the world. It is a psalm that suits the church, perpetually persecuted by the world.

Many Jewish scholars believe that this psalm was written by Ezra the scribe; while others believe that it was written by the prophet David, returning to his throne after the rebellion of his son Abshalom came to end.

This psalm presents to us Messianic prophecies concerning the joy and the glory, enjoyed by believers through the cross.

Here, the psalmist requests from the church to renew her covenant with the Savior, who pours His mercies on her, to bring her forth to the eternal glories.

<b>1- The past mercies</b>	<b>1 – 3</b>
<b>2- The renewal of the present</b>	<b>4 - 7</b>
<b>3- The glories to come</b>	<b>8 - 13</b>

#### The title:

**To the chief Musician. A psalm of the sons of Korah.**

❖ The name Korah means “Golgotha” (Calgary), where the Lord suffered on our behalf. We who believe in His resurrection, are all the sons of Korah <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

#### 1- THE PAST MERCIES:

Remembering the past amid the calamity, the psalmist had the amazing mercies and salvation of God transfigured before him. That makes him cry out from the depths of his heart, with daring, together with humility and contrition before God. And as said by the apostle Paul: “*We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope; but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?*”(Romans 8: 23-24).

**“Lord, You have been favorable to Your land; You have brought back the captivity of Jacob” (1)**

“*Lord, You have been favorable to Your land*”. Looking forward by the spirit of prophecy to the Lord Christ, having on His head the crown of thorns, receiving death,

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 64.

then risen up to grant us the blessed resurrected life; the psalmist sees Him bearing on our behalf the curse that dwelt on our land, and granting us the heavenlies.

*“You have brought back the captivity of Jacob”*. Bringing back the captivity here refers to the liberation from the painful evils; as is said by David: *“When the Lord brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice and Israel is glad”* (Psalm 14: 7). And when God saved ‘Job’ from his troubles, and granted him glory, it is said: *“God brought back the captivity of Job”* (Job 42: 10). The same happens when man is liberated from his troubles, in particular from the bondage of sin, he feels as though liberated from a bitter captivity. ***“You brought back the captivity of Jacob”***, It is the experience of every believer, liberated from the captivity of sin through the cross.

❖ You bless Your land, O Lord; The same land You have previously cursed; now You bless it by Your coming; ... The same land that previously heard the verdict: *“Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth”* (Genesis 3: 18). now, in the Song of songs, it is called: *“The rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valley”* (Songs 2: 1); The same land that brought forth thorns and thistles, hears in the book of Isaiah, the blessing: *“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse; and a Branch shall grow out of his roots”* (Isaiah 11: 1). The Lord comes to proclaim the release for the captives; as it is also said in the Holy Book: *“He led captivity captive”* (Ephesians 4: 8); Namely, we who were in the past captives by the devil for perdition; now, the Savior leads us to salvation<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“Lord, You have been favorable to Your land”*** (1). This refers to the coming of the Savior ... The land that rebelled against You, and was defiled by idol worship, is saved by Your coming. ***“Lord, You have been favorable to Your land”***; Let this be the prayer of the sinner for getting forgiveness. You have blessed the earthen vessel (namely, the body); Even though it brought forth thorns and thistles, yet, being Your creation You renewed it.

***“You brought back the captivity of Jacob”*** (1); namely, of those who believe in Christ; of every believer who became a captive to sin<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ You brought back our captivity, not by liberating us from some barbarian enemies, but from our evil doings, and from our sins, by which the devil has authority over us, and without which he has no authority<sup>3</sup>.

❖ Confess, therefore, that you are under bondage, to be qualified for liberation; For without knowing the enemy, how can man seek a liberator<sup>4</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

❖ The sound heart that accepts the words of God, is like a good soil that produces good works. ... Man is called ‘earth’, as it was said to Adam: *“You are earth, and to earth you will return”*. Pleased with mankind, God sent His only begotten Son incarnate to liberate nature from its captivity<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 64.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 17.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

<sup>4</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

<sup>5</sup> راجع تفسير المزامير لأنسيمس أسقف أورشليم، اعده للنشر الراهب القس صموئيل السرياني، 1988.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

*“You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sins”*

(2)

**Forgiveness** of the iniquity, and covering of sins refer to atonement. **Covering the sin**, as it came in the Holy Book, refers to that it is completely forgiven; as it is said by David: *“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”* (Psalm 32: 1-2); And, *“You have forgiven the iniquity of my sin”* (Psalm 32: 5).

**Covering our sins** by His blood, the Lord Christ liberates us from condemnation; as *“There is therefore now, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”* (Romans 8: 1). It is an **eternal forgiveness**, as it is said by the prophet Jeremiah: *“For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more”* (Jeremiah 31: 34).

❖ *“You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people”* (2). You have saved your people, not for the sake of their works, but for the sake of your mercy *“You have covered all their sins”*. This psalm, in all its wholeness, refers to the coming of the Savior you cover their sins with virtues; you cover injustice with justice; and uncleanness with purity<sup>1</sup>.

❖ *“You have forgiven the iniquity of your people”*. We believe that this is realized in **baptism**.

*“You have covered all their sins”*. This is realized by **repentance**; as it is written in the psalm: *“Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, and his sin is covered”* (Psalm 31: 1). In baptism our iniquity is taken away; and by repentance our sins are covered. They are not cleansed, but are forgiven. I wish we meditate very carefully in these words: Truly, by the coming of the Lord Savior, all our iniquity is taken away by baptism. When we lived without law, we sinned without law (Romans 2: 12). This kind of sin is called ‘**anomia**’ in Greek; namely (sinning without law). However, after baptism, it is not any more called ‘*anomia*’, but is called ‘**sin**’. Sin is not imputed except to him who knows that he commits it. When there is no disobedience to God’s commandment, there is no sin<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Do you wish to know how sins are covered by virtues?

Yesterday I was lustful; but today I am pure. Purity covers lust. Yesterday I was a fool; but today I am wise. I repented my fault; Wisdom covers foolishness Yesterday I was robbing the possessions of others; but today I give away what is mine. Giving covers greed.

Blessed is he who is forgiven in baptism; After baptism, repentance is like clinging to a wooden board floating after the sinking of a ship. We can say that a repentant, as he regrets having sinned, is called a happy man; he is granted salvation from destruction<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 17.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 64.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 64.

- ❖ The Gentiles have become the people of God, as shown in the prophecy of Zechariah: “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming, and I will dwell in your midst’, says the Lord. Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people” (Zechariah 2: 10-11). He forgave the iniquity of the Gentiles by baptism, and covered their sins by repentance. Love and mercy, as well, cover sins.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“You have taken away all Your wrath; You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger” (3)***

The Holy God does not endure sin. He who persists on it, is giving God his back, and would come under the horrible divine wrath.

In the psalmist, **St. Augustine** sees his great care for the holy life, whether it is of the believer or of the people. The believer, having given thanks to God for covering all his sins, and because He has turned from the fierceness of His anger; Why would he again say to God: “Cause Your anger toward us to cease” (4). ... Although he may not have committed any more sins; yet, knowing for sure the possibility of falling again into sin, he cries out to God to turn away from His anger because of his inner thoughts, or of the possibility of falling again.

- ❖ ***“You have taken away all Your wrath; You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger”***. See the extent of the power of repentance; it keeps man from falling under the wrath of God<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

## **2- THE RENEWAL OF THE PRESENT:**

Remembrance of the mercies of God in the past, would exhort us to resort to Him in the present; to offer a praise of thanksgiving for His dealings with us, together with crying out from the heart, and seeking the renewal of the covenant with Him.

***“Restore us, O God of our salvation; and cause your anger toward us to cease”***  
(4)

If there is sweetness in the forgiveness of sin, the secret of this sweetness is the return of man to the bosoms of his Holy divine Father; namely, the reconciliation between heaven and earth; between the Creator and His creation.

The word translated as “**anger**” here, is also translated as (grief or sorrow) (Ecclesiastes 1: 18; 7: 3).

- ❖ Nothing would make God angry as when men fall into despair concerning their evil, on the assumption that they could not return. This despair is actually a sign of the lack of faith. He who despairs of having salvation, **does not believe in the day of judgment**; or else he would do good, anticipating God, the divine Judge.

Let us hear what the Lord says on the mouth of His prophet Jeremiah: “*Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst*” (Jeremiah 2: 25); And, “*When people fall, do they not get up again? If they go astray, do they not turn back?*” (Jeremiah 8: 4).

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 64.

The prophet Ezekiel uses a similar trend of thought by saying: *“Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against Me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live”* (Ezekiel 18: 30-32); And he later says: *“As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live”* (Ezekiel 33: 11).

These words reveal to us that the mind should not fall into despair through lack of belief in these blessed promises; And that the soul, recognizing the signs of perdition, is committed not to refuse taking the medications, with the assumption that her wounds are incurable.

Ezekiel says that God vowed, saying: *“As I live!”* So, if we choose not to believe in His promises, let us believe in them for the sake of the vow.

The good man is he who prays with belief, saying: *“Restore us, O God of our salvation, and cause Your anger toward us to cease”* (4); And says: *“By Your favor, O Lord, You had established me as a strong mountain; You hid Your face, and I was dismayed”* (Psalm 30: 7). He intends to say that, thinking of the defilement of my sins, for the sake of the beauty of virtue, God has strengthened my weakness by his grace.

(St. Eronimus)

*“Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?”* (5)

God, not being angry forever, is not only set upon our past experience of His dealing with His people along history, but also upon the attribute of mercy of God Himself. It is written: *“And the Lord passed before him (Moses) and proclaimed: ‘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’* (Exodus 34: 6-7). *“For His anger is but for a moment; His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, but Joy comes in the morning”* (Psalm 30: 5).

If God’s anger which is but for a moment would make man cry out for bitterness; How would it be for those who dwell in hell forever? How could they endure the perpetual divine wrath?!

**St. Augustine** believes that the psalmist cries out to God, not to be angry with us forever; on account of that, what has dwelt on Adam, has dwelt upon his descendants, upon all mankind.

❖ *“Do not be angry with us forever”*. As by God’s anger, we submit to death; And by the sweat of our face we shall eat bread (Genesis 3: 19). That was the verdict on Adam when he sinned; And Adam came to be everyone of us; as *“In Adam all die”* (1 Corinthians 15: 22). That verdict issued against Adam has crossed over to us; although not present then, yet we were in him What happened to Adam, extending to us, we are also committed to die Through Adam, by submitting to death, we received the weakness of the body; pains of suffering; poverty; and the snares of temptations; We carry all that in this body of ours; and that is the anger of God Yet, as your father’s sin would not harm you, if you change yourself; so we have to change; By faith, *“being put to death”* was taken away by His resurrection; Man would wholly be renewed, *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive”* (1 Corinthians 15:

22). Seeing that, the prophet says: “*Do not be angry with us forever; Do not prolong Your anger to all generations*” (5). The first generation was dead by Your anger; and the second generation will live by Your mercy<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“Will you not revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You?” (6)**

He who falls under sin, will come to be under the divine wrath, and would become under the verdict of the eternal death. The remedy is within the hand of Him who is alone able to revive, or to raise from the dead; That the sinner would restore his rejoicing in the Lord through the work of the divine grace. If sin kills the soul, and denies her the fellowship with God, the Grantor of life; the need is great for the spirit of resurrection! There is no true perpetual joy except by the attachment to the Lord, the Fountain of life and resurrection; the Grantor of joy.

❖ **“You, O Lord, will revive us again”** (6). Not that we return to you, and You revive us; It is not only being alive is from You, but by our mere return we are revived. **“And Your people may rejoice in You”** (6). By their evils they rejoice in themselves; but by their goodness they would rejoice in You.

Desiring to rejoice in themselves, they found woe in themselves; But now; as our whole rejoice is in God; whoever rejoices, will rejoice in Him.

Why, O brethren, would you rejoice in silver? When your silver will eventually come to an end, or you yourself will come to an end; nobody knows which will come first! But what is certain is that both will!. Nothing, and no one, would endure forever! That also applies to gold, clothes, houses, wealth, land; and finally to the light itself!. Do not ever rejoice in these things; but let your rejoice be in the Light that knows no setting; in the Dawn that is not preceded by a yesterday, and will not be followed by a tomorrow! ... Who is this Light? It is He who says: *“I am the Light of the world”* (John 8: 12)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“Show us Your mercy, O Lord, and grant us Your salvation” (7)**

There is no way to enjoy the salvation other than the mercies of God proclaimed through the sacrifice of the cross. And there are no heirs of salvation, except those vessels of mercy. God’s mercies brought forth to us the Savior; and His grace grants us fellowship with Him. There is no cause through which God proclaims Himself as the Savior of the world, other than His love of mankind, and His exalted mercies.

❖ Until You return to revive us, we the dead: **“Show us Your mercy, O Lord, and grant us Your salvation”** (6-7). The descent of the Savior is a work of mercy by God. He would not have come as a Physician, unless most men are sick; and as we were in need of compassion, He came as a Savior<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ **“Show us Your mercy, O Lord, and grant us Your salvation”** (7). Your salvation is Your Christ. Blessed is he to whom God shows His mercy; he who is not preoccupied by pride, God will show him His mercy. For, by showing him His salvation, He convinces him that however good he may be, there is no goodness in him, but that

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on the Psalms 17.

which is from Him, our whole Goodness. ... And when man sees that all the goodness in him, is not his, but from God, he would realize that everything good in him is through the mercy of God, and not due to his own worthiness; ... And once he does, he would not be proud; and not being proud, he would not fall; and not falling, he would stand; and standing, he would endure; and enduring, he would have peace; and having peace, he would rejoice, rejoice in the Lord his God.

**“And grant us Your salvation”** (7). Grant us Your Christ. We shall see Your Christ, not the way the Jews saw Him, and crucified Him; But we shall see Him the way the angels see Him and rejoice<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### 3- GLORIES TO COME:

Through the experience of the past, we trust in the promises of God concerning salvation and the glory prepared for us in Christ the Savior of the world. It was said by Haggai the prophet: *“The desire of all the nations will come; ‘And I will fill this temple with glory’, says the Lord of hosts ‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than that of the former’, says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace’, says the Lord of hosts”* (Haggai 2: 7, 9).

**“I will hear what God the Lord will speak. For He will speak peace to His people and to His saints; But let them not turn back to folly”** (8)

According to the Coptic translation, after the Septuagint, **“I will hear what God the Lord will speak. For He will speak peace to His people, to His saints, and to those who return to Him with all their hearts”**.

Praying for all the people, as well as for every believer, and for the sinners who long to return to God with all their hearts, the psalmist heard the divine voice responding to his prayer; and speaking peace for these three categories: for the people as a whole; for the saints as members of the congregation; and for those returning to God by repentance, that truly comes from their hearts.

What God presents in the heart of His prophet to hear Him by his inner ears, He presents to every priest who loves all mankind, the way His Lord does; And He presents it as well, to every believer, true in his wide heart toward everyone. God speaks in all the big hearts that are wide enough to accommodate all mankind.

Peace about which the Lord speaks in the prophet is not the mortal temporal kind of peace, presented to all humanity through the cross; but that about which the apostle Peter says: *“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality; but in every nation whoever fears Him and work righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ – He is the Lord of all”* (Acts 10; 34-36).

❖ Concerning Moses; In that seclusion, God was not far from him; He was speaking to Him. David, as well, says: **“I hear what God speaks in me”** (8 LXX). What would be greater than when God speaks to someone<sup>2</sup>?

(St. Ambrose)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

<sup>2</sup> Duties of the Clergy, 3: 1: 2.

- ❖ Isaiah says: “*The Lord God has opened my ear*” (Isaiah 50: 5). To perceive what he means by saying: “*The Lord God has opened my ear*”: God has granted me a heart by which I hear His message. What the prophet hears, he hears it in his heart; the way we cry out in our hearts, “*Abba Father*” a silent cry heard by the Lord. By the same way the Lord speaks in our hearts, to make us cry out: “*Abba Father*”.

Here also the prophet says: “*I will hear what God the Lord will speak (in me)*”. We find the same meaning said by Habakkuk: “*I will stand my watch, and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer*” (Habakkuk 2: 1) These words refer to what the Lord speaks in the heart and in the mind<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ “*I hear what God the Lord proclaims in me*” (8)<sup>2</sup>. The prophet prays for the sake of the people, he speaks, while God speaks in him ... You perceive that God does not speak in the ears but in the heart; according to Zechariah: “*The angel who talked in me said to me ...*” (Zechariah 1: 9). By the angel here, it is to be understood that it is the Lord who proclaims the will of the Father; who is called in Isaiah: “*The great angel of counsel*” (Isaiah 9: 6)..I listen to the voice of the Lord God in me; I listen by the ears of my heart; to hear what the Lord God speaks in me<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ “*For He will speak peace to His people and His saints, but do not let them turn back to folly*” (8). Here, I notice three categories: His people, His faithful ministers, and those who return to Him with hope. He speaks peace to His people, not to the Jews about whom Hosea says: “*For you are not My people*” (Hosea 1: 9)<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ “*I hear*”. Because God speaks in the prophet, in a world with much noise, man needs a retreat from this distraction, a return to his soul, and from his soul to God, whose voice he hears inside him; he needs to seal his ears against the loud noise of this life; against this soul burdened by the corruptible body; and against the imaginations of “*this earthly tent that burdens the thoughtful mind*” (Wisdom of Solomon 9: 15); So that he could say: “*I hear what the Lord God speaks in me*” (8). What does he hear? He hears Him “*speaks peace to His people*”<sup>5</sup>.

- ❖ O brethren, If you wish to belong to this peace uttered by God, Direct your hearts to Him, and not to me, or to this or that man!

For he who directs himself to the hearts of men, will fall together with them. ... What would be better? To fall together with the one to whom you direct yourself; Or to stand firm with Him (God), our joy, peace, comfort, and the end of all our troubles. There is no better than God. Blessed are those who direct their hearts to Him<sup>6</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The thought comes from God, when He visits us by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit; lifting us up to a great progress ... And when He chastens us in case we slow down our growth, or when we are overcome by slothfulness. He reveals to us the secrets of heavens, and turns our goals toward the virtuous works; the way He has

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 17

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 17

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Psalms, Alternate Series, 64.

<sup>4</sup> Homilies on the Psalms 17.

<sup>5</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

<sup>6</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

done with ‘Ahasuerus’ whom God chastised, and exhorted to bring back what was written concerning the great works of Mordecai The prophet says: “*I hear what the Lord speaks*” (8); Another prophet says: “*And the angel who talked in me said to me*” (Zechariah 1: 14); And the Lord Himself says: “*For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of Your father who speaks in you*” (Matthew 10: 20); And Paul, the chosen vessel says: “*Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me* ” (2 Corinthians 13: 3)<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Moses)**

**“*Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him; That glory may dwell in our land*” (9)**

When the believer fears God, salvation would be near to him, as though springing from his inner depths; where glory dwells in his land on a perpetual and a steady basis.

Our land which, under the ancient curse, produces thorns and thistles, is dwelt by the incarnate Word of God,; according to His promise: “*I will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst*” (Zechariah 2: 5).

❖ “***His salvation is near to those who fear Him***” (9). The Lord God says: I shall reveal to you the way of salvation. I will be merciful to you. Although your repentance is still not complete, I shall wait for you, and I shall give you another chance for a perfect repentance. So “***that the glory may dwell in our land***”, He calls you to repentance, that you, who were leprous before, would receive Christ as your guest<sup>2</sup>.

❖ “***For His salvation is near to those who fear Him***”. How would God be near those who fear Him? As fear is far from perfection; yet “*Perfect love casts out fear*” (1 John 4: 18), For us who fear the Lord, He will not only be near to us, but will be in us, “*I will dwell in them, and walk among them, I will be their God, and they shall be My people*” (2 Corinthians 6: 16). “***That glory may dwell in our land***” (9). That is the land about which is said in the Holy Book: “*The earth shall yield her increase*” (Psalm 67: 6). The increase of our land is the “*Bread of life*” who was born for our sake in Bethlehem (house of the bread); the Bread that comes from heaven for our sake; the Bread that the “*angels desire to look into*” (1 Peter 1: 12)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ “***He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth***” (Psalm 25: 13). Namely, that the soul of him who fears the Lord, will dwell in prosperity, and will perpetually be in harmony with it. The text may also refer to man while in the body, living in the fear of God; he will live in prosperity, and in the heavenlies, for being in charge of his body, and for enjoying having authority over it; that he therefore possesses the inheritance of glory, and enjoys the heavenly promises<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

Commenting on this phrase, **St. Augustine** says: [The whole land at that time worshipped idols, and feared the devil and not God; And although Israel feared God, yet with an absolute material mind.

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 1: 19.

<sup>2</sup> On *Psalms*, homily 17

<sup>3</sup> On *Psalms*, homily 64.

<sup>4</sup> *Death as a Good*, 9: 39.

❖ In the Old Covenant they used to fear God, lest He would deliver them to captivity; their land would be taken away from them; their vineyard would be destroyed by hail; their women would be inflicted by barrenness; or their children would be taken away. Although God’s material promises have prevailed upon their minds, yet He, who was far from the Gentiles, was near to them; according to the words of the apostle: “*He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near*” (Ephesians 2: 17). The Jews were near, having worshipped the One God. Who were those who were afar? The Gentiles who forsook the One God who made them, and worshipped the things created. ... Man could never be afar from God, as far as place is concerned, but concerning love. When you love God, you are near to Him; and when you hate Him, you are far from Him; even if you are in the same place<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

***“Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (10)***

By the cross, the constitution of our relationship with God and with our brethren is set upon mercy, without disregarding the truth and the righteousness, in company with peace. By these factors, reacting together, the believer is glorified. He personifies the four, and makes them encounter each other on the same way. And what is this Way but He who said: “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (John 14: 6). He is the Love, by, and in whom, we enjoy the divine mercy, recognize the truth, be clothed in the righteousness, and enjoy the sweetness of peace.

These four features have deserted Adam and his descendants since the fall of our early parents; then were restored by humanity in the most exalted image in the second Adam who came down from heaven.

According to **St. Jerome**, both the Gentiles and the Jews encounter together in Jesus Christ: the Gentiles through the mercy, and the Jews through the truth.

❖ ***“Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace kissed each other”***. What a wonderful portrait! Are you a sinner? Meditate in the saying “*Mercy*” Are you a faithful minister? Meditate in the saying “*and truth*”. Are a sinner, do not despair; Are you are righteous, do not boast yourself<sup>2</sup>.

❖ ***“Mercy and truth have met together; His salvation is near to those who fear Him; That glory may dwell in our land”***.

In truth, the glory of God dwells in our land, and consequently, “***Truth shall spring out of the earth; Yes the Lord will give what is good***” (10, 11). What goods? “*Our land gives its increase*” Mary. Our land, our body gives their fruit. “***Righteousness walks***”. “*The virgin land gives the fruit of righteousness*”<sup>3</sup>.

❖ ***“Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace kissed each other”***. All these have become one in the secret of the Savior Lord – the Son of Man and the Son of God – who is our Truth, our Compassion, our Peace, and our Righteousness; In whom the righteousness of the first people, and the mercy of the second, have met together in one peace. Truly, the apostle says: “*For He Himself is our peace, who has*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 17.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 17.

*made both one*” (Ephesians 2: 14). That is the secret to which the church longs, and cries out in the Song of songs: “*Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth*” (Song 1: 1). And that is the kiss about which the apostle Paul says: “*Greet one another with a holy kiss*” (Romans 16: 16; 1 Corinthians 16: 20; 2 Corinthians 13: 12; 1 Thessalonians 5: 26)<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ Who weeps, and says together with the prophet Jeremiah: will instantly find the words: “*Mercy and peace have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other*”, realized in him. If he is terrified by the righteousness and the truth, mercy and peace will give him courage to search for salvation<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Both (mercy and peace) are said about His Person, and embrace Him<sup>3</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ There is perfection in peace, where everything is accepted. That is why the workers of peace are the children of God, in whom nothing is against Him; and the children have to be like their Father.

The workers of peace in their soul, are those who have authority over all their psychological intents, and who submit them to reason; namely to mind and spirit; those who reigned the desires of the flesh; and became the kingdom of God; where everything is in order; In whom what is exalted in man, gives command to what is mutual between man and beasts; And what is exalted in man submits to the One who is more exalted than him; namely, to God.

It is actually not possible for you to reign those lower than you, unless you submit to Him who is more exalted than you. That is the peace granted by God, on earth to those with the god will.

Do you wish for peace? Do righteousness, for peace to become yours; For “*Righteousness and peace have kissed each other*” (10).

(St. Cyprian)

- ❖ “*Mercy and truth have met together*”. Truth in our land (in the person of the Jew), and mercy (in the land of the Gentiles). The truth is where the words uttered by God (with the Jews), and where is the mercy? It is with those who forsook their God and followed the demons? Has He come down to them as well? Yes He did!

Do righteousness to have peace; If you do not love righteousness, you will not have peace; As both – righteousness and peace – love each other, and kiss each other.

Ask all men: Do you want peace? All races will answer with one mouth: Yes we want and love peace! Then, love righteousness as well, for these two – righteousness and peace – are friends, kissing each other. If you do not love the friend of peace, peace itself will not love you, and will not dwell in you. How great is the love of peace! For, even the wicked longs for peace; It is a good thing. But do righteousness, as righteousness and peace kiss each other and never disagree<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 64.

<sup>2</sup> Ep. 122: 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ep. 122: 3.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

- ❖ Mercy and truth; Justice and peace. These couples were afar from one another for so long; according to what the Lord said in the prophecy of the prophet Hosea: *“There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint”* (Hosea 4: 1-2); for which the prophet David cries out: Send your mercy and your right.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (11)***

The Lord Christ, “is the *“end of the law”* for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10: 4); And He is the “Truth”, looked down from heaven, and came down for the sake of the salvation of mankind; according to His testimony: *“I am the Truth”* (John 14: 6). How then has He sprung out of the earth, but, according to St. Jerome, by the incarnation of the divine Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary? ...

Looking down from heaven on mankind, He came down to them to proclaim His love, practically given for the sake of their salvation.

And according to **St. Ambrosiaster**, this prophecy, saying: ***“Truth shall spring out of the earth”*** has revealed the Person of the Lord Christ. He says that the identity of the Lord Christ was vague, difficult to recognize; but His resurrection from the dead has confirmed that He is the Son of God. And the Roman Centurion has recognized His Identity when he saw the wonders that happened while He was on the cross, that he and those who were with him said: *“Truly, this was the Son of God”* (Matthew 27: 54).

If our inner life became earth producing the thorns and thistles of sins, He looked down on us, and bore the disgrace of the cross on our behalf, to dwell in us, and to set His kingdom inside us.

- ❖ David says: *“Truth shall spring out of the earth”*(85). For God, in whom Truth is, took an earthly body to open up the way of salvation before the earthly creatures<sup>1</sup>.

**(Lactantius)**

- ❖ By saying: ***“The Truth springs out of the earth”*** (85), David also prophesies His birth from a Virgin, and His resurrection from the dead<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Erinaos)**

- ❖ In a garden He was buried, where a vine was planted. Having said about Himself: *“I am the true Vine”* (John 15: 1). He was planted in the earth to uproot the curse that dwelt on it because of Adam, to produce thorns and thistles. The Vine sprang out from the earth to consummate what is written: *“Truth shall spring out of the earth, and Righteousness shall look down from heaven”* (11)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ To someone who may ask: Why did the prophet Paul say that the second Man is from heaven, and not in heaven (although the Lord Himself has taken His body from the earth; for St. Mary is a descendant of Adam and Eve?); To answer him I say that that the physical love between man and woman produces children who inherit the original sin from their fathers. But Christ has taken a body from the womb of the Virgin

<sup>1</sup> Lactations: Divine institutions, 4: 12.

<sup>2</sup> Adv. Haer. 3: 5: 1.

without human seed; namely, He did not come as a result of that kind of lust, despite taking His body from the earth. That is what the Holy Spirit means by proclaiming: *“Truth shall spring out of the earth”* (11). Nevertheless, it is said that He is a heavenly Man, and from heaven, and not an earthly Man<sup>1</sup>.

According to **St. Augustine**: Earth is also the believer, who has been earth because of the sin; but through his belief in the Lord Christ, truth has sprung out in him; And instead of falling under the punishment of sin, he enjoys the new life, liberated from sin.

❖ *“Truth shall spring out of the earth”*. Christ was born by a woman; The Son of God has come in a human body. What is the “Truth”? It is the Son of God. And what is “the earth”? It is the body The Truth was born from the Virgin Mary, to be able to offer Himself a sacrifice to justify mankind -- the sacrifice of suffering; the sacrifice of the cross. How could He offer a sacrifice for our sins, unless He dies? And how could He die, unless He receives from us the body prone to death? It was not possible for Christ to die; as the Word of God would not die; Deity would not die! How could He offer a sacrifice, a healing sacrifice, unless He dies; unless He is clothed with a body that sprang out of the earth<sup>2</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“Truth shall spring out of the earth; and Righteousness shall look down from heaven”*. The Truth of the promise springs out of the earth; And the Sun of Righteousness looks down from heaven, to shine with His light abundantly on mankind, who are in darkness, and in the shadows of death<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**“Yes, the Lord will give what is good; and our land will give its increase” (12)**

As the Lord Christ proclaims the dwelling of the Holy Trinity in us, our heart turns into a paradise that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit. By that the prophecy is fulfilled, saying: *“Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit? But from this day forward I will bless you”* (Haggai 2: 19). The apostle, having experienced this fruit, says: *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Galatians 5: 22-23). And that is what the Lord of hosts has already proclaimed by the prophet Zechariah, saying: *“But now, I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days”, says the Lord of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase”* (Zechariah 8: 11-12). And the psalmist says: *“Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him”* (Psalm 67: 6, 7).

**St. Augustine** interprets the word that came here as “goods or goodness”, as (sweetness); as the Lord grants His believer *“the sweetness of doing righteousness”*, pouring on him a kind of joy; after having found his joy in evil. ... he who used to find joy in drinking, will turn to reason; ... he who used to find it in stealing, will find his joy in giving to others; he who used to find his joy in listening to filthy songs, will find it in

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 362.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps, 85 (84).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 64.

praising God; and he who used to find his joy in going to evil places, will find it in going to the church. This pleasure will dwell on him from the Lord.

❖ ***“The Lord will give what is good”*** (12). The cause of these kisses in psalm 85: 12, is that the Lord gave what is good, and that our land gave its increase (12). Now, we can see the fulfillment of the promise given then. Our land will give its increase when plowed by the plow of righteousness; when its old iniquities are rooted out by means of fasting, and the rest of virtues, to produce hundredfold of the yield of the seed of the gospel that it receives. Peter and the other apostles have sown their land with troubles of every kind; And we could say truly that their land has given its increase; Also when the martyrs are slain and crucified, their land will give its increase<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“Our land will give its increase”***. These words refer to Him who became the heavenly Bread, He who said: ***“I am the bread which came down from heaven”*** (John 6: 41)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Let everyone know himself, and let him acquire his own vessel; and when the soil of his body is plowed, let him anticipate the fruit in due time. I wish his land produces no thorns or thistles (Genesis 3: 18), but he would rather say: ***“Our land will give its increase”*** (12)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ As the earth would not give fruit unless it receives rain, So are our souls, they will not produce virtues without receiving the goodness of God<sup>4</sup>.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Righteousness will go before Him; and shall make His footsteps our pathway”***  
(13)

The psalmist ends the psalm, looking at the Savior coming down to our earth to deliver Himself to us as the “Righteousness”; to acquire and to be clothed by it; to bear us in Him; being the Way through which He brings us forth into the bosom of the Father.

Our Christ, being the King of kings, needs no procession to precede and to reveal His glory; For His righteousness always precedes Him, and reveals the path of our salvation.

According to **St. Jerome**, the talk here is about the Lord Christ who could never stumble, for there would never be thorns or thistles or stones along His way. He would never walk in our hearts if there is any sin left in them. ... Let us therefore, prepare the way for Him, before

He steps inside us.

And according to **St. Augustine**, the righteousness will go before Him. Repentance will prepare our footsteps, led by God Himself.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 64.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 17.

<sup>3</sup> Letter 15.

<sup>4</sup> راجع تفسير المزامير لأنثيموس أسقف أورشليم، أعده للنشر الراهب القس صموئيل السرياني، 1988.

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 85**

### **WHEN WILL MY LAND GIVE ITS INCREASE?**

- ❖ Because of our first parents Adam and Eve, curse dwelt upon our land;  
To produce thorns and thistles.  
Instead of the garden of Eden, the world for us became a valley of tears.  
Our own body produced thorns and thistles as well.  
Who could save it from its evil desires?
- ❖ By Your love You came down to our world;  
You have borne our sins, and healed our infirmities;  
Our life in Your company became an enjoyable journey;  
You came to set almost angels out of us;  
And to turn our earth into almost heaven;  
You brought back the captivity of Jacob;  
And granted us the glory of the children of God.
- ❖ He who knew no sin, became a sin offering on our behalf;  
You received the curse of the cross instead of the curse that dwelt upon us because of  
breaking the commandment.  
You granted us Your Holy Spirit to renew our nature.  
To perpetually sanctify us;  
To turn our barren wilderness into a joyful paradise.  
To grant us His fruit, of love, joy, peace, etc.  
Glory be to You, Your Good Father, and to Your Holy Spirit!

## PSALM 86

### RESPOND TO MY PRAYER, O LORD

The Jews used to sing this psalm in “Yom Kipur”, being the great day of Atonement, for the sake of the whole people, as well as for that of every believer. It is like a personal lamentation springing out of the heart of every true believer in his relationship with God; And it also includes a praise of thanksgiving to God, together with a cry-out from the heart, coming out of a bitter soul, moaning because of anguish and persecution.

The name of the Lord “Adonai” came seven times in this psalm; And in it the psalmist calls himself “a servant of the Lord” (2, 16).

<b>1- A cry by a suffering believer</b>	<b>1 - 7</b>
<b>2- A praise for the Savior Lord</b>	<b>8 - 13</b>
<b>3- A cry-out for help against the enemies</b>	<b>14 – 17</b>

#### The title:

##### A prayer by David:

This title suits David’s life and person. Despite what he reached of piety and success, yet his fall into sin was so horrible that it turned his life into unceasing prayers of repentance; and made him perpetually feel his great weakness, and his continuous need for the support of God.

There is a wide consent of both the Jewish and the Christian scholars that this psalm is authored by David himself. Some believe that he wrote it as his soul was bitter because of king Saul’s persecution; or because of the rebellion of his own son Absalom against him.

#### 1- A CRY-OUT BY A SUFFERING BELIEVER:

*“Incline Your ear, O Lord, and answer me; for I am poor and needy” (1)*

This request came often in the Holy Scripture. Hezekiah the king, with a bitter soul cried out: *“O Lord God of Israel, the One who dwells between the Cherubim; ... Incline Your ear, and hear; Open Your eyes, and see”* (2 Kings 19: 16); and the psalmist often repeated it (see Psalms 17: 6; 31: 2; 45: 10). It is an expression said by someone who feels like an infant on the chest of his father, intending to whisper in his ears; It is said by a meek and humble person, with whom the Lord is well pleased; Who, Himself says: *“Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart”*.

By saying: *“Incline Your ear, O Lord”*, the psalmist intends to say to Him: [I am unable to express what goes on inside me by my mouth and tongue; and no one could hear the sighs of my heart, perceive and partake of my feelings, but You].

The psalmist probably felt that, because of his persecution and frequent escape, he was often denied fellowship in the collective worship; Yet God alone could appreciate what goes on in his depths.

**St. Augustine**, believing that the One who talks here is our Lord Jesus Christ, who, for our sake has become poor and needy, to make us rich by Him. says: [He prays for us, being the High Priest; prays in us, being our Head; and is prayed to, being our

God. I wish we know our words in Him, and His words in us ... We pray to, by, and in Him; and talk to, by, and in Him<sup>1</sup>].

❖ He will incline His ear, if you do not haughtily lift up your neck; As He is close to the humble, and far from the haughty.

He is up high, and we are down below; yet we are not forsaken. “*Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone may even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5: 7,8). The fact of not being worthy for the Son of God to die for our sake, greatly demonstrates His mercy. “*For I am poor and needy*”. He does not incline His ear to the rich, but to the poor and the needy; namely, to the humble who confesses his need for His mercy; and not to the one who, lifting up himself, and boasting of being in need for nothing, says: “*God, I thank You that I am not like other men, or even as this tax collector*” (Luke 18: 11-13). The Pharisee boasted his worthiness, while the tax collector confessed his sins.

Let no one take my words as though God does not listen to the rich who have gold, silver, and land. Abraham, in his great riches, was poor and humble, kept all the commandments, and counted his riches as nothing. In his obedience to God, he was ready even to offer his own beloved son a sacrifice (Genesis 22: 10)l to teach you to be poor and needy, whether you have everything, or have nothing in this world<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ My sins have weakened my soul; and shyness has lowered my voice. Therefore, O Merciful Physician, condescend toward my humility; incline Your ear, for I take refuge in no one but You ... I wish I am worthy of the blessing You gave to the one, poor in spirit<sup>3</sup>.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*Preserve my life for I am (holy); You are my God; Save Your servant who trusts in You*” (2)

The word “*preserve*” is sometimes used as a military term meaning (guard or protect). The psalmist perpetually feels the need for God’s protection “*Preserve me, O Lord, For in You I put my trust*” (Psalm 16: 1). He was always in need of God’s protection, of his life that was continuously threatened; and of his soul, so as not to lose her eternal glory.

Saying “*for I am (holy)*”, he does not mean to justify himself before God, but he is rather defending himself against those who often accused him of being evil, because of the multitude of troubles, temptations, and afflictions dwelling upon him; The way it happened to the righteous ‘Job’, and the apostles Peter, Paul, John, and others, who said: “*Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of His saints*” (Psalm 116: 15).

“*My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart will not reproach me as long as I live*” (Job 27: 6).

“*My Lord, You know that I love You*” (John 21: 16).

“*Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? ... Are you not the seal of my apostleship in the Lord?*” (1 Corinthians 9: 1).

<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

<sup>3</sup> راجع تفسير المزامير لأثناسيوس أسقف أورشليم، أعده للنشر الراهب القس صموئيل السرياني، 1988.

The psalmist so loves to call himself “*a servant of God*” that he sometimes repeats it in the same psalm several times. He who tasted the liberation from the bondage of sin, feels the sweetness of the bondage to God, that grants his soul a kind of liberty, joy, and peace. And despite calling himself (holy), he does not boast his piety, but leans upon the grace of God; crying: “*Save Your servant who trusts in You*” (2).

According to **St. Augustine**, the Speaker here is the Lord Christ, who, alone, is “Holy” and “Pious” without sin. Putting on Christ (Galatians 3: 27), we have the right, as a catholic church, and members in it, to say that, by Him, we holy and pious; yet, not on our own, but as a grant from Him.

**“Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You all day long” (3)**

With daring and trust in the work of God, he cries all day long without despair. And despite calling himself holy and pious, he seeks the mercies of God all day long; which, in itself, is a confession that he is a sinner, and in need of the forgiveness of his sins.

The verb “*cry*” came in the future tense; as though he proclaims that he keep crying unceasingly, for he is in perpetual need of God’s mercies.

According to **St. Augustine**, the church, being the body of Christ, cries as one man to the end of the world, and the Lord hears his voice. Our

One Head intercedes for us before the Father.

- ❖ Not “for one day”, but “every day”, namely, continuously; as the body of Christ keeps groaning from suffering up to the end of the world. Until the affliction passes away, man keeps sighing and calling God. Each one of us, according to his own measure, contributes in this cry by the whole body<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

**“Rejoice the soul of Your servant; For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul” (4)**

He does not only seek from God to take away from him the sadness and the bitterness of soul, but seeks from Him, as well, to fill his soul with the joy of the Spirit. He presents himself to God, the Source of the true joy. He lifts himself up to the Lord, as one who trusts his case in no other hand but the Lord’s.

Seeking from God to rejoice his soul, and lifting himself up to Him, he is not preoccupied with getting saved from physical troubles, but with enjoying the joy of the Lord in his depths, and with the lifting up of his soul, as though flying to the Source of her salvation.

- ❖ Share my labor with me, O brethren; you see my pledge, and who am I who pledged. ... You know what I intend to say; and how I actually am! “*With a perishable body weighing down the soul, and an earthly tent burdening the thoughtful mind*” (Wisdom 9: 15). That is why I bare my mind of the multitude of thoughts, and concentrate it in the One God, the indivisible Trinity; to be able to find something to talk about. In this tent (body) that weighs down my soul, I can say: “*To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul*” (4); to be able to talk to you about some worthy subject I pray to God to help me, by lifting my soul up; as I am too weak compared to Him; and He is too Mighty compared to me<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 2: 3.

- ❖ As You, alone, is the Joy, while the whole world is full of bitterness, You seek from the members of Your body to lift up their hearts; on account that the heart lifted up to God could never get corrupt ... Not like the body, which could be lifted up by a change of position; the heart is lifted up through a change of will<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“For You, Lord, are Good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You” (5)***

Our hope in the Lord, our trust in Him, and our leaning upon Him, are all set upon our perception of His attributes as proclaimed by the Word of God, as testified by history, and by our past experience in our dealings with Him.

- ❖ There was never a just king, who is at the same time meek and humble; who came to Jerusalem riding on a, except He alone, Jesus Christ, the King of kings, God the Savior, who is gentle, and *“abundant in mercy to all those who call upon Him”* (5)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Sveris of Antioch)

- ❖ ***“For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul”*** (4). How can I lift up my soul? As much as You give me strength; I am weak; I am drowning; Heal me and lift up my soul; Give me strength; And until then, endure me. ***“For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You”*** (5)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications”***

(6)

The psalmist supplicates to God to take his case upon Himself, as he has no other Helper but Him.

- ❖ How great is the zeal of the one who prays. He means to say: O Lord, do not allow my prayer to go astray, but hold it fast to Your ears ... To which God would respond by saying: “If you want Me to hold your prayer fast to My ears, you, yourself, should hold My law fast to your heart!”<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“In the day of my trouble, I will call upon You, for You will answer me”*** (7)

That is his experience in his past temptations. There is no one without a day of trouble, whatever are his position or his possibilities.

- ❖ I am sure, no Christian can say that there was a day when he had no trouble. Saying *“all day long”* (3), means (all the time) ... *“While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5: 6). Whatever we may treasure here, we are not in the city which we can call home. He who finds sweetness in the land of sojourn, does not love his city; ... As travel is bitter; one is in trouble *“all day long”*<sup>5</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## **2- A PRAISE FOR THE SAVIOR LORD:**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

<sup>2</sup> Cathedral Sermons, Homily 20.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

<sup>5</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

***“Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; Nor are there any works like Your works”(8)***

God’s works in nature, and His exalted care for humanity, testify to His presence and to His love. He who does not so perceive; whatever wonders he sees, he will not believe in God as he should. There is no comparison between God and any other being; For He alone is capable to save to perfection, by His will, wisdom, and love.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist here, rebukes the heathens, who worship idols, angels, or any heavenly hosts.

❖ Angels worship the One God, and do not encourage those who intend to worship them; as we may see how angels of high ranks stopped those who intended to worship them , and exhorted them to worship the true God (See Revelation 19: 10)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ No one should compare God to man; man to animal; or wood to stone; on account of that they are different in nature. While God is beyond any comparison, man could be compared to man, wood to wood, and stone to stone<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ When Rabshakeh came with the Assyrian army to Jerusalem, and addressed the people, he blasphemed God, saying: [if gods of the different countries were not able to save their land, how can your God save Jerusalem from the might of the Assyrians?]. Hearing those blasphemies, king Hezekiah *“tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and cried out to the Lord, saying: ‘You are the Lord God, You alone!’* (2 Kings 19: 19).

According to **St. Athanasius** the apostolic, this psalm calls the prophets gods, those to whom the word of God came. ... The prophet David says that no prophet could make salvation to mankind the way the Lord did, nor do works like His works; ... There is no intercessor, nor a king, but the Lord of their salvation; ... When the saints did wonders, it was not by their own power, but by that of God; Whereas Christ performed miracles by the power of His deity.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“All the nations whom You have made, shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name” (9)***

Every now and then, the word of God reveals the call of all the nations to receive faith, *“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you; For dominion belongs to the Lord’s, and He rules over the nations”* (Psalm 22: 27-28).

Some believe that this is a prophecy about what will happen when all the nations receive faith; when peace will dwell over all the world; and when the name of God will be glorified, according to what came in the following prophecies:

*“A people yet to be created may praise the Lord”* (Psalm 102: 8)

*“Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled”* (Isaiah 43: 9).

*“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; Laud Him, all you peoples”* (Romans 15: 11).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

<sup>2</sup> Four Discourses Against the Arians, 1: 13: (57).

*“Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy, For all the nations shall come and worship before You”* (Revelation 15: 4).

- ❖ Before the incarnation of the word, the whole world was ruled by the devil, the evil, the serpent, and the apostate; the created was worshipped, and not the Creator and the Maker! But once the Word of God, the Only begotten Son, became Man, the whole world became filled with His glory; *“As to Him every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* Philippians 2: 10-11). David, as well, prophesied that, saying: *“All nations whom You have made, shall come and worship before you, O Lord”* (Psalm 86: 9). All that was realized when the multitudes of nations were called, and all worshipped before Him, who for our sake became like us; yet, in His exaltation He remained above everyone<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Everyone saw the salvation of God the Father, who sent His only begotten Son, a Redeemer and Savior; not to one nation, and not to the other ... For by the mercy of the Savior, being unlimited, He redeemed all nations, and, with His light He shined over all those in the darkness<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

- ❖ The good Teacher, the Wisdom, the Word of God who created man, cares for every nature of His creation; He is the Physician of all mankind; the Savior; the Healer of both the body and the Soul<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

- ❖ He proclaims the church, as “All the nations”<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ This saying is a prophecy about the entry of the nations into faith in the Lord on His coming down to earth ... that He who emerges from the stem of Jesse will rule the nations; And in a prophecy by Jeremiah, he says that the nations will come to Him from the ends of the earth; Their coming is not by moving from one place to another, as God is everywhere, but through the closeness of their will and hearts to faith.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“For You are great and do wondrous things; You alone are God”* (10)**

God is Unlimited, Eternal; Almighty; and submits to no measure; Nothing in God is perceived by mere human or angelic mind, without a proclamation by God Himself to His creation.

- ❖ I wish no one would call himself great; For *“You alone are great”*<sup>5</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ The word *“alone”* here, does not confine the Deity in One Person; but distinguishes between the creative and the created Nature.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup>Is 1: 4 PG 70: 176B.

<sup>2</sup>In Luc. Ser. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Paedagogus 1: 2.

<sup>4</sup>On Ps. 86 (85).

<sup>5</sup>On Ps. 86 (85).

***“Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name” (11)***

The phrase *“Unite my heart to fear Your name”* (11), in the Septuagint version came to mean: *“Let my heart rejoice when it fears Your name”*.

Here, the psalmist confesses that, without God he does not know the way; he confesses his ignorance and his continuous need for the leadership of God Himself to know His way, and to walk in His truth; He feels like a blind man, to whom no man, angel, nor any heavenly creature could grant the enlightenment, and clarify the vision. He also feels that God is closer to him than any other being, capable of granting him the wisdom, and of leading him to the way of salvation. He puts all his hope in Him, to grant him the godly fear, the spirit of piety, and to take away from him the inner dissension and wavering.

❖ Therefore, there could be fear in joy! How could there be joy if there is fear?! There will be always joy together with fear; There is no complete joy, nor complete surety; Without joy, we would fall apart; and without complete surety, we would be rejoicing the wrong way! That is why God pours the joy on us, and strikes us with fear; By the sweetness of joy, He leads us to enjoy surety; and by granting us fear, He keeps us from rejoicing the wrong way, and keeps us from withdrawing from the way

Your way, truth, and life, is Christ To learn the way is one thing, and to walk in it is another. You should notice how man, everywhere, is helpless; and how everywhere he needs help!

Those (beside) the way could not be true Christians; but once they are brought forth to the way, and come to belong to the Catholic Church in Christ, they are committed to walk through Him in the same way, lest they would fall<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The way of God is to avoid transgressions and to abide to virtues; a way that leads to the truth, along which no one can walk except by God’s guidance and power. But His guidance is not granted except by fearing Him; because the fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom; and everyone who gains this fear, which is the foremost among virtues, will have the joy of heart.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore” (12)***

As the believer, together with the apostle Paul, experiences sitting with Christ in the heavenly places; heavenly joy will fill his heart, and he will share with the heavenly creatures their perpetual praise, and their glorification of the Holy Name of God forever.

***“For great is Your mercy toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol (the lowest pit)” (13)***

The believer will never cease to exult; for the divine mercies have lifted him up, as though from Sheol; to heaven, and have presented to him the new resurrected life instead of death and corruption. Such an amazing salvation motivates the believer to set forth from one day to another, to enjoy new unceasing mercies, approaching God in a unique relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

**St Augustine** presents to us two views concerning 'ISheol': the first one is that, relatively, there is a lower Sheol, and a higher Sheol, although both are low; And Christ descended to the lower Sheol, so that we would not remain in Hades, whatever our state is. And the second view, although conforming with the first one to a certain extent, is that there are different levels in Hades.

❖ Sin brings man down to the depths of Hades; according to what came in the fourteenth chapter of the book of Proverbs: "*There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*" (Proverb 14: 12).

This saying, as well, is a prophecy about Christ, resurrecting from the dead, and saving the souls of the righteous from Hades.

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

### **3- A CRY-OUT FOR HELP AGAINST THE ENEMIES:**

*"O God, the proud have risen against me, and a mob of violent men have sought my life, and have not set You before them"* (14)

As much as the believer's soul exults, and is attached to the mercies of God, And as much as the gates of heaven open wide before him; The devil and hosts of darkness would stir up against him. Those are the proud and the mob of violent men who seek nothing less than to destroy his soul, not setting before them that his soul is preserved in the hands of God, and the price of his salvation was already paid for on the cross.

We are not afraid of this vicious battle, as the enemy never ceased to wage war against the early fathers, the prophets, the apostles, the disciples, and all the believers of the Old and the New Covenants; and even against Christ the Creator Himself!

In the Septuagint version it came as: "*O God, the of the law have risen against me*"; And according to **St. Augustine**, "the of the law' are not of the Gentiles, who were without a law, but of the Jews.

❖ They did not, themselves, keep the law, and accused Christ of the law! We know how much the Lord has endured. Do you think that His body does not suffer from that now? How could this be? "*If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household? A disciple is not above his teacher or a servant above his master*" (Matthew 10: 25, 24). The body of Christ still suffers of the law, "*And a mob of violent men have sought my life*". Those were the proud who have risen against the Head; namely, against the Lord Christ, crying out with one mouth: "*Crucifer Him, crucify Him*" (John 19: 9). Those are about whom is said: "*Sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword*" (Psalm 57: 4).

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ We have reached the salvation which we desired; the day of the resurrection of the Lord Christ, the day of peace and reconciliation, the day in which death has come to no avail, and Satan was defeated. On that day men joined the angels, the spiritual hosts, in praising God. On that day, the weapons of Satan became obsolete, the shackles of death were loosened, and the might of Hades came to an end.

On that day our Lord Jesus Christ crushed the bronze doors, and cancelled the sting of death; And we can say, together with the prophet: "*O death, where is your sting; O Hades, where is your victory?*" (1 Corinthians 15: 55).

He even changed the name of 'death'; It is no more called death, but sleep and departure. Before the birth and crucifixion of Christ, the name 'death' has been fearful. For the first man heard God say: "*In the day that you eat of it, you shall die*" (Genesis 2: 17). And the prophet David says: "*Evil shall slay the wicked*" (Psalm 34: 21). The separation of the soul from the body was called 'death' and Jacob, the father of the fathers said to his sons: "*You would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol*" (Genesis 42: 38); and Isaiah says: "*Sheol has enlarged itself, and opened its mouth beyond measure*" (Isaiah 5: 14); And David say: "*You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol*" (Psalm 86: 13). We find this concept of death in many other places of the Old Testament. Yet, since the Lord Christ has delivered Himself a sacrifice for the sake of all mankind, and is risen from the dead, He cancelled all these nomenclatures, and presented to humanity a new life which it has not known before; And the exit from this world is no more called death but sleep or departure<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ The prophet says "*the proud*" about the evil hosts of the devil; and "*a mob of violent men*" about the rulers who sought the crucifixion of Christ the Lord, for "*they did not set god before them*"; namely, they did not fear Him.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***"But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in mercy and truth" (15)***

The more the enemy is stirred up against us with great violence, to destroy us eternally, the more we are filled with hope in God, "*full of compassion, gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in mercy and truth*". The battle is actually between the Holy God and the crafty and deceptive devil.

- ❖ Why is He so longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth?

For when He was hanged on the cross he said: "*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do*" (Luke 23: 34) While being crucified for the sake of the wicked, and amid their slanders, not only by words, but by death, hanged on a cross, the Son prays to the Father for their sake. He as though stretched His hands to pray for them, and "*His prayer is set before the Father like incense; the lifting up of His hands as the evening sacrifice*" (Psalm 141: 2)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***"Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me! Give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant" (16)***

As long as the battle is between two side, between God Himself, and the devil; The believer, being the son of God's maidservant, has only to seek from God to turn to him, to support him with His mercy, and to grant Him to be clothed with His strength.

Here, the fathers distinguish between the Lord Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the strength of God; And the believers, the children of God by adoption, who enjoy the strength of God through the free divine grace! The strength we get is a free gift, not out of our own worthiness, but through our seeking from Him! On our side, we, as the children of His maidservant, are committed to obedience, for we love Him; while, on His

<sup>1</sup> PG 52: 762. ترجمة: د. سعيد حكيم يعقوب (المركز الأرثوذكسي للدراسات الأبائية بالقاهرة)

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 86 (85).

side, He has already demonstrated His love for us, and delivered Himself to us as a refuge and a stronghold.

- ❖ In the prayer of David, the Holy Spirit demonstrates the same distinction, saying in the psalm: “*Give strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant*”. As the true Son of God, by nature is different from the children of the maidservant; The first is the Son who has the same might of the Father; whereas the others are in need of salvation<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Athanasius of Alexandria)**

***“Show me a sign for good, that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed. Because You, Lord, has helped me and comforted me” (17)***

Despite what the psalm bore of cry-outs from the whole heart; yet at its end, the psalmist proclaims his trust that he will enjoy salvation, help, and heavenly comforts; and that the devil will be ashamed and disgraced. This is the feeling of the true believer, even before the fulfillment of the salvation from the anguish and affliction; he gives thanks ahead for what he will get of help and comfort.

**St. Augustine** believes that the Speaker in this psalm is the Lord Christ, praying to the Father to show Him a sign for good; which is His resurrection from the dead, to put those who crucified Him, and rejected faith, to shame.

- ❖ Do you wish, O beloved brother, to be honored in the sight of men and God? When your charitable deed is done in secret (See Mathew 6: 4); God will see it, and will show you a sign for good (Psalm 86: 7 – according to the Coptic version in the Agpeya), and will honor you as you honor Him (1 Samuel 2: 30)<sup>2</sup>.

**(Pope Abba Theophilus)**

- ❖ In the old, “*God put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him*” (Genesis 4: 15). That mark was a sign (but not for good); not like the one for which the prophet prays, saying: “*Show me a sign (for good), that those who hate me may see and be ashamed*” (17); but like the sign put on the doors of the children of Israel in the land of Egypt, which when seen by the destroyer on the lintel and on the doorposts of their gates, he would pass by.

His request was also for a good sign, namely, for one to prove what he has seen by the eye of prophecy, that the Virgin will give birth and remain a virgin, according to a proclamation by the prophet Isaiah.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Four Discourses Against the Arians, 2: 19 (50).*

<sup>2</sup> رسالة القديس أنبا ثيوفيلس إلى الرهبان، 6 (فردوس الآباء)...

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 86**

### **VISIT ME, O GOOD ONE, WITH YOUR MERCY**

- ❖ “Incline Your ear, O Lord, and answer me;  
Like a little infant, I am not able even to lift up my head.  
I am poor, and needy for Your mercy.  
I have nothing to justify myself;  
To find refuge in Your love and abundant compassion.
- ❖ All day long I cry to You;  
I have no other refuge but You;  
I have no one to perceive my depths but You;  
There is no one is like You in Your fatherhood, wisdom, and might.
- ❖ So amazing in Your works, all the nations that  
You have created will return to You;  
With joy and exultation they will worship You;
- ❖ Fill my life with the heavenly gladness;  
That despair would not crawl into my heart;  
Nail Your fear in my heart;  
That I will not deviate to the right or to the left;  
Save my from the pit of bitter despair.
- ❖ My enemies would not seek less than my soul;  
The devil and all his hosts would never cease to oppose me;  
Turn to me, and save me from the death of sin  
Set me up, For You are the resurrection and the life.

## PSALM 87

### THE CITY OF GOD, MOTHER OF ALL PEOPLES

Anticipating the coming of the Messiah, the Savior of the world, stretching His hands on the cross to embrace the world, to die for them, and to rise, and arise them together with Him; The psalmist's soul exults to see the gates of Jerusalem, the city of God, open up before all peoples; to see the city which was closed on a certain people, how its citizens became of all the peoples of the world, how it bears a spiritual motherhood to all, and grants them the blessed and exultant life, as a deposit of heaven.... The church, the spiritual kingdom of Christ, shall be exalted above all the kingdoms of the world, above the temporal politics, and does not enter with the world into a competition on a temporal authority or glory.

The psalmist's mind, in his view of Jerusalem, has risen up beyond any place limitation of the earthly Jerusalem, which was boasted by the Jews as being the center of the world, and the most sacred place, for having the only holy temple of God.

<b>1- God's choice of Jerusalem</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>
<b>2- The citizens of Jerusalem</b>	<b>4 - 6</b>
<b>3- The exultant city</b>	<b>7</b>

#### The title:

**A psalm of the sons of Korah, A song of praise.**

Some believe that the author of this psalm is the prophet David, and sung by the sons of Korah.

We have seen that the word 'Korah' means (Golgotha). And according to **St. Jerome**, the sons of Korah are **(the sons of the resurrection)** <sup>1</sup>.

Those who enjoy being in the heavenly city of God, are those who are risen together with the Lord Christ, and who experience here the resurrected life as a deposit of eternity.

#### 1- GOD'S CHOICE OF JERUSALEM:

***"His foundation is in the holy mountains"* (1)**

Comparing between the tabernacle of the meeting and the temple of Solomon, the psalmist says that the former has no foundations, being a movable tent; whereas the temple has its foundations set on the holy mountains. As to the church of the New Covenant, on the other hand, its foundations are the prophets and the apostles; and its Cornerstone is our Lord Jesus Christ.

❖ Paul the apostle proclaims: *"As a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation"* (1 Corinthians 3: 10); namely, the faith in the Holy Trinity. And: *"For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrew 11: 10) ... The psalmist designates *"the holy mountains"*, as there are other mountains which are not holy: *"Lift up a banner on (dark) mountains"* (Isaiah 13: 2); and: *"Give glory to the Lord your God before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains"* (Jeremiah 13: 16).... Who are those whom we call "foundations"? They are the apostles, upon whom the faith of the church is set and founded<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 18.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 18.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ The foundations of Jerusalem are set by God; and the mountains upon which it is built are holy mountains, on account of that the Holy God has chosen them for His dwelling.
- ❖ The “*city of God*” is said to mean the upright worship whose foundations are the holy divine teachings; While the “*holy mountains*” on which its building is set, are the apostles and the prophets; and above them all, is our lord Jesus Christ, as according to Paul the apostle: “*having been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Cornerstone*” (Ephesians 2: 20) <sup>1</sup>.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ I believe that is why, when Jesus Himself transfigured, it was not in a valley, but on the top of a mountain; to teach us that we should not look for him in any other place, but on the mountains of the law and the prophets<sup>2</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

“*The Lord loves the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob*” (2)

The Holy Book with its two testaments, reveals in every possible way, the love of God for man and mankind. His choice of Zion, and His love of its gates, does not mean His need for it, nor His care for material things; as He is the Creator of heaven and earth; But He loves man, and wishes to embrace all humanity in His bosoms, and pours His splendor on her.

- ❖ It seems to me that the gates of Zion refer to the (virtues).

As the iniquity and sin are the gates of death, I believe that the gates of Zion are the virtues<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ He does not mean the material gates, but those on which the gates of Hades shall not prevail (Matthew 16: 18); and through which will enter the multitudes of the believers in Christ<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Zion is Jerusalem that was the capital of the Jewish nation, where the temple was set; and through whose gates the statutes leading to the Mosaic worship have entered. That is why it has been more prominent than “*all the other dwellings of Jacob*”; namely, of the Israelites.

According to Paul the apostle, Zion or Jerusalem, refers to the church of Christ: “*You have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven*” (Hebrew 12: 22-23). And: “*But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all*” (Galatians 4: 26). It is the church whose gates is its teachings; loved by God more than all the dwellings of Jacob; namely, more

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<sup>1</sup> تفسير المزامير لأنثيموس أسقف أورشليم، أعده للنشر الراهب القس صموئيل السرياني، 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Sngs 3: 11.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 18.

<sup>4</sup> Letter 108 to Eustochium, 9.

than the statutes of the Mosaic law (in its literality), in which Israel dwelt, and which he called “dwellings”, because of its temporary status.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

**“Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God” (3)**

Looking at the church of Christ, the psalmist sees her filled with glory, on account of that her Christ, in its midst, is the secret of her eternal glory. By His coming, the history and the events of the Old Covenant glittered, its joyful meanings transfigured, the prophecies were perceived; humanity enjoyed exultant praises and joyful meanings; heavenly secrets were revealed, and it came to have exalted privileges and divine promises.

That was what the prophets of the Old Covenant have touched; and what the prophet Isaiah has seen: *“Now 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 people shall come and say, ‘Come, and 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 shall walk in His paths’. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem”* (Isaiah 2: 2-3).

❖ Where shall we find those glorified sayings? ... All the prophets have spoken of this city: Isaiah says: *“Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion”* (Isaiah 52: 1); And, *“We have a strong city;... a lofty city; ... Yet the fortified city will be desolate”* (See Isaiah 27: 10; 26: 1, 5; 25: 2, 12); And David says: *“There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God”* (Psalm 46: 4) ... And the Savior Himself, speaking about this city, says: *“A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden”* (Matthew 5: 14).

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ These sayings suit the new Jerusalem, more than the old one; namely, it suits the church of Christ, about which is said, not just vain human words, but glorious divine things.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ There, innumerable company of angels are seen; an assembly of saint, and the church of first born whose names are registered in heaven; ... *“Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God”* (3 LXX); whom God promises through Isaiah: *“I will make you an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations ... Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls salvation”* (Isaiah 60: 15, 18). That is why, whenever you lift up the eyes of your soul, seek what is befitting of the higher things, what concern the city of God; things that are worthy of a city, made glad by the river of God, Whom God is her Maker and Creator<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Some define a city, as an assembly of a multitude of beings in one body, governed by law ... This definition suits the Higher Jerusalem, the heavenly city; on account of that, it is a church of the firstborn whose names are registered in heaven (Hebrew 12: 23); that it is well controlled; with an unceasing flow of saints, and that it is governed by the heavenly law. The human nature cannot perceive the extent of readiness of that city and of its system, that *“eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the*

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on the Psalms, 18: 4.*

*heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2: 6).*

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

What is this city, called the city of God, about which such glorious things are spoken, other than St. Mary, in whose womb the Word of God is incarnate, by which she became a second heaven.

❖ In the sixth month I shall send Gabriel to a virgin, with certain instructions!

Come now, O prince of angels, and be the minister of a great hidden secret ...

My compassion made me come down to earth to save the lost Adam, who was created in My image, whom sin destroyed and corrupted the work of My hand, and distorted the beauty of what I made.

Behold, the wolf devours my flock; the house of paradise is devastated; the tree of life is guarded by a sword of fire; the places of joy are closed; ... and I intend to catch the enemy.

However, I want you to keep this secret which I entrust only to you; as it is still hidden from the other heavenly hosts.

Go to the virgin Mary; Cross over to this living city, about whom it is said: **“Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God” (2).**

Proceed, therefore, to that rational paradise; to the gate of the East; to where I shall dwell; to a place worthy of my word; to the second heaven on earth; to the lighted cloud; and inform her about my coming Proceed to the glory prepared for Me; to the court of my incarnation; to the pure beauty of my birth in flesh<sup>1</sup>

**(St. Gregory, the wonder maker)**

## **2- THE CITIZENS OF JERUSALEM:**

***“I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge Me; Philistia too Tyre along with Cush; This one was born in Zion” (4)***

‘**Rahab**’, referring to Egypt, as mentioned in psalm 89: 10, and Isaiah 51: 9; was awesome and a symbol of pride, power, and sometimes of violence<sup>2</sup>.

‘**Babylon**’, a great empire with authority, was a competitor of Egypt; and Israel was often caught in between the two of them; And

‘**Cush**’ refers to Ethiopia, or rather generally, to all the region south of Egypt.

Who is he who was born in those nations? Some believe that the psalmist refers here to the church of the New Covenant that embraced a multitude of heathen nations, to whom, faith is presented as a newly born infant.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, ‘Rahab’ refers to spaciousness, as well as to pride; ‘Babylon’ to confusion; ‘Cush’ to dark souls; and ‘Tyre’ to idol worship. It is as though the nations that were idol worshippers, spacious in sin, confused in teachings; proud, and haughty, have all become knowledgeable of God, by their entrance into the true faith; Namely, have turned into the rational spiritual Jerusalem; And even became recognized by God, Himself, as His own.

❖ Come now along with me to another category who were saved by repentance.

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<sup>1</sup> البشارة بالتجسد الإلهي، 2005، تعريب القمص تادرس يعقوب ملطي ونادية أمين مرقس، عظة 3.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Plumer, 87.

A certain woman may say: I have committed adultery and defiled my body by all kinds of uncleanness. Shall I have salvation?! To her I say: Turn your eyes to 'Rahab' the harlot, and see how she was saved by repentance. All what she said was: "*The Lord your God; is the Lord of heaven above and on earth beneath*" (Joshua 2: 11). She said "*The Lord your God*"; and did not dare to refer Him to herself because of her life filled with filth. And you will find a confirmation of her salvation in the book of psalms, saying: "*I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge Me*"<sup>1</sup> (4).

How great is the compassion of the Lord; the Holy Book referring even to the harlots; It does not only say: "*I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon*", but adds: "*among those who acknowledge Me*". We reach salvation by repentance, whether we are men or women on equal terms<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

Speaking profusely of 'Rahab', who according to **St. Jerome** was Rahab the harlot, the Gentile woman who hid the two spies sent by Joshua; as though she has received faith in Jesus the Savior; The saint demonstrated the following points:

- 1- She was a Gentile, a reference to the Gentiles who will receive faith.
- 2- She hid the two spies on the roof; a reference to that her faith was high and exalted.
- 3- She hid them under stalks of flax; a reference to purity, although she has been a harlot.
- 4- Flax, growing in black soil, is without beauty; Yet, once it is taken out and processed, it becomes splendidly white.
- 5- She advised them to hide three days then to set forth. A reference to the enjoyment of enlightenment.
- 6- She asked them not to walk in the open valleys, but to get to the mountains. a reference to that the faith of the church is not set in the valleys, but high up on the mountains.
- 7- The name 'Rahab' meaning (spacious) or (proud); refers to that she proudly walked before along the spacious way, that leads to perdition (Matthew 7: 13)

- ❖ Now the psalm, speaking about the call to the Gentiles, says: "*I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge Me*". The sinner should have peace, if he return to the Lord by repentance; when he hears that God mentions Rahab the harlot, who hid the two spies sent by Joshua, not downstairs, but up on the roof; a reference to her exalted faith<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ She who has been before on the spacious way leading to perdition, has come afterwards to the memory of God<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ Those who were before foreigners, and in affliction, who used to live in the middle of the sea (Tyre is said to have been in the middle of sea); struck by the violent waves, have ultimately found place in the church of God<sup>5</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> في الطابعة البيروتية "راحاب وبابل اللتين تعرفانتي".

<sup>2</sup> مقال 2: 9.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 18.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 18.

<sup>5</sup> On Psalms, homily 18.

- ❖ ‘Babylon’ means confusion. A reference to that every soul, even if it is confused by sins, is called to mention by God.

(The scholar Origen)

**“And of Zion it will be said, ‘this one and that one were born in her. And the Most High Himself shall establish her’ (5)**

In the Septuagint version it came as: “And it is the Most High who established it forever”; Meaning that He who is born in it is truly the eternal Most High who establishes His church.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the Word of God who grants the believer the adoption or the spiritual birth, and is incarnate for our sake, is born there. By that, everyone who confesses the Lord’s Deity will have Zion as a spiritual mother, according to the words of the apostle that “*she is the mother of us all*” (Galatians 4: 26).

Some believe that saying, “*this one and that one were born in her*” (5), refers to that many who will enjoy the new birth, will come from all nations to become citizens of the new Zion, namely, members in the church of the New Covenant.

- ❖ If this is our wish, Christ is being daily born through every virtue<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Looking toward the heights, David was amazed to see how the city looked (5); how the people of Babylon became citizens of Jerusalem; how the harlot became a virgin; how the Ethiopians became white instead of black; and how Tyre became a higher city! Moreover, he saw how the bride of the song, enthusiastically encouraging the daughters of Jerusalem, describing to them the goodness of the Groom, who receives the black soul, and restores her to the image of the early beauty by the fellowship with Him. He saw how he, who was “*like the tents of Kedar*”, became a dwelling place for the True Solomon; namely, for the King of Peace. The text says: “*I am dark, but lovely, O daughter of Jerusalem*”; And all of you who watch will be white “*like the curtains of Solomon*”, even though you were before dark “*like the tents of Kedar*” (songs 1: 5)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

- ❖ Meaning that a mere man would not be able to proclaim to Zion that she will be saved by Him who is to be born in her ... If He is described as being “*the most High*”; how about saying that He is “*the Word of God*”<sup>3</sup>?

(St. Jerome)

**“The Lord records, as He registers the peoples: ‘This one was born there’” (6)**

The psalmist sees the lord, being preoccupied with the salvation of mankind, holding a record and writing down the nations coming into faith, and every individual by name, to glorify them. And St. Jerome sees the Lord prepare His disciples to record to the peoples the coming of that Most High Son who will be born in Zion; to record it in the Holy Books.

<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 18.

<sup>2</sup> عظة 2 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 18

- ❖ Plato wrote books; yet for a few, and not to all peoples. But what the heads of the church (the disciples and the apostles) wrote, were not for a few, but for everybody with no exception<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ The rational Zion, as we mentioned before, is the church of the firstborn who are in heaven; as said by our Lord of glory to His disciples: “ ( )”; Meaning by that the apostles and the teachers of the peoples who are spiritually born in her; a great multitude, uncountable except by the Lord born in the body; Hence He said to His disciples that “ ( ) .... In the version translated by Simachos, it came as: [To the nations, it will be said to everybody: ‘This one was born there’. ‘The Most High who established her; the Lord who has the record of the peoples, was born there’].

**“Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

### **3- THE EXULTANT CITY:**

*“Both the singers and the players on instruments say: ‘All my springs are in you’” (7)*

The Book of Revelation portrays to us the Higher Jerusalem, as all the redeemed enter into it carrying their harps. It will be an exultant musical band embracing billions of people from Adam to the end of times, who will unceasingly praise with the spirit of joy and exultation.

**Pope Theophiles** believes that when the spirit of man departs from this world, there will be a group of the hosts of darkness waiting to draw her to them, to share their destiny; and another group of angels, longing to receive her with the spirit of joy to enjoy the heavenly paradise.

- ❖ The prophet tells the church that all those dwelling in her are as though filled with joy and gladness<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ All the nations will stand in rows to praise God with joy, dwelling in the city whose foundations are set upon the holy mountains, which is, according to our Lord Christ who built it, glory be to Him, is not hidden because it is built on a mountain, while its gates and entrances are with us; and In its middle, all believers stand in a divine order, and filled with spiritual joy.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ I am truly terrified to think about such anguish waiting for the soul as she departs from the body, when, against her, the adversary hosts of evil spirits that rule the darkness of this wicked world, will come, and parade before her all the sins she has committed, with and without knowledge, or with ignorance in her days of youth. ... And on the other side, will stand the heavenly hosts, ready to parade the good works she has done. How much would be the anguish and terror that the soul will face at that time, until her position is finally proclaimed, and the verdict is issued by the Just divine Judge!. If she proves to be worthy of the paradise, she will be taken by the angels with great honor and joy; according to the Scripture (87), to the unutterable glory, where there is

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<sup>1</sup> *On Psalms, homily 18*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms, homily 18*

*“everlasting joy and gladness, and where sorrow and sighing shall flee away”* (Isaiah 35: 10).

**(Pope Abba Theophilus)**

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 87**

**BY YOU, I WILL ENTER INTO YOUR BELOVED CITY**

- ❖ You came down to our land to proclaim Your amazing love of us;  
You carried us in You to bring us forth into Your heavenly church;  
You are the Way that will bring us forth unto You.  
You are the door through which we shall enter into her glories;  
You are the secret of her glory and splendor.
- ❖ Glorious things are spoken of Your city;  
In her, the prophecies of the prophets were fulfilled;  
In her, heavenly secrets were revealed;  
In her, voices of exultation are unceasingly heard;  
In her, the divine truth and the joyful teachings are transfigured.
- ❖ I wonder when will You come on the clouds!  
For then, I will carry the magnificent harp of the spirit;  
To join all those standing on Your right hand;  
My whole being will play an eternal symphony of love;  
That brings gladness to the heavenly hosts;  
We shall all play it together;  
What a glorious heavenly church!

## PSALM 88

### A MISERABLE NIGHT

This is counted by some as the saddest of all the psalms; in which the psalmist searched for the most bitter terms and expressions to describe the condition he has reached; a seemingly with no hope of salvation<sup>1</sup>.

Some, however believe that it expresses what the Lord Christ has endured when, through His own free will, He took upon Himself to bear our sins; when the adversary hosts were stirred up against Him; when His soul was labored with calamities; when he descended into the pit as someone without power; and was counted by His crucifiers as the object of god's wrath.

It is, as well, the only psalm that did not end with joy and praise, or with thanksgiving to God. Even though, according to St. Jerome, it is more like a praise presented by the children of resurrection, having perceived what the Lord Christ has done, when His soul descended to

Hades, and carried the captives to bring them forth to paradise.

<b>1-A cry-out seeking the divine help</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2- A lamentation by a suffering righteous</b>	<b>3 - 9</b>
<b>3- Inquiries by someone on the verge of the grave</b>	<b>10 - 12</b>
<b>4- Inquiries about the reason behind the affliction</b>	<b>13 - 17</b>

#### The title:

A song. A psalm of the sons of Korah (to the end). By the chief Musician: according to *Mahalath Leannoth*; in antiphonal response to a contemplation by Heman the Ezrahite.

According to **St. Jerome**:

1- The **sons of Korah**, as we saw in psalm 85, refer to the sons of resurrection; as 'Korah' means (Golgothah or Calvary).

2- **To the end**: As this psalm is a praise to be said, not at the beginning, where the father Patriarchs were; nor in the middle, where the prophets were; but at the end, where the apostles and we, to whom the joy of the praise is promised, are.

3- The word *mahalath* in Hebrew means (Chorus), used where there are a multitude praising together in harmony, as though in one voice.

4- In **antiphonal response** refers to that all the multitudes respond together in praising God. It is the secret of the church of many nations, places, and different customs, assembled together to form one Chorus to glorify God.

The antiphonal response to the psalm is not only by words of the mouth, but by following the lead of the Lord Jesus Christ in His suffering for the sake of others. It is as though the goal of this psalm is to adopt the practical giving love of the Lord Christ for the sake of our brethren.

5- **Heman** is one of the chief Musicians like Asaph and others. As to the name **Ezrahite**, it is derived from 'Ezra', meaning (helper). Ezrahite therefore, means (the help of God). This church chorus is formed of all the nations through the help of God.

In conclusion, **St. Jerome** believes that the title refers to that this psalm concerns the sons of resurrection, who, by the grace and help of God, form together a chorus of all

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<sup>1</sup> William MacDonald: *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 1995, Ps. 88, *The Saddest Psalm*.

the nations of the world, to praise God in harmony at the end of times, when the gospel is preached; all responding together with the one promised spirit of joy,

❖ Here we find a prophecy about the sufferings of our Lord Christ. As, according to the prophet Peter: “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Peter 2: 21); And the apostle John says: “*He had to lay down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*” (1 John 3: 16); And: “*Although I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing*” (1 Corinthians 13: 3); all of which refer to the meaning of ‘**antiphonal response**’.

The Lord Christ proceeded first, followed by the chorus of martyrs, up to the end, to get a crown in heaven<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## 1- A CRY-OUT SEEKING THE DIVINE HELP:

**“O Lord, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You” (1)**

This beginning represents the only joyful ray amid the pitch darkness that prevailed upon the psalmist in this psalm; or, let us say, the only star to give light in such a night of darkness; after which the psalmist presented a very sorrowful statement, and cries out to the Lord; as someone who has no comfort.

Before starting his complaint to the Lord God of his salvation, the psalmist proclaims that, although his anguish reached a serious level, yet he was hoping that the Lord alone could save him.

**“Before You”**: Under the bitterness of intense affliction, man usually cries out; but the need is to cry out before the Lord, as God of his salvation. Many are used to fill the ears of men with their complaints of what have dwelt upon them; Others fill the air with complaints in vain; And still others bury their cries deep inside themselves, which may cause them ultimately to breakdown! ... I wish we, instead, pour ourselves before God, and present to Him the cries of our hearts; as He, alone, can grant us salvation.

❖ **“O Lord, God of my salvation”**. This psalm is actually sung in the name of the Savior; as what came in it of humble expressions, He utters by His Manhood for the sake of the salvation of humanity. “By day I cry out, and by night I seek before You”<sup>2</sup> (1)

(St. Jerome)

❖ Let us now listen to the voice of Christ lead us in singing in the prophecy; and to the chorus of His believers, by following His lead, or by thanksgiving<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry” (2)**

As his heart grew bitter because of his anguish, his voice became so faint, that he seeks from the God of his salvation to incline his ear to hear the hidden cries of his heart. In his grief, he wishes to feel that he is standing before the Lord, and in His presence; as though, God is only preoccupied with listening to him. Feeling that the language no more helps him to express his condition, he does not care to prepare an eloquent speech to

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 88 (87).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 65.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 88 (87).

complain, but prays to God to listen to the language of sorrow that prevail upon his depths.

❖ **“Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit”** (Luke 23: 46); *“Let my prayer come before you; Incline your ear to my cry”* (2) It is the voice of the Son, speaking in our name to the father. *“Incline your ear”* is a sign of intense weakness that makes your voice so faint, that to hear it, the listener must incline his ear! Although it may seem unbecoming to say that the God the Father is unable to hear the voice of God the Son, except by inclining His ear; yet we should take into consideration that the holy Book sometimes uses some of the expressions of our human weakness to make us understand more easily what it says<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Even our Lord prays, not as God, but as a suffering servant He: : *“cried out day and night”* (1)

Our prayers, to enter before God, means receiving it; And inclining His ear is a sign of compassion, by listening to it; For God has no body members as we do<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ So Jesus did *“when he got wearied from His journey, He sat by the well”* (John 4: 6). He got wearied because He did not find the people of God whom He sought, *“They went away from the presence of the Lord”* (Genesis 4: 16). the sinner goes away, but the righteous comes in. Adam, as a sinner hid himself from the presence of the Lord; But the righteous says: *“Let my prayer come before You”* (2)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

## 2- A LAMENTATION BY A SUFFERING RIGHTEOUS:

***“For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave”* (3)**

The psalmist says that troubles have so gathered together upon him; that he is no more able to present a specific complaint. His heart became so full of sorrows, that there is no more space for any more. His life became like someone drawing near to the grave; he counts himself among the dead.

**St. Jerome** believes that the psalmist, here, describes what the Lord Christ endured on the cross; as He carried the sins of the whole world, then descended to the pit to liberate the captives. *“He drew near to it”*, but it was impossible for the pit to take hold of Him, on account of that He is without sin.

❖ Another prophet says that: *“He has borne our griefs”* (Isaiah 53: 4); St. Matthew the Evangelist says: *“He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed”* (Mathew 26: 37). Our Lord Himself says: *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death”* (Mathew 26: 38). And the psalmist David, seeing by the spirit of prophecy, what is going to happen, said on His tongue: *“My soul is full of troubles; and my life draws near to the grave”* (3). And His body (the church) like a chorus following her Leader, should learn from her Head, that these sorrows are not because of our sins, but a sign of our human weakness.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 65.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 88 (87).

<sup>3</sup> Joseph 3: 8.

We hear the apostle Paul, a prominent member in this body, confess that his soul is full of such troubles, saying: *“I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart... for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites”* (Romans 9: 2-4)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ *“For my soul is full of troubles”*. I bear the sins of many; and the suffering for the sake of all, My soul is full of sorrows; I bear evil burdens to cast on the cross. *“My life draws near to the grave”*. He say well *“draws near”*, as He was not held in the pit, but drew near to it for our sake. In another psalm, the psalmist says in the name of the Lord: *“For You will not leave My soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption”* (Psalm 16: 10)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“I am counted with those who go down to the pit, I am like a man who has no strength”* (4)

In the midst of his anguish, the psalmist remembers the episode when the sons of Jacob cast their young brother Joseph in the well, where he became like a man who has no strength.

Because of us, the Lord Christ descended to the pit of Sheol; where His crucifiers assumed that He became without strength; and did not perceive that, by His descent He destroyed the gates of Sheol, and saved those who died on the hope, and were held in Hades for such a long time.

- ❖ As to the dry well in which Joseph was cast (Genesis 37: 24), Why should we marvel that the well of the Jews was without water? When it is written: *“having forsaken Him, the Fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no waters”* (Jeremiah 2: 13). And to know that this is true; let us hear what the Lord says about Himself on David’s tongue: *“You have laid Me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths (of death)”* (Psalm 88: 6 – Septuagint)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ *“I am counted with those who go down to the pit”*. Those who crucified Me assumed that I went down together with the rest of men to be held in the prison of the lower world; They did not perceive that I went down there to draw together with Me those who were held there. *“I am like a man who has no strength”*, Yet I am free among the dead; as the other men were held in the pit by the shackles of sin; as no man is without sin, even though his life is one day

As we all are *“caught in the cords of our sins”* (Proverbs 5: 22), he who goes down there, will be held by the law of the lower world. But by nature I am free; although I became like a sinner to the account of the sins of men<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“Adrift among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and who are cut off from Your hand”* (5)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 88 (87).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 65.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph 3: 16.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 65.

In the Septuagint version, this text came as: *“I became free among the dead”*. The fathers of the church talked much about the Lord Christ, who, with His complete free will, received death for our sake, and became like the slain who lie in the grave.

❖ *“like the slain who lie in the grave”*. He did well by saying *“(like) the slain”*. He received the wounds for the sake of the salvation of humanity; according to the words of Isaiah: *“He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows”* (Isaiah 53: 4)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Although He was called *“dead”*, yet not like those dead who lie in hell; He was the only One free among the dead (5)<sup>2</sup>.

❖ **“The sun was darkened”** (Luke 23: 45) for the sake of the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4: 2); **“The rocks were split”** for the sake of the Spiritual Rock (Mathew 27: 51; 1 Corinthians 10: 4); ... and **“The graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who have fallen asleep were raised”**, because of Him who is *“free among the dead”* (Mathew 27: 52; Psalm 88: 5); *“having set the captives free from the waterless pit”* (Zechariah 9: 11)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ Who can liberate from death, and from the bondage, but Him who is *“free among the dead”* (5)? And who is He who is *“Free among the dead”*, except Him who is without a sin among the sinners? Our Savior Himself says: *“The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me”* (John 14: 30). *“The ruler of this world”*, who holds fast those whom he deceives, seduces, and provokes toward sin and death, *“has nothing in Me”*

Come, O Lord; Come, O Savior; so that the captive may recognize You!

Let him who was taken into captivity escape to You; Be his Redeemer!

I was lost, yet I was found by Him, in whom the devil has nothing that come from the body!

Is it possible for a mortal body to take hold of Him, to crucify and to kill Him?!

You are wrong, O deceiver; The Savior would never be deceived ... You may see in Him a body prone to death; yet not the body of

sin, but *“by sending His own Son in the likeness of the sinful flesh, on account of sin; God condemned sin in the flesh”* (Romans 8: 3) For what goal? *“That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”* (Romans 8: 4).

Our souls will not abide in bondage, for He forgives our debts day after day<sup>4</sup>.

❖ With active worthiness, He saves from this bondage of sin; He who says in the psalms: *“I became like a man who has no strength; Free among the dead”* (4-5). For He alone was free, for He alone was without sin. By saying in the gospel: *“The ruler of this world is coming and he has nothing in Me”* (John 14: 30), He refers to the devil who came in the persons of the Jews who persecuted Him. He finds nothing in Me of the sin, as he would in those who are killed as righteous; For I do not pay the punishment

<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 65.

<sup>2</sup> مقال 10 : 4 .

<sup>3</sup> مقال 13 : 34 .

<sup>4</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 84: 6.

of death because of My sins; but I endure death to fulfill the will of My Father; I would not suffer, if I am not willing to do so; “*I have the power to lay My life down, and I have the power to take it again*” (John 10: 18). That is definitely the One who is “*free among the dead*”<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ We are partly free and partly in bondage. Our freedom is not yet complete, nor utterly pure; for we have not yet entered into eternity. We are still partly in weakness, yet have partly gained freedom. What we have committed of sins are already cleansed by baptism; But is evil completely wiped out, and we have become without weakness?<sup>2</sup>  
(St. Augustine)

- ❖ He delivered His life for our sake; and became as free among the dead (5). Death did not attack Him because of sin like it did to us; As he was, and still is without sin; He endured passion by His own free will, for our sake, and for the sake of His limitless love for us<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril the great)

***“You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths” (6)***

In the Septuagint version it came as: “**They have put me in the lowest pit, in darkness and in the shadows of death**”. The wicked assumed that they can bury the true Light; not perceiving that the true Light scatters the darkness.

The psalmist moans that his acquaintances and friends disappeared as though in darkness; as though they do not see him; or so that he would not see them and ask for their help. So he portrays himself as someone who has no other company but anguish, suffering, and darkness; has no one to support him or partake of his feelings.

- ❖ “***You have sunk me in the lowest pit***”. I have descended to the lowest pit to save the whole humanity from the chains of that pit, “***In the darkness of the pit, in the shadow of death***” (6). He did not say “*in death*”, but said “*in the shadow of death*”; For death has not yet prevailed on Me by the Jews, but “*the shadow of death*”. It was My will to descend for the sake of the salvation of humanity; I, the Light, descended to the pit to liberate the souls from the pit of darkness.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ That was more realized in the Person of Christ; For He had in His authority, not only those who were cast in prison, but, valiantly and successfully, He called even those cast by the devil in the prison of Hades; Has ascended to the above, and the captivity captivity; and gave life to those cast by the devil to death<sup>4</sup>.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- ❖ Not knowing what they were doing, they put Him there I do not know if “*the shadows of death*”, refers to the death of the body, or to Him, about whom is written: “*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light*” (Isaiah 9: 2); as by faith, they were moved from the darkness and the death of sin, to light and life<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41: 7.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Ioan. Tr., 41: 10.*

<sup>3</sup> *In Luc. Ser. 87.*

<sup>4</sup> *Sermon 9: 5.*

<sup>5</sup> *On Ps. 88 (87).*

- ❖ He did not die because of a sin He committed, but Christ came to die, and not to sin; By sharing our punishment but not our sins, He cancelled both the punishment and the sin. ... What is the punishment He cancelled? That which we were to get after this life<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You have afflicted me with all Your waves” (7)*

The whole Love, by His own free will, accepted to take our place, to bear our sins, and to become as though the wrath meant for us, dwells upon Him, to reconcile us with the Father, and to clothe us with His righteousness.

- ❖ *“Your wrath lies heavy upon me”*. Your wrath fell upon me, to be withdrawn from the others; And *“You have afflicted me with all Your waves”*, The full storm came upon me, so that peace and quiet would prevail upon the world.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ They assumed that the wrath of God not only stirred up against Him, but heavily fell upon Him. They dared to condemn Him to death, even to the most horrible kind of death, the death on the cross; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written: ‘cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’”* Galatians 3: 13); and intending to commend His obedience, which he has done to extreme humility, he said: *“He humbled Himself, and became obedient to the point of death”*, and as though this is not horrible enough, he added: *“even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2: 8). With the same idea, it is said in the psalm: *“You have afflicted me with all Your horrors”*, translated by some as *“with all your waves”*, or *“with all Your currents”* (7); or as it came in another psalm: *“All Your waves and billows have gone over me”* (Psalm 42: 7)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“You have put away my acquaintances far from me; Yu have made me an abomination to them. I am shut in, so that I cannot escape” (8)*

Having been hanged on the cross, His disciples ran away, together with all those on whom He has poured His gifts. And by sunset, the Jews sought His removal from the cross, lest the Sabbath would be defiled! ... The Holy One who by His Spirit, He sanctifies the sinners, was an abomination to them!

**St. Augustine** wonders what is meant by *“His acquaintances”*. Although the Lord Christ, the Creator, knows every single human soul, Yet He counts the righteous as His acquaintances; whereas the wicked are not worthy to be so counted.

He means His disciples who ran away, and did not even attend His trial; Or he probably means, although they were His acquaintances, yet, they still did not know Him as being, in truth, the Word of God.

- ❖ *“You have put away my acquaintances”* (8). If by *“His acquaintances”*, he means those who knew Him, that would be all men, as who among them does not know Him? ... He rather means those who knew Him as much as they could perceive, at least as a

<sup>1</sup> Sermon 231: 2.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 88 (87).

Righteous man, but not as God, whom He counts them as His acquaintances; but not the wicked to whom He will ultimately say: “*I never knew you*” (Matthew 7: 23) Is that said because His disciples were outside while He was tried inside (Matthew 26: 56)?; Or shall we give these word a deeper meaning: that, by saying “*You have put away*”, he means: You kept My true identity hidden from My acquaintances; You did not reveal it to them<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*You have put away my acquaintances*”. In my suffering on the cross, even my disciples ran away; all of them distanced themselves from me; even Peter himself said, “*I do not know this man*” (Mark 14: 71); they looked at me as an abomination; And the Jews cried out, saying: “*Crucify him; We have no king but Caesar*” (See John 19: 15). “*I am shut in, so that I cannot escape*”. Although the Jews betrayed me, yet, in my mercy, full of compassion, I did not forsake them, but loved them. When they delivered me to Pilate, I did not escape, but prayed for them on the cross, saying: “*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do*” (Luke 23: 34).

When “*they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff; then passing through the midst of them He went His way*” (Luke 4: 29-30). That is what He intends to say: Is it not possible for Me now, while I am shut in, to escape from their nets and from the danger of death by the power of My Deity? Yet, I have come to suffer; My will is to be shut in, and My will is not to escape.

To interpret it differently, I am shut in as Man, Yet I haven’t forsaken My deity.

I am shut in by men, Yet I have not forsaken the bosom of the Father.

I am shut in as Man on earth, Yet, being God I did not withdraw from heaven.

(St. Jerome)

“*My eye wastes away because of affliction. Lord, I have called all day upon You, I have stretched out My hands to You*” (9)

He, whose eyes are on the whole earth, who never sleep nor slumber; the Almighty bowed down His head on the cross, and gave up His Spirit, as though in humiliation. His crucifiers did not perceive that His hands are stretched to embrace everyone who intends to return to Him, to open up his insight to perceive the divine truth, and to recognize the eternal secrets.

**St. Augustine** believes that the physical eyes of the Lord Christ did not waste away, even in the moments of crucifixion. If the church is the body of the Lord Christ, His eyes would refer to His disciples who have got a kind of vision, like St. Peter to whom the Father proclaimed that

Christ is the Son of the living God (Matthew 16: 16). Yet, this Peter was weak during the trial, the passion, and the crucifixion of the Lord Christ.

As to stretching His hands, it refers to the Lord stretching His hands on the cross. As to the expression: “*all day long*”, the Jews used to refer what is a part to what is whole; as saying that He was buried three days and three nights. According to **St. Augustine**, stretching the hands refers to doing good, as He never ceased to do.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 88 (87).

- ❖ *“My eye wastes away because of affliction”*; It grew dim. I, the One, sound by the power of My Deity, became weak for the sake of the sins of men.
- ❖ *“Lord, I have called all day upon You”*; not only by My voice, but also by My heart. That is the way we should call God, crying out in our hearts: *“Abba Father”* (Galatians 4: 6). *“I have called all day upon You; I have stretched My hands to You”*, a testimony from the Holy Book used by the apostle Paul in the name of the Savior in His epistle to the Romans (Romans 10: 21).

(St. Jerome)

### **3- INQUIRIES BY SOMEONE ON THE VERGE OF THE GRAVE:**

*“Will You work wonders for the dead? Shall the (shades of the) dead arise and praise You?”* (10)

In the Septuagint version it came as: **“Or shall (the physicians) arise and confess You?”**; Commenting on this, **St. Augustine** says that, as the medical physicians do not heal the sick by their own power; the spiritual physicians, likewise, cannot draw anyone to life without the divine grace, according to the words of the Lord Christ: *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”* (John 6: 44).

As long as man is dead by his lack of faith, he would not enjoy the wonders of God, namely, the entrance into sonhood to God, and the renewal of his nature through baptism; And no spiritual physician, without the grace of God, can bring someone dead by the Spirit, back to life, to glorify God, confessing his sins, and the work of redemption.

*“Is Your steadfast love declared in the grave, or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction (Abaddon)?”* (11)

Here, the psalmist feels that his situation has become very serious; that he was on the verge of death. Will God work wonders or signs to save him after death? Or will God be glorified in him after turning into a nonexistent shade? Is there any hope for him after his sure perdition by death?

The Lord Christ, on the other hand, by His own free will, gave up His Spirit; and by His own free will, took it back; having proclaimed when He brought Lazarus back to life: *“I am the resurrection”* (John 11: 25).

The crucifiers, assuming that the life of the Lord Christ has come to an end; and that they are through with the wonders He was doing; did not perceive that His resurrection from the dead was the greatest of His wonders, that granted life and resurrection to those who believe in Him.

If during His life on earth He revealed His love and mercies to many; By His death and resurrection He presented His divine mercies to the sinners, and opened the gates of heaven to all those who call Him, of all nations.

The word *“Abaddon”* is derived from the Hebrew verb ‘to destroy’, which conforms with the Arabic verb with the same meaning. *“Abaddon”* therefore means ‘destruction’, or ‘destroyer’, conforming with the Greek term: ‘Apollyon’, which came once in the New Testament (Revelation 9: 11), as the name of the angel of the bottomless pit, or the devil of destruction.

In the Old Testament it was used to refer to the **world of the dead** in its horrific and destructive aspect; as it came in (psalm 88: 11). In the book of ‘Job’ it came

analogous to Sheol (Job 26: 6); and in that of Proverbs 15: 11; 27: 20. It also came analogous to death, and sometimes to the grave<sup>1</sup>.

***“Shall Your wonders be known in the darkness? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?” (12)***

Speaking in the name of the suffering humanity, in the moments of her weakness, the psalmist says that she feels that God has to move fast. As, on one aspect, no wonders could be enjoyed by man after his death; And on another aspect, God would not be glorified, nor His mercy proclaimed after man enters into the darkness of the grave.

Humanity did not perceive what God has prepared for her through the death of the Lord Christ, and His burial in the grave, when the atonement is realized, not only for those who cried out to him in His days; But He crossed over to Hades to proclaim the good news of salvation; And His work will extend along the generations to the end of time.

**St. Augustine** believes that “*the darkness*” here, is analogous to non-belief, according to the words of the apostle: “*You were once darkness*” (Ephesians 5: 8). Whereas “*the land of forgetfulness*”, is he who forgets God: “*The fool said in his heart, ‘There is no God’*” (Psalm 14: 1).

❖ The meaning of the whole phrase (9 – 12), would probably be: [Lord, I called You in the midst of my sufferings all day long; I stretched my hands to You; I did not cease to stretch them to work for the sake of Your glory. So why would the wicked be stirred up against me, except because You do not perform wonders among the dead? For those wonders would not move them to faith; and the physicians would not be able to restore them to life to glorify You? For Your hidden grace is not in them to draw them to faith].

No one can come to me, unless You draw him Yourself. Would Your compassion be declared in the grave? Namely, in the grave of the dead soul, which is weighed under the burden of the body?

***“Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?”*** In the darkness of death; namely, in him who forgets you, who lost the light of this life; How would Your wonders work, and Your righteousness be known<sup>2</sup>?

**(St. Augustine)**

#### **4- An INQUIRY ABOUT THE REASON BEHIND THE AFFLICTION:**

***“But to You I have cried out, O Lord, and in the morning my prayer comes before You” (13)***

If humanity in its weakness urges God to give His help before death dwells on those who suffer, and yet God is not glorified in them; the psalmist cries out to the Lord in the night, and in the morning he finds His response.

The talk here is probably in the name of the Lord Christ. When the crucifiers assumed that they are through with the story of Jesus, and that it has finally gone into forgetfulness; once the dawn of Sunday came, He is raised from death, and by His death, His amazing salvation was realized.

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<sup>1</sup> *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Abaddon.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 88 (87).*

❖ *“and in the morning my prayer comes before You”* (13)

**He calls us** when He says: *“All day long I have stretched My hands to a disobedient and contrary people”* (Romans 10: 21). And we call Him when we say: *“Lord, every day I have called upon You”* (9).

**He waits for us**, as said by the prophet: *“Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to You”* (Isaiah 30: 18). And we wait for Him when we say to Him: *“I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined to me”* (Psalm 40: 1); And, *“Lord, I hope for Your salvation, and I do Your commandments”* (Psalm 119: 166).

**He strengthens us** when He says: *“Though I disciplined and strengthened their arms, yet they devise evil against Me”* (Hosea 7: 15). He exhorts us **to strengthen ourselves** by saying to us: *“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees”* (Isaiah 35: 3).

**The Lord Jesus cries out:** *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me to drink”* John 7: 37). And the prophet cries out to Him: *“I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God”* (Psalm 69: 3).

We seek the Lord when we say: *“I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called Him, but He gave me no answer”* (Songs 5: 6). So also **the bride of the song seeks Him**, and weeps with tears, saying: *“By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought Him, but I did not find Him”* (Songs 3: 1)<sup>1</sup>.

(Father Sherimon)

**“Lord, why do You cast off my soul? Why do you hide Your face from me?”**  
(14)

In the Septuagint version it came as: *“Lord, why do you throw my prayer aside?”*

In the time of affliction, the one who suffers often feels as though God has cast him off; and hid His face from him so as not to hear his cries. Bearing our sins on the cross, the Lord Christ cried out: *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”* (Mark 15: 34; Psalm 22: 1).

❖ As it came in the form of a question; not that the wisdom of God is to be blamed, or as though it does something without reason; So it is in this psalm *“Lord, why do You cast off my soul?”* (14). But looking more carefully, we shall realize that the delay in responding to the prayers of the saints, although it may seem as a rejection, yet it is like blowing into the flame in order that it would kindle with more splendor<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught”** (15)

In the midst of intense anguish, man may often forget the multitudes of God’s goodness on him; and complain as though there is nothing in his life since his youth but terrors and troubles.

Although the psalmist’s soul got distraught because of the intense terrors into which he entered, yet he did not fall into despair; as he still cries out to the Lord, God of his salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 13: 12.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 88 (87).

- ❖ All those terrors (15-18) have been realized in the members of the body of Christ; And God seemed to hide His face from their prayers, after listening to them according to their will; For they actually do not know that responding to their requests is not for their own good.

The church often hungers and thirsts; She has been afflicted from her youth up (15); as said by the body of the Lord Christ in another psalm: *“Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth”* (Psalm 129: 1). For this reason, while some of her members are exalted while still in this world, to demonstrate the greatness of humility, on this body, embracing the saints and believers, whose Head is Christ, the wrath of God may dwell, yet it would never abide on them.

Whereas concerning the non-believer, it is written: *“The wrath of God abides on him”* (John 3: 36). God’s terrors may cause the weak believer to be distraught; yet that will be all what may happen to him. Although not always, but it is so written to warn him to have fear. Sometimes these terrors provoke the soul to meditate in the significance of the troubles around her, which seem as though flowing over her from all sides like waters, and covering her in fears. The church in her journey is never spared of such terrors, which sometimes dwell on one member, and some other time on another; and saying “all day long”, means it is continuous until the end of time. The friends and acquaintances amid their own worries would often forsake the saints in the time of terror; as is said by the apostle: *“No one stood with me; but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them”* (2 Timothy 4: 16)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off” (16)***

At the time of intense anguish, man may become distraught; and will often refer what comes over him to God’s wrath on him.

***“They came around me all day long like water, they engulfed me altogether” (17)***

Amid the anguish, man may feel, not only that he has been so afflicted since his youth (15), but that terrors come around him all day long, and on a daily basis, to engulf him altogether.

- ❖ ***“They came around me all day long; they engulfed me altogether (on all sides)”***: The Pharisees and the priests, together with Pilate, and the common people!

(St. Jerome)

***“Loved one and friend You have put far from me, and my acquaintances into darkness” (18)***

- ❖ In the midst of my sufferings, All have forsaken me, even My disciples.

(St. Jerome)

In this psalm, It is to be noticed that with every supplication and worship, he presents its justification:

Supplication or worship	Its justification
1- He asks God to listen to him (1)	For He needs help

<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 88 (87).

2- He asks God to keep his soul (2)	For he is pious
3- He seeks God's mercy (3)	For he cries out to Him all day long
4- He asks God to bring joy to him (4)	For He is abundant in mercy
5- In his affliction he calls Him (7)	For He listens to him.
6- He eternally glorifies His name (12)	For His mercy is great
7- He seeks a sign for good (17)	For God helps and comforts him

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 88**

### **LET ME POUR THE CRIES OF MY HEART BEFORE YOU**

- ❖ Your voice pierces my whole being  
My God, My God, Why have You forsaken me?  
For my sake, You have borne the punishment of my sins;  
You accepted death to make void the sting of death and corruption.  
And to liberate me from the authority of the devil and the sin.
- ❖ As the terrors pour on me;  
I count it as I am born to suffer;  
As though the terrors are accompanying me since my youth  
I assume that God's wrath dwells on me;  
That His currents of water engulf me;  
That He has hidden His face from me;  
That He no more listens to my prayer.
- ❖ To You, O Lord I confess that,  
In my anguish, I sometimes resort to a friend, and fill his ears with my complaints;  
In my bitterness, I sometimes cry out in my depths;  
And I destroy myself by myself.  
Teach me, and train me to resort only to You;  
To cry out before You; For You alone are God of my salvation;  
By Your fatherhood, wisdom, and might, You support me, and save me.
- ❖ My friends and acquaintances deserted me;  
I have no one to help me;  
And no one to partake of my sufferings;  
But you promised that Your wrath abides on the wicked;  
And not on those who believe in You and walk in Your ways.
- ❖ My God, In the midst of my affliction, I feel as though I am lonely;  
My tongue cannot express what goes on within me;  
Incline Your ear to listen to the sighs of my hearts;  
In my anguish, I wish to see your face, and to feel Your presence.
- ❖ I often feel as though my sufferings are beyond my endurance;  
I count myself like a dead man, without life in me;  
Even if I die, You are capable of bringing me back to life;  
Capable of releasing me out of my prison, and liberating me;
- ❖ Why does my soul moan in me; when You have endured all our disgrace?  
On the cross You became like dead, You, the Grantor of resurrection;  
You were laid in the grave like dead;  
When You are the Free, and Grantor of freedom:  
You went down to Hades to bring me up to Your paradise;
- ❖ You have walked among us, shining with Your mercies over many;  
But by Your death and resurrection You opened before us the gates of Your heavens.  
You stretched Your hands for the whole world;  
And is risen from the dead to grant even the dead the new life.

- ❖ Your resurrection brought light to my depths;  
Even If I fall in terrors;  
And my soul is distraught;  
I Will cry out to You, God of my salvation.
- ❖ Indeed, I often feel as though Your wrath has dwelt upon me;  
Even my relatives and friends flee from me.
- ❖ I soon perceive Your wisdom, and enjoy Your abundant grace.  
What an honor to be crucified together with You!  
You liberated me from death, You the Free among the dead.  
Even If you delay to respond to my prayer;  
You still kindle the flame of Your love in me;  
And fill my depths with an inexpressible splendor;  
In the midst of my affliction, when I discover Your unique friendship;  
I attach to You, and the tongue of my heart praises You;  
Glory be to You, O the amazing love!

## PSALM 89

### AN EVERLASTING COVENANT

This psalm is considered the last one in the third book of psalms (Psalms 73-89); this book ends by a psalm concerning the everlasting covenant between God and king David, a covenant that touches the life of every true Christian, on whose heart the true King, the Son of David eternally reigns.

This psalm is based on the covenant, by which the Lord through the prophet Nathan, proclaimed to David: “*Your kingdom shall be established forever before you; Your throne shall be established forever*” (2 Samuel 7: 16). This divine promise carries a clear prophecy about the Lord Christ, of the seed of David, who will reign in His church forever.

This psalm was most probably written at a time when the people were going through such affliction to assume that God has forgotten His promise. It is as well, a prophecy about the sufferings of the Lord Christ, and the sufferings of His church, who has a complete trust in the steadfast love of God, and His faithfulness in His covenant<sup>1</sup>.

<b>1- An opening praise</b>	<b>1 - 4</b>
<b>2- God of the covenant</b>	<b>5 - 14</b>
<b>3-The people and the divine covenant</b>	<b>15 - 18</b>
<b>4- The items of the covenant</b>	<b>19 - 37</b>
<b>5- Man, the breaker of the covenant</b>	<b>38 - 45</b>
<b>6- A cry-out</b>	<b>46 – 51</b>

#### The title:

“**A contemplation of Ethan the Ezrahite**”. This title, according to **St. Jerome**, reveals what came in the psalm. If the word “Ethan” means (strong) or (brave); and “the Ezrahite” means (he who gets help from God), This psalm which includes a promise by a vow, from God: “*I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations*” (3-4); a vow to us believers; a vow presented to the strong and the brave, to enjoy the divine help. According to St. Jerome: [That promise about Christ, which is indeed presented to us; bears a secret meaning<sup>2</sup>].

This divine promise will never fail; As, although it is not literally realized in the Jews, yet it is secretly realized in us; as the Lord Christ, from the seed of David, sits on the throne of His church, as well as in the heart of every believer.

❖ No man is strong except by hope in the promise of God; as, according to our worthiness, we are weak, but by His mercy, we are strong; In himself, man is weak, but by the mercy of God, he is strong. That is why the psalmist starts by saying: “*I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations*” (1)<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

#### 1- AN OPENING PRAISE:

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. S. Plumer, Ps. 89.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

Although it is obvious that this psalm was written at a time, it so seemed to the people that God has forgotten His promise or covenant given to His servant David, Yet the author starts it by praise, and the proclamation of his trust in the eternal mercies of God, the steadfastness of His truth, and the faithfulness in His covenant with His chosen; And in that heaven testifies to His wonders which He does in the congregation of His saints; A line, he repeats several times in this psalm.

***“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever; with my mouth will I make known your faithfulness to all generations” (1)***

The author proclaims his exultation and gladness in the mercies of God under all circumstances, and at all times. Trusting in God’s faithfulness to all generations, he would never fear or get disturbed concerning the future.

❖ ***“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever”***. He does not say “of the mercy”, but “of the mercies”. It would be one mercy if it is one sin; But being so many, so would be the mercies of God. *“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever”*.... Having acquired the mercies of the Lord forever, It is befitting of me to praise Him forever; for the cause of my praise is forever. ... He who sings, would drive grief and fear away, and set joy in, because he would acquire mercy. That is then what the psalmist mean to say: [As my sins are forgiven through the compassion of God; I shall keep singing of His mercies. And as “forever” means: Having compassion on me, not for a limited time, but forever, I, on my part, will also praise You forever, and will never cease; for You save me forever].

***“With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations” (1)***. How great is the sequence of this psalm! The psalmist did not start it by the “faithfulness”, then reached to the “mercies”; but, having his sins forgiven, he got the “mercies” first, then reached to the “faithfulness”. Indeed, when I was a sinner, I did not dare to approach the “faithfulness”; but once I got the “mercies”, then, with a brave heart, and without fear, I dared to proclaim the “faithfulness”. By saying: “to all generations” he means the two generations: the first one of the circumcised, and the other of the Gentiles. To the first, Peter was sent; and to the second Paul was sent He (the Lord Jesus Christ) who, in the first generation, spoke by the fathers and the prophets; He then spoke in His Person (Hebrew 1: 1-2); And as said in the Song of songs (1: 1): “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth”<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ If do not obey You, I would not be Your servant; And if I only speak what is my own (and not what is Yours), I would be a liar. My talk is therefore of two parts: one is Yours, and the other is my own: the truth Is Yours, and the language is my own<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“I will declare that your mercy shall be built up forever; Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens” (2)***

By saying that God’s mercies shall be built up (stands firm) forever, he means that no man, nor a generation can limit or perceive God’s mercy as it is. Being without limits, humanity will keep experiencing His mercies forever; and will stay amazed by His

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

exalted love. It does not start, to end with a certain generation; But is like bricks of stone built in a building that stays steadfast and well established, until we enjoy it in the climax of its glory, on the day we encounter the Lord Christ, and we enjoy the fellowship of the eternal glories. Our entry into heaven confirms that those mercies would never cease.

❖ *“For I will declare that Your mercy shall be built up forever”*. I (the Lord Jesus Christ), who spoke in the Old Testament by the fathers and the prophets, I speak now in Myself. I did not come to void the commandments of mercy, established by the law, but to build upon their foundation; as I said in the gospel: *“Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I did not come to destroy, but to build”* (Matthew 5: 17) What is then the message when the prophet say *“built up”*, as though it is a place or a city? (aedificabitur). Let us search in the Book of Genesis about the origin of the world *“aedificatione”*.

God took one of Adam’s ribs and built it into a woman (see Genesis 2: 22). Here, the Holy Book uses (build) *“aedificavit”*. As the concept of building usually refers to setting a great building, Adam’s side from which a woman was formed may refer to ‘the apostolic authority’ -- Christ and the church. That is why the Holy Book says that a woman was formed (aedificavit) from Adam’s rib.

Let us now go to the second Adam, and see how the church was set into a (building) ‘aedificetur’ from the side of the Savior, the side that was stabbed while hanged on the cross, out of which blood and water came. Do you wish to know how would the church be built from blood and water? First of all, by the water of baptism sins are forgiven; Then, by the blood of the martyrs, the building is crowned. As it is obvious that the church is built by the compassion of God, It is consequently logic that *“Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens”* (2). *“On earth You shall establish Your mercy, and in heaven You shall establish Your faithfulness”*<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

According to **St. Augustine**, the lord Christ is the Cornerstone that *connected* together the Israelites who believed in Him to the Gentiles who received Him. He gathered together the truth (the faithfulness) through His promises to the Israelites, with the gentiles through His mercy. In Him the truth (the faithfulness) together with the mercy were realized.

❖ For some, you have to destroy, to rebuild, according to what is written in the prophet Jeremiah: *“See I have this day set you over the nation; to destroy and to plant”* (Jeremiah 1: 10). Indeed, all those who used before to worship the images and the stone, could not be built in Christ, unless their old practices are first destroyed.

All the ways of the Lord are mercy and faithfulness. Faithfulness in the realization of His promises could not be revealed, unless preceded by His mercy in the forgiveness of sins<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to My servant David”*  
(3)

Here, it is God Himself who speaks, who in His love proclaims that He cherishes the covenant He made with David, His beloved chosen.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

- ❖ ***“I have made a covenant with my chosen”***. Up to this very day, the Lord makes covenants with us; so that we may lead a good life, to be qualified for a fellowship with the chosen for a covenant with the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ The Lord swears to confirm His promise. Indeed man is forbidden to swear (Matthew 5: 34), lest, by making it a custom to swear, he, as man, may be deceived, and may fall into breaking his vow. God, however, alone, could never be deceived, nor break His vows<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations”***

(4)

He does not say: “Your (seeds)”, but says: “*your seed*” in the singular, as said by the apostle: “*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘and to seeds’ as of many, but as of one, ‘and to your seed’, who is Christ*” (Galatians 3: 16).

Although it was literally realized in David and his son Solomon, but the goal of that covenant was to proclaim the role of the Lord Christ, the Word of God, who took the form of a servant and became Man, to bring men forth into a new covenant, to enjoy the reconciliation with God, and the fellowship of eternal glory. That is what the archangel Gabriel proclaimed when he gave the good news of the divine incarnation to the virgin St. Mary, saying: “*Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the highest, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end*” (Luke 1: 31-33).

That covenant, established by a vow (1 Samuel 20: 3; Samuel 19: 23; Hebrew 6: 16); is the backbone of the prophecies, the subject of the praises of the singers along the generations; and remains the secret of joy and gladness for the church up to the ultimate day of the coming of the King of kings; and the object of the praise of the heavenly creatures themselves (Revelations 5: 6-14).

- ❖ ***“And build up your throne to all generations”***. The throne of God is built, as we already said, on two generations: on the circumcised, and on the Gentiles<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

According to **St. Augustine**, the throne of God is in us, and He reigns on us; This is the first generations; But He will also come on the day of the resurrection of the dead, and sits forever; and that will be the other generation.

- ❖ The seed of David is the seed of Abraham, to whom is said: “*To Your seed, who is Christ*” (Galatians 3: 16) ... Let us consider that the words: “*I will establish your seed forever*”, not only concern the body of Christ, born by St. Mary, but concern us all as well, who believe in Christ; as we are members, who could not be separated from their Head. If the Head is forever in glory, so will be the members; so that Christ will be whole forever.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

*“And build up your throne to all generations”*. Now, Christ has His throne set in us; For unless He sit in us, he would not reign on us; And unless He reigns on us, He would not sit in us. He sits in us and reigns in us; and will sit in another generation when He comes in the resurrection of the dead<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## 2- GOD OF THE COVENANT:

*“And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O Lord; Your faithfulness also in the congregation of the saints”* (5)

By the heaven he may mean the angels, as it came in Job 15: 15; Psalm 97: 6; Hebrew 1: 6. Many fathers, like **Sts. Jerome, Augustine, and the scholar Origen**, believe that they refer to the church, or the congregation of true believers, who became a new heaven, testifying to the wonders of God in them; and enjoying chastity, love, and purity of heart, etc; believed by some to be supernatural; and counted by the majority of men as imaginary and beyond human ability.

❖ You praise Him, on account of that the dead are risen; You should rather praise Him, on account of that the lost are saved. What an amazing grace and mercy! Yesterday, man was in a whirlpool of drunkenness, today he is adorned with reason; Yesterday he was sunken in luxuries, today he is in the beauty of moderation; Yesterday he was a blasphemer of God, today he is His a praiser of Him; Yesterday he was a subject of the created, today he became a subject of the Creator; Let them then become heavens; Let them praise the glorious works of God, by which they have become heavens<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“The heavens will praise Your wonders, O Lord”* (5). This line of thought to be an echo of the psalm that says: *“The heavens declare the glory of God”* (Psalm 19: 1). By a secret concept, the prophet calls the apostles “heaven”. If it is said to the sinner: *“You are dust, and to dust you will return”* (Genesis 3: 19), Why would it not be said to the saints: *“You are heaven, and to heaven you will return”*. As both the apostles and the saints have their citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3: 20); *“The heavens will praise your wonders”*, would refer to the repentance preached by the apostles, by which we came to know our Lord Jesus Christ. If we obey their counsel, and follow their lead, we could also be called ‘heaven’, as we imitate those whose citizenship is in there.

In another psalm, the psalmist says: *“I am a stranger on earth; a sojourners as all my fathers were”* (Psalm 39: 12). This city in Judaism; how could he call himself a sojourner? That is because all the saints in this world are sojourners on earth, have no longing for any earthly possessions; all their possessions are in heaven, where they have dwellings in the city *“whose Builder and Maker is God”* (Hebrew 11: 10). The prophet, therefore, is a sojourner in this world, hastening with a great zeal toward his home city, the kingdom of heaven ... The apostle teaches us that, although we have fallen from paradise by the sin of the first Adam, By the righteousness of the second Adam we shall return to paradise<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

***“For who in heaven can be compared to the Lord; Who among the sons of God can be likened to the Lord?” (6)***

If the Lord, the Word of God, by His incarnation, has taken the form of the servant, and by His own free will, he became as though less than the angels, physically submitting to death, and bearing our disgrace; Yet, none among all the heavenly beings could be compared to Him; As according to the apostle Paul: *“For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. And again: ‘I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son’. But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him’. And of the angels He says: ‘Who makes His angels spirits, and His ministers flames of fire’. But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever”* (Hebrew 1: 5-8).

There is no gap, greater than that between the Creator and the creature, whatever his position is; Or between the Unlimited and the limited!

❖ ***“For who in the clouds can be compared to the Lord?” (6)***. The “clouds” are the prophets and the apostles who, by the water of their teachings, satisfy the barren hearts of men. ... ***“Who among the sons of God can be likened to the Lord?”***. All the saints are called the sons of God, as they are sons by adoption; whereas the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is alone the true Son by nature; about whom the psalmist says: *“Who in the clouds among the sons of God can be likened to the Lord?”* Who among the angels or the saints can be compared to the Creator in glory and authority? As He Himself grants the glory to all, His praise is eternal; He whom all the creation fear and before whom they become terrified; He who is worshipped by the cherubim, the Seraphim, and the four living creatures (Revelation 5: 14); to whom is the glory and the authority forever and ever, Amen<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ “Emanuel” is called the ***“Firstborn among many brethren”*** (Romans 8: 29); He is God of the whole world; worshiped as God, reigns as God over those called His brethren through grace; and *“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those in earth, and of those under the earth. And every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2: 10-11)<sup>2</sup>.

❖ It is the will of Christ to grant us the grace of sonhood, we who are under the yoke of the world, and who are slaves by nature. Whereas Christ Himself is the true Son of God the Father, even after His incarnation, taking a body that was not His before<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great)

❖ We understand, O brethren, that by the “heavens” and the “clouds” is meant the preachers of the truth, the prophets, and the apostles, who proclaim the word of truth.... Let us contemplate why are they so called. They are “heavens” for the splendor of the truth; and “clouds” for the sake of the hidden things of the body. As all the clouds are vague because of their temporary nature: momentarily appearing and disappearing, the apostle says: *“Therefore, judge nothing before the time, until the*

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>2</sup> Glaphyra on Genesis 3: 173 B-c.

<sup>3</sup> I Luc. hom 10: 3.

*Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness*” (1 Corinthians 4: 5). In that instant, you will see what man says, and even what is in his heart, which you cannot now see. We are called clouds for the sake of the body, and we are preachers of the truth in the body; Yet our body comes in a certain way, while His comes in another way; We are called the sons of God, while He is so called in another way; He is a Cloud who came from a virgin, a Son from eternity, One with the Father in eternity; **“For who in the clouds can be compared to the Lord?”**<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be held in reverence by those who are around Him” (7)**

God stretches His hands with love for His believers, particularly for those sanctified for Him; And they in turn, being His sons hold Him with the fear and the reverence befitting to Him.

Who are **“those around Him”** but the heavenly hosts, and all the saints of the Old and the New Covenants?

❖ **“God, who is feared in the assembly of the saints; held in reverence by those who are around Him”**; namely, by those who by their life of purity are qualified to approach Him<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Being so preached all over the world, and through wonders performed by His ministers, He became feared and revered by those who are around Him<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty like You? Your faithfulness also surrounds You” (8)**

The opposition of the devil and the hosts of darkness to You, is in vain, for to You, submit all the hosts of heaven, and all creation, rational and irrational long to obey; the Mighty Lord of hosts, the whole Wisdom, in whom there is no fault, who, being Himself the Truth, grants those around Him to walk by the spirit of faithfulness and wisdom, after His example and Spirit.

❖ **“O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty like You? Your faithfulness also surrounds You”**. The Truth Himself says: **“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am”** (John 17: 24)<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Great is Your authority, having created heaven, earth, and all things in them; And what is greater, is Your compassion, that reveals Your faithfulness to all those around You<sup>5</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“You rule the raging of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them” (9)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>5</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

In the Septuagint version it came as: ***“You prevail upon the might of the sea”***. According to **St. Augustine**, the *“might of the sea”* refers to the nations that did not receive the faith, were stirred up, and killed some of Your believers; Although allowed by God, yet, as everything is under His authority, this will be just for a limited time, ***“its waves rise, then You still them”*** (9) .

The winds, the seas, and the oceans are all in the palm of His hand; and as said by the psalmist: *“Who stills the noise of the seas, and the tumult of the people”* (Psalm 65: 7). When the disciples were disturbed *“when a great tempest arose on the sea, the Lord said to them: “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, ‘Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?’”* (Matthew 8: 26-27).

The water often referred to people; and the waves to their disturbance, as well as to the temptations that dwell upon them. But the Lord Christ has the authority to grant exalted faith to His faithful servants, and to save them from temptations<sup>1</sup>.

***“You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain; You have scattered Your enemies by Your mighty arm”*** (10)

We already know that **‘Rahab’** refers to Egypt (Psalm 87: 4), where the Pharaohs represented violence, particularly when they it against the Jews, and killed their male newborns. In his haughtiness, Pharaoh entered into a battle against God Himself, and, intending to destroy His people,, all the newborn in Egypt were dead in one night, and Pharaoh and his army drowned in the Red Sea.

In the Septuagint version it came as: ***“You have humiliated the proud, as one who is slain”***. About a specific vicious serpent in the sea, the Holy Scripture says: *“From the bottom of the sea, I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them”* (Amos 9: 3); And, *“There is that Leviathan which You have made to play there”* (Psalm 104: 26).

**St. Augustine** also compares between the humiliation of the proud devil and the great humility of the Lord Christ; and compares killing or wounding the pride of the devil’s heart with the wounded Christ, about whom it is said: ***“You have scattered Your enemies by Your mighty arm”*** (10).

❖ He says: ***“You have humiliated the proud, as one who is slain”*** (10).

Before Your humility, the proud became humiliated.

The proud caught his proud victims through pride; While the Great, by His humility and believing in Him, He became little.

While the little man is strengthened by the example of Him who descended from His greatness to humility; the devil lost those whom he caught.

As this example happened before the eyes of men, they learned to condemn their pride, and to liken the humility of the Lord; Whereas the devil is cast down, and loses those under his authority, and becomes humiliated without learning.

You became humble and grant humility to others; You were wounded, and wound the others (who are crucified together with You); For Your shed blood *“cancels the written code (of sins) with its regulations that was against us”* (Colossians 2: 14; and can wounds the devil.

We should understand that the devil is wounded, not by stabbing the body, which he does not have, but by stabbing the pride of his heart<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“You have crushed the proud by a deadly breath”*. It is the devil who had a deadly wound by the nails of the cross<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours; the world and all its fullness, You have founded them”* (11)

He is the Creator of the heaven and earth, He support them by His exalted care; as nothing is impossible for Him.

*“All its fullness”* means all its inhabitants along the generations.

What are *“the Lord’s heavens”*, but those who preached the divine truth in the Old and the New Covenants? And what is His *“earth”*, but that which receives that truth as rain coming down from heaven<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“The north and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Your name”* (12)

These are two beautiful famous mountains: Mount ‘Tabor’ here, refers to the (west); being located west of the River Jordan, with an elevation of 1750 feet above sea level; and from its top you can see the Mediterranean Sea. Mount ‘Hermon’, on the other hand refers to the (east), 50 miles away from Mount Tabor, east of the River Jordan, with an elevation of 10,000 feet above sea level. All directions: north, south, east, and west, shout of joy, and glorify God, Creator of the whole universe.

*“The north and south, You have created”* (12). The north also refers to the anti-Christ, about whom the Lord says on the tongue of Jeremiah: “Out of the north, calamity (evil) shall break forth on the inhabitants of the land” (Jeremiah 1: 14)<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

According to **St. Augustine**, ‘Tabor’ means (the approaching light), and (Hermon’ means (deprivation) or (curse). Being the Light that is not kindled by an external source, when the Lord approaches, He, by His mighty arm, destroys the devil and curses him; namely, destroys the proud.

❖ Nothing and no one has authority against You, the Creator. He can indeed stir up the world (the sea) through his craftiness; but can he surpass the limits set by the Creator, who made all things? Why should I then fear the wind of the north? Why should I fear the seas? In the north, there is indeed the devil who said: *“I will sit ... on the farthest side of the north; ... I will be like the most high”* (Isaiah 14: 13-14). That is why You humiliated the proud as one who is slain<sup>5</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“You have a mighty arm; strong is Your hand, and high is Your right hand”* (13)

The arm refers to the might, and the right hand to the glory. God is both Mighty and Glorious, works in His believers to make them enjoy the spirit of strength and glory.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>5</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

And as said by the apostle Paul: “*What is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power*” (Ephesians 1: 19).

❖ Man should not think greatly of himself. “*You have a mighty arm*”. By You we were created; and in You we take refuge<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

“*Righteousness and justice are the foundations of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face*” (14)

If the throne of God is justice, truth or righteousness; His mercy and faithfulness in realizing His promises precede Him. In all His works, He is wholly Just, and wholly merciful.

❖ “*Righteousness and justice are the foundations of Your throne*” (14). Ultimately, your righteousness and justice will appear, while now they are hidden ... Some will sit on Your right hand, and others will sit on Your left hand (Matthew 25: 33). The non-believers will get terrified when they see Him whom the scoff now and in whom they do not believe. Whereas the righteous will rejoice when they see Him whom they do not see now, but in Him they believe<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### **3- THE PEOPLE AND THE DIVINE COVENANT:**

“*Blessed are the people who know the festal shout! They walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance*” (15)

The psalmist believes, having talked about God whoset His covenant with His people, that he wishes to become as though in an unceasing feast, where he perpetually hears the voice of the feast trumpets. He sets the covenant so that they would recognize the experience of the blessed heavenly life. The greatest of what they enjoy, is not getting temporal blessings, earthly goods, and material profits, but they enjoy the light of God’s countenance, to walk the journey of their life in an inexpressible glorious joy, and need nothing whatsoever; being in a fellowship with God, the Creator of all, the Initiator of everything, who cares for every thing great and small.

Talking about the church life as one of perpetual shouts of joy for the Lord, and commenting on the saying of the psalmist: “*Blessed are the people who know the festal shout*” (15), **the scholar Origen** say: [He does not say: Blessed are the people who practice the righteousness, nor those who know the secrets of heaven, earth, and stars; but “*those who know the festal shouts*” Here, he presents blessing in abundance. Why? Because all the people partake of the company of exultation. I so seems to me that the shot for joy means the unity of the heart, and the bond of the spoirit ... When the people shout with one accord, as it is mentioned in the book of Acts, an earthquake will happen (Acts 1: 12) ... If you wish, you could become ‘Isaac’ (meaning the laugh), and be joy for the church your mother<sup>3</sup>].

The work of the church is to bring forth the spirit of joy among all. The Word, having become seen through incarnation, you can say together with the apostle John: “*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>3</sup> In Josh. 7: 2.

eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled concerning the word of life, ... These things we write to you that your joy may be full” (1 John 1, 4). It is befitting of us to bear all signs of joy for the incarnation, inward and outward; on account of that our Christ has sanctified the incarnation, and became seen. The work of the church, both in the jubilee and in her life, to do her best to bring everyone forth into the joyful life; so that all would perceive that our gospel is joyful news; and the world would see the power of salvation in the joy of the church, as well as in provoking as much as she can of the spirit of true joy,

- ❖ I wish we would not be drowned in our afflictions, but offer thanksgiving in every situation, to acquire great profit, when we bring pleasure to God who allows for the afflictions<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ **“Blessed are the people who know the festal shout”**. What is meant by that? To know the joy that surpasses expression by words. That joy is not your own, as long as *“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1: 31). You should therefore rejoice, not in your glory, but in the grace of God, which, once you realize that the tongue cannot express its greatness, you can understand the meaning of the festal shout<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“In Your name they rejoice all day long; and in Your righteousness they are exalted” (16)**

The name of God, or His presence, is the secret of our exaltation all day long; namely, all the days of our life, even in the midst of affliction.

**“In Your righteousness they exalt”**: Namely in His righteousness, they enjoy the true righteousness, and their hearts and souls would be lifted up as though to heaven itself. It is as though, through His faithfulness in the realization of His promises, He lifts us up to live on His right hand, to enjoy the inner paradise, according to His promise: “I will be Glory in its midst”

- ❖ Why would He not stop until He establish the justice on earth? Do not interpret this that He has appointed a time to stop; namely, once He establish peace on earth. But what He says here, is that He will rather overcome His enemies, and prevail, to establish His justice in the whole world. The gospel is preached all over the world, as though its laws were established. It is written: *“Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your way is truth”* (Psalm 119: 142 LXX); And, *“In Your name they rejoice all day long”* (16 LXX). Being called Christians, we put all our hope in Him<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- ❖ If they rejoice in their iniquity, they would not rejoice all day long; as they would not continue rejoicing when they rejoice in themselves, and fall in pride<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> In Acts hom 42.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>3</sup> In Is. 3: 5 PG 70: 852 D.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

***“For You are the glory of their strength, and in your favor our horn is exalted”***  
**(17)**

Having the spirit of festal shout and exultation all the days of their life, and abiding to the righteousness and faithfulness of God, the believers practice such a life, not through a temporary emotional reaction, but through an enjoyment of the strength of God working in them; according to the words of the prophet David: *“For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield”* (Ps. 5: 12).

If God breaks the horns of the wicked, He exalts the horn of His children: *“I said to the boastful, ‘Do not deal boastfully’, and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up the horn, Do not lift up your horn on high; Do not speak with a stiff neck’”* (Psalm 75: 4, 5).

***“For our shield belongs to the Lord; and our king to the Holy One of Israel”***  
**(18)**

God does not only give us the strength to enter into a fight against the devil, his evil works, and his crafty tricks; And does not stop at providing us with someone to save us from our anguish, But He Himself is our shield, and is as well, our King and Savior from all our sins and weaknesses.

He is called *“the Holy One of Israel”*; being the Holy One who refers Himself to His church, sanctifies her, and purifies her of every sin and weakness.

❖ As a heap of sand, I was moving; Unless You lift me up, O Lord, I would fall.

He is the One who lift you; He is the cause of your enlightenment; By His light, you securely walk; and by His righteousness you are glorified. He lifts you up high; guards your weakness; grants you His power, and not your own.

**(St. Augustine)**

#### **4- THE ITEMS OF THE COVENANT:**

***“Then You spoke in a vision to Your holy one, and said, ‘I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people”*** (19)

In the Septuagint version it came as: *“Then, by inspiration (proclamation) You spoke to Your children”*.

In many versions the word *“holy one”* came in the plural tense. God often spoke with His holy ones through visions and divine proclamations: like the prophet Moses (Exodus 3); the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 18); and the ‘Seer’ Nathan (2 Samuel 7); that was how the prophet in the old was called.

By the *“Chosen One”* here, he means the Lord Christ, who came to save the world.

❖ *“I have exalted one chosen from the people”*; namely the Lord Christ, who is so called on account of that He has taken human body<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“I have found My servant David; With My holy oil I have anointed him”*** (20)

Here, he talks about choosing David as king, whose heart He found pious, and commanded Samuel to anoint him a king instead of Saul (1 Samuel 16: 1-13). So the Spirit of God dwelt over him. The anointment of David came as symbol for the true Son of David, who is anointed by the spirit of gladness for the salvation of the whole world.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

❖ God finds the lost soul as the good shepherd finds the lost sheep, and, according to the Lord Christ, the congregations of angels gather together to celebrate it; And it is also like that lost coin that was found after its owner lighted a lamp; then the friends and neighbors rejoiced (Luke 15: 9). David, the servant of God was also found, according to the psalm, saying: *“I have found My servant David, With My holy oil I have anointed him”* (20); by which David became a possession of the One who found him; according to what follows: *“With whom My hand will be established; Also My arm shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not outwit him, nor the son of wickedness shall afflict him”* (21-23). There are, as well, other elements included in this phrase of glorification<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

***“With whom My hand shall be established; Also My arm shall strengthen him”***  
(21)

The history of king David reveals how the Lord’s hand and arm supported him despite the afflictions that dwelt upon him.

***“The enemy shall not outwit him, nor the son of wickedness shall afflict him”***  
(22)

He does not take the enemies away, nor forbid them to set their nets, and stir battles against His believers, but He grants His believers the spirit of conquest and victory, to be crowned.

The Lord Christ allowed it to be tempted by Satan, and gave His Spirit up to battles in the wilderness; which ultimately ended by the phrase: *“Angels came and ministered to Him”* (Matthew 4: 11).

According to **St. Jerome**<sup>2</sup>, the enemy here is Satan; and the son of wickedness is Judas the traitor.

❖ The enemy may truly stir up against him, yet he cannot do him any harm. There is a benefit from his attack, because those he attacks are ultimately crowned with conquest. For, how could he be overcome, if he does not attack us?; And how could God be our Helper if we are not tempted? The enemy does his best, but he cannot harm him, nor the son of wickedness can afflict him<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague those who hate him”*** (23)  
When the prophet David refused to stretch his hand against king Saul, despite all the later attempts to kill him; and when the Lord saved him from the hand of all his enemies; He uttered the following song: *“You girded me with strength for the battle; You have subdued under me those who raised against me. You made my enemies turn their backs to me, so that I destroyed those who hated me. They looked, but there was no one to save them...”* (2 Samuel 22: 40-42).

***“And plague those who hated him”***, the way He struck Pharaoh and those with him by the ten plagues. Any tool aimed against His church will be broken.

<sup>1</sup> عظة 12 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

***“But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him; and in My name his horn shall be exalted” (24)***

This psalm often binds between God’s faithfulness and His mercy; and repeats that the secret of the strength of the believer is the name of God; namely, the enjoyment of His divine presence.

If the Word of God, by His incarnation, *“humbled Himself, and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross; Therefore God also highly exalted Him, and gave Him the name that is above every name; so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth; and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2: 9-11).

❖ All the ways of the Lord are mercy and faithfulness. Always remember that, as these two features are particularly presented to us, we should return them to God; Namely, having shown us mercy to forgive our sins; and faithfulness to realize His promises; So we should, by walking along His ways, give Him back the mercy and faithfulness: the mercy by having compassion on the poor; and the faithfulness by not doing injustice. I wish faithfulness would not take mercy away from you; Nor would mercy hinders faithfulness. As if, through the firmness you forget about mercy, you would not by that be walking along the way of God, where *“mercy and faithfulness have met together”* (Psalm 85: 10).

***“And in My name his horn shall be exalted” (24).*** Why should I say more? You, as Christians know about Christ<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Also I will set his hands over the sea and his right hand over the river” (25)***

Granting His anointed, the prophet David, authority over the sea and the rivers, means that He grants him awe before his enemies wherever they are. The seas often refer to the heathen nations and peoples; whereas the rivers, by their sweet water, refer to the believers. Faith shall extend among the nations, to receive him as king over them, or to join His spiritual kingdom.

If the Lord Christ reigns over the hearts of believers; He will also subdue the wicked on the great day of the Lord.

❖ As rivers run into the sea, so are the greedy people plunge into the bitterness of this world; Yet all these different kinds of people will ultimately submit to the Lord Christ<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“He shall cry to Me: ‘You are my Father, My God, and the Rock of my salvation” (26)***

We do not find a single case where David call God his Father; Whereas the Lord Christ calls God the Father, His Father, more than 60 times in the gospel according to John alone<sup>3</sup>. And when the Word became Man, He called Him His God and Father.

***“Also I will make Him My firstborn, the Highest of the kings of the earth”(27)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>3</sup> W. S. Plumer: Ps. 89.

This prophecy has not been realized in the person of David; he was never been called the ‘firstborn’; Whereas the Lord Christ became ‘Firstborn’; By His own free will He resurrected from the dead to grant us the resurrected life; He became “*firstborn among many brethren*” (Romans 8: 29).

“*He is the image of the invisible God, the First born over all creation*” (Colossians 1; 15). “*He is the Head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence*” (Colossians 1: 18)

“*And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him’*” (Hebrew 1: 6).

A day will come when all the kings of the earth leave their thrones; and will come the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the true King of peace, the beloved Son of God, the Savior of the world.

- ❖ “*The Lord Jesus, the Firstborn from the dead*”(Colossians 1: 18), according to the apostle, became exalted, ascends to heaven, and to Him will submit all the kings of the world<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Although He is the only begotten Son of God, Yet He is our Firstborn; For we are all brethren to Him; Hence we are children of God. Christ is our Firstborn, For, having chosen to descend to the level of the natural creatures, you will find that the divine Scriptures refer to Christ, the Son of God, saying: “*The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father*” (John 1: 18). When the Holy Book uses the word “*Firstborn*”, the inspiration interprets it by what shows its significance, by saying: “*that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren*” (Romans 8: 29); And, “*the Firstborn from the dead*” (Colossians 1: 18). Christ is a Firstborn from the dead, on account of that He has partaken of everything except for the sin; and because He arose His body from the dead<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

“*My mercy I will keep for him forever and my covenant shall stand firm with him*” (28)

When the Father proclaimed His pleasure in His only begotten Son during His baptism and His transfiguration, He proclaims His pleasure in His church, namely, His body, and keeps His mercy for her forever; And God, will stay Faithful in His promises, standing firm in His covenants with His church, to enjoy the fellowship of the eternal glory.

- ❖ He keeps His mercy in the church, He saves by the covenant of His commandments<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ For His sake, the covenant is fulfilled; and in Him it was realized. He is the Seal, the Intercessor, the Surety, the Witness, the Inheritance, and the Partner in the inheritance of the covenant<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>2</sup> In Ps. Hom 25.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

(St. Augustine)

***“His seed also I will make to endure forever. And his throne as the days of heaven” (29)***

Who are His seed but the children of God, who are born by the water and the Spirit; Far, walking as is befitting to them, they will enjoy the eternal life. And what is the throne of God but the believers who bear God in their hearts, and enjoy the divine promise, “*God’s kingdom is within you*”.

- ❖ This refers to the assembly of the believers, the church where God sits as though on His throne<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ ***“His seed also I will make to endure forever”***. Not only in this world, but also in the world with no end. ***“And His throne as the days of heaven”***. The thrones of the kings of the earth are like the days of the earth, that differ from those of heaven. The days of heaven are the years about which is said: ***“But You are the same, and Your years will have no end”*** (Psalm 102: 27). The days of the earth would soon be chased by the days following them; The preceding days will disappear, and the ones to follow will also not endure; As it comes, it will also go; And may even go before it come. The days of heaven, on the other hand, which are also ***“the one day of heavens”***, are years that will endure, with no beginning, nor end; None of its days will have an evening, nor a tomorrow; No future to be expected, nor past to be lost. The days of heavens are always present, where the throne of Christ is forever and ever<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“If his sons forsake My law, and do not walk in My judgments” (30)***

- ❖ This is the strongest guarantee for the promise of God. David’s sons are the sons of the Groom. All Christians are called His sons<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“If they break My statutes, and do not keep My commandments, Then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes” (31, 32)***

There is no partiality with God; If His mercy is exalted; He, by His justice and righteousness, does not accept fellowship with iniquity. Visiting His children who divert from the divine faithfulness by the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, is the fruit of the iniquity they have committed. Yet this rod and those stripes are not for their destruction, but for their reform. That is what David himself has experienced when he got slothful with iniquity, when stripes dwelt upon him, not for his destruction but for his salvation.

- ❖ Blessed is man who is chastened in this life, For God does not chasten on the same transgression twice (Nahum 1: 9 LXX). How great would be God’s wrath that does not come on us here; because He would be as though keeping us for slaughtering; As He says to Jerusalem: ***“Because you agitated Me with all these things... I will lay to***

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

*rest My fury toward you, and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more*” (Ezekiel 16: 43, 42)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ *“I will visit their iniquity with stripes”*. Why? So that *“My mercy I will not utterly take from them”*. If He intends to forsake someone, He would not punish him or visit him with stripes; He strike only the son whom He receives<sup>2</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ The reform done by the Father is of benefit, so as to restore the soul of his son to the commandments of salvation. He chastens wit the rod, according to what is written: *“I will visit their iniquity with stripes”* (33).

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ Let Him chasten him, as long as He does not take His mercy away from him. Let Him visit him with stripes, as long as He does not deprive him of the inheritance. If you understand well the promises of your Father, you would not fear His stripes, as much as you would fear to be deprived of the inheritance; *“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives”* (Hebrew 12: 6). Would the sinful son take the chastisement lightly, when he sees the only begotten son, who is without sin, scourged? I wish the pious children do not say: If you intend to come with a rod, do not come at all! It would be better for them to learn by the father’s rod, rather than to perish by the kisses of the thief<sup>3</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

*“Nevertheless My loving kindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail”* (33)

Because of what David did, when he responded to God’s chastisements on him, He did not utterly take His mercy away from him, nor broke

His covenant with him; And the Lord Christ came from his seed. According to **St. Augustine**, Although the talk here (33) is concerning the Lord Christ, yet it also concerns the body of Christ, namely, His church. When Saul of Tarsus persecuted the church, the Lord Christ did not say to him: “Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting My servants, namely My believers, or My saints”, But said: *“Why are you persecuting Me?”*; He refers all what happen to the church to Himself personally.

- ❖ For god is Merciful and wishes all to be saved, He says: *“I will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their sins with the stripes; yet my mercy I will not utterly take from them”* (32, 33) ... because God is Jealous, and does not want the soul that He betrothed to Himself by faith, to stay in the defilement of sin; but intends for her to become instantly purified, and to uproot her defilement at once, in case it was caught with certain defilements<sup>4</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom 51.

<sup>2</sup> Selections From Exodus, 127.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 89 (88).

<sup>4</sup> Homilies on Exodus, 8: 6.

- ❖ *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of god abides on him”* (John 3: 36). Yet, once he believes, the wrath will go away from him, and life will dwell on him instead.

If God does not judge him, Will you judge him?!

He said that he who believe in Him will not remain in the darkness; meaning that before he believe he was in the darkness, but after he did he remain in it no more., but his faults will be corrected, and he will come to keep God’s commandments, He who said: *“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live”* (Ezekiel 33: 11): as though the Lord says: I already said that he who believe in Me will not be judged; For *“I did not come to judge the world but to save the world”* (John 12: 47). I shall readily forgive him; *“For I desire mercy and not sacrifice”* (Hosea 6: 6) *“For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* (Matthew 9: 13).

Again the Lord says: *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”* (John 12: 48). His word is for all to return from the way of sin; so, as by judging him you would despise the word of Christ, you should receive the sinners.

Indeed, they are committed to cast their sin away, keep God’s commandment, and despise iniquity; But it would be cruel to despise someone who has not kept God’s commandments yet, but will eventually do. Let the Lord teach us about such people, saying: *“If they break My statutes, and do not keep My commandments, Then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes; Nevertheless My mercy I will not utterly take from them”* (31-33). He promised to give His mercy to all<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ For God is merciful and *“desires all men to be saved”* (1 Timothy 2: 4), He says: *“I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes, but My mercy I shall not utterly take from them”* (32-33). God then visits and seeks the souls begotten by the most evil of fathers – the devil. And will say to each soul: *“Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; Forget your own people also, and your father’s house”* (Psalm 45: 10). He, then, will visit you after you commit sin, will disturb you, will visit you with the rod and stripes, for the sake of the sin delivered to you by the devil, your father.
- ❖ **“this is the time of the lord's vengeance”** The Holy Book clarifies that the punishments are set upon him who can endure them with perseverance. When man is not punished on earth, he will stay without punishment until he will be on the day of judgment. The Lord says on the tongue of the prophet Hosea: ***“I will not punish your daughter when they commit harlotry; nor your brides when they commit adultery”*** (Hosea 4: 14). God does not punish the sinners because of His wrath on them, as some may think; Or, in other words, When God punishes a sinner, He does that, not motivated by anger on him, but, on the contrary, a sign of God’s anger on such a person, would be in not punishing him. For the one punished, even if he suffers under that punishment, yet the purpose of punishing him is actually to reform him and set his ways right. David says: ***“Lord, Do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure”*** (Psalm 6: 1); But if You wish to chasten me, according ton the prophet Jeremiah: ***“O Lord, correct me, but with justice, not in Your anger, lest You***

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<sup>1</sup> On Repentance, 1.

***bring me to nothing***” (Jeremiah 10: 24). There are many who were reformed because of God’s punishment and chastisement on them. And as the Holy book says, the children of the Lord Christ, when they sin, they are punished to give them the chance to have mercy from the Lord; according to the words: ***“If his sons forsake My law, and do not walk in My judgments; If they break My statutes, and do not keep My commandments; Then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My mercy, I will not utterly take from them”*** (30-33). From this we understand that in case one commits a sin and is not punished so far, that would be a sign that he is not yet worthy of judgment<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

***“My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of my lips”***  
(34)

It is befitting of the believer not to despair because of his weaknesses, but to return to the Lord with the spirit of hope, for He is the Forgiver of sins, who waits for every believer to return to Him with repentance.

❖ Concerning my advice to you to walk step by step; See in the gospels how the Lord Christ, when He granted His disciples the gifts of grace, concerning the healing and casting out the unclean spirits; He talked to them about the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the ultimate consummation; saying: ***“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them”*** (John 20: 23). Therefore, if because of your labor for God’s sake, He will forgive your sins, that will be the goal which I want you to reach. But, in case you read in my letter some words you do not understand, Ask the twin of your soul, by beloved son ‘Serinus’, he will, by the grace of God, explain to you what you could not understand. For, to that effect I prayed to God for his sake. You should, therefore, O man of God, run along the way prepared for you until you reach with joy the harbor of Christ which we have reached, and hear the voice filled with joy, light, life, and exultation, saying to you: ***“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make ruler over many things; Enter into the joy of your Lord”*** (Matthew 25: 21). ... ***I wish you rejoice in the Lord; ... I wish you rejoice in the Lord; ... I wish you rejoice in the Lord.*** The Lord will preserve your soul, body, and Spirit, from every evil, from every demonic controversy, and from every disturbing thought. May the Lord be your Light, Refuge, Way, strength, the crown of your joy, and your eternal help. Now, beware, for the Lord says: ***“I will not alter the word that has gone out of My lips”*** (34).

(St. Parsnovius)

***“Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David”*** (35)

Many scholars consider that, although the title of “the Holy God” is a unique title, not shared by any creation; Yet, through attaching to Him and fellowship with Him, it would become a holy creation.

In more than one location, God calls on us to be holy for Him, as He is Holy.

***“His seed shall endure forever; and his throne as the sun before me”*** (36)

It is befitting of us to stand before the throne of the Sun of Righteousness, to shine on us with the splendor of His holiness and glory, to become like the moon.

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<sup>1</sup> عظات للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكلين سمير كوستي، 5 .L.II.

***“It shall be established forever like the moon, Even like the faithful witness in the sky” (37)***

- ❖ ***“His throne as the sun before Me”***, means that the church will dwell in the splendor of the glory to come ***“and shall be established forever like the moon; Even like the faithful witness in the sky” (37)***. Christ, the Lord Himself, who bore a faithful testimony for God the Father in the world, has been raised up to heaven<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Now, you can clearly understand the saying: ***“My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*** (Matthew 27: 47); when you compare the glory of the lord Christ when He was in the presence of God the Father, with the scoffing and despise while He was on the cross. ... His throne has been then, as the sun before the presence of God the Father, and like the moon established forever (Psalm 89: 36-37)<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

## **5- MAN, THE BREAKER OF THE COVENANT:**

***“But You have cast off and abhorred, You have been furious with Your anointed” (38)***

After God spoke about His mercy and faithfulness in His promise to establish David’s seed on his throne forever; And as the Jews have misunderstood what God the Father meant, and counted that covenant concerning the temporal kingdom of Israel in a literal way; Here we hear a strange voice daring to judge God, starting with this phrase (38), and inquiring: ‘Where is the divine promise?!; Namely, casting the blame on God!!

The situation here is probably like what came in the book of Exodus, where the people cast the blame on God when Moses delayed on the mountain to receive the law. The people then worshipped a molded calf, and said: ***“This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt”*** (Exodus 32: 4); When Aaron made an altar before it, and they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings, and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play; namely, to practice abominations and unclean things.

Here, according to **St. Jerome**<sup>3</sup>, we even hear the voice of some of the apostles addressed to God the Father, saying similar things, when they saw Christ delivered to His enemies; assuming that the Father has broken His promise with Him, when He delivered Him to His kinsmen, namely, to the Jews and the high priests; by raising the right hand of His adversaries who delivered Him to death; when all His enemies rejoiced; namely Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews.

***“You have renounced the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown by casting it to the ground” (39)***

Daringly, he accuses God of renouncing His covenant, and of profaning the crown of him whom He promised an eternal kingdom, by casting it to the ground. Those were probably how the Jews felt, in particular when Judah was taken into the Babylonian captivity; as they had in mind that God would never deliver His temple to the enemies,

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Matt 135.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 66.

His holy city to devastation, and the king from the tribe of Judah to defeat before a heathen nation.

***“You have broken down all his hedges; You have brought his strongholds to ruin” (40)***

A painful portrait, likening the nation in its defeat before the enemy to a vineyard that lost its hedges, and to a flock with no guards.

***“All who pass by the way plunder him; he is a reproach to his neighbors” (41)***

He portrays all who pass by the king, whose kingdom collapsed and scattered, as scornfully saying: Is this the Lord’s anointed? Is this the eternal kingdom?

That was happened when the Lord Christ was hanged on the cross, when even the two robbers crucified on His right and left hand reviled Him; and when they put up over His head the accusation written against Him in three languages: “This is Jesus the King of the Jews”, as a kind of mockery.

***“You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries; You have made all his enemies rejoice” (42)***

The high priests, the priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees, assuming that they have reached the perfect conquest; that they right hand was exalted above him whom they counted as their enemy; and that they have got all what they wished for by His crucifixion and death; they rejoiced and exulted, yet temporarily.

***“You have also turned back the edge of his sword, and have not sustained him in the battle” (43)***

These phrases and the ones to follow came as though carrying a kind of admonishment, the way the prophet Moses did when he pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: “*Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say: ‘He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.*

*Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them: ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever’* (Exodus 32: 11-13).

What is the edge of His sword but His words? It so seemed at the time of His crucifixion that all His words and sermons have gone in vain with no fruits; and that His ministry is like a battle that ended with defeat.

He turned the edge of His sword; as the Jews have not profited from His preaching; and have not sustained Him in the battle; as the souls of His faithful ministers became confused because of His death.

***“You have made his glory cease, and cast his throne down to the ground” (44)***

How amazing! The Sun of Righteousness who shone on those who sat in darkness; the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, became crucified between two robbers, counted together with them! ... How some assumed that His splendor was quenched, and His throne was cast down to the ground!

*“The days of his youth You have shortened; You have covered him with shame” (45)*

The talk here seems not to apply to a certain king of Judah, but to the kingdom of Judah as an entity that came to an end by the Babylonian captivity, and did not endure.

Although many of the fathers of the church believe it to be a prophecy of the Person of the Lord Christ, whom, as some expected, will be the Messiah who sets an earthly kingdom that will endure in this world forever; then were shocked to see Him crucified!

And that was as well, how His own disciples at that time felt, nor perceiving that He will be risen from the dead. By such comments the apostles admonished the Father, with the assumption that Christ will not return from the pit!

## **6- A CY OUT:**

*“How long, Lord? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?” (46)*

It is as though the church, watching the death of Christ, cries out, saying: *“How long will Your wrath endure? And did not call on Him to return from the dead!*

*“Remember how short my time is; For what futility have You created all the children of men?” (47)*

It so seems that the author, having seen the collapse of the kingdom of Judah, his own dreams collapsed as well. For, although it was an earthly kingdom, yet he hoped that it will endure forever, according to God’s promise to David.

And the same applies to those who assumed and hoped that the Messiah was to be an earthly King who prevails over all nations and peoples to the account of Israel; and their assumption and hopes collapsed by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

*“What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave?” (48)*

Comparing between the saying of the psalmist: *“What man can live and not see death?” (48)*, and that of the prophet Ezekiel, saying: *“The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18: 4)*; **St. Jerome**<sup>1</sup> says: [There is difference between seeing death and tasting it. Not all who see it, taste it; and all who taste it, will by necessity see it]. By that he means that all mankind – the righteous and the wicked – will see death, death of the body. Yet he whose soul is sanctified in the Lord, will see the death of his body, without tasting death; as he bears the power of the resurrection of Christ working in him.

In another location, **St. Jerome**, comparing between seeing death and tasting it, and saying that all men see death but not all of them tastes it; quotes the words of the Lord Christ, saying: *“Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power” (Mark 9: 1).*

❖ I saw a beautiful woman, and longed for her with my whole being; but the fear of God drew me away from lust. I saw death, but I did not taste it. But if it happens that I saw her, I would in this case have positively committed the sin of adultery in my heart; and have tasted death!

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> *In Ps., hom 80.*

***“Lord, where are Your former mercies which You swore to David in Your truth?” (49)***

***“Remember, Lord, the reproach of Your servants -- how I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples” (50)***

***“With which Your enemies have reproached, O Lord, With which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed” (51)***

All those expressions came from someone who dared to accuse God of not practicing His eternal mercies; of not keeping His covenant with David (49); and of being content of seeing the reproach of all the many peoples on His people, and to be reproached by His enemies (50, 51); whether that was when He saw Judah captivated by the Babylonians. Or when He saw Christ crucified.

That reproach was realized on the Lord Christ by His crucifixion; as it is said on His tongue: *“For Your sake I have borne reproach”* (Psalm 69: 7).

***“Blessed be the Lord forevermore! Amen and Amen” (52)***

This is the praise of the church, when the Lord Christ is risen from the dead, and came out of the pit, a Victor and a Conqueror to her account.

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 89**

### **REIGN, O MY SAVIOR, IN MY DEPTHS**

- ❖ My Lord, You have promised my father David to set from his seed, He who will reign forever;  
By Your incarnation You have become a son of david;  
And now, You were lifted up on the cross;  
You have torn the written record of my debt;  
You crushed the devil who enslaved me;  
And established Your kingdom in me.
- ❖ My eyes are concentrated on the cross of Your love;  
My depths sing Your love and mercies;  
You grant me Your dwelling; and my tongue set forth praising Your faithfulness;  
You have turned my heart into a new heaven that praises Your wonders  
And my depths proclaim Your faithfulness, O Lord, in the congregation of saints.
- ❖ My life came to be like a hidden lighted cloud;  
That cherishes You, and carries You as fiery chariot;  
Proclaims Your awe, majesty, and splendor in me;  
O Lord, what else should I ask for?
- ❖ If the world with all its waves stirs up against me;  
You have authority over the pride of the sea;  
You say one word, and the waves and storms obey.  
All the temptations and afflictions of the world turn into eternal crowns of glory.  
The proud devil lies in wait like dragon intending to devour me;  
But You, the whole Humble, grants me by Your Holy Spirit two wings, to fly as though to heaven.  
How can the enemy devour me?  
As long as Your Spirit dwelling in me,  
Grants me the strength, and lifts me up as though to heaven;  
And proclaims in me Your Righteousness and Faithfulness.
- ❖ How would I be disturbed by Who lies in wait in the waters;  
When You have turned my life into an exultant celebration;  
Where the shouts of the Spirit are heard;  
And Your light glitters in my depths; and every bitterness and darkness are scattered.
- ❖ For whom shall I sing; when You are the pride of my strength;  
You are my eternal armor;  
You are my King and Sanctuary;  
You are the Rock of my salvation;  
Forevermore, I shall never forget Your mercy;  
Holding fast to Your amazing covenant.
- ❖ If I complain to You about my weaknesses;  
Your grace supports me;  
And gives sweetness to Your commandments;  
You visit me with Your mercies, even in the midst of Your chastisements;

You surround me with a hedge of Your love;  
So that I would not break the commandment, and Your covenant.  
Blessed are You, O the eternal and Holy king;  
Forevermore, We shall offer You unceasing sacrifices of thanksgiving.

## PSALM 90

# LET THE FAVOR OF THE LORD OUR GOD BE ON US

This psalm comes at the beginning of the fourth book of psalms, which corresponds to the book of Numbers, or the book of the journey in the wilderness under the leadership of God Himself; He who covered them as a cloud by day, and leads them as a pillar of light by night; cares for their daily food (the manna coming down from heaven), and their drink (the water coming out of the rock) ... Throughout that journey that extended over forty years, all needed the grace of God.

At the beginning of the journey, Moses and the people exulted and sang a praise called “the song of Moses”, a thanksgiving praise for crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15). And near the end of the journey, before his departure from this world, he prepared his advice in the form of another praise (Deuteronomy 32). And here, he presents a praise, in which he seeks for the sake of all the generations to enjoy God’s grace on them.

According to **St. Jerome**<sup>1</sup>, this psalm is considered an introduction to the fourth book of psalms; As the psalms are divided into five books. The Hebrews believe that, not only this psalm, but the ten following psalms as well, which are without titles, are all written by the prophet Moses<sup>2</sup>; and that they have no titles because they belong to this psalm.

<b>1- The need of the generations for God as a dwelling place</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2- How soon would man turn to destruction</b>	<b>3 - 6</b>
<b>3- God’s chastisements for the sake of our sins</b>	<b>7 - 12</b>
<b>4- Joy and exultation in the favor of God</b>	<b>13 - 17</b>

### The title:

The expression “*the man of God*” came more than 40 times in the Holy Book. And speaking about the activity of the Holy Book, the apostle Paul wrote: “*that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3: 17).

❖ “*A prayer of Moses the man of God*”. Moses writes about how man is created, and how he fell out of his place. Now, he prays for the sake of Him who fell into death, to rise up to life; and for him who fell through the sin by the seduction of the devil, to rise to glory by Christ<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ This psalm is called “*a prayer of Moses the man of God*”, through whom God gave the law to His people, liberated them from the house of bondage, and led them forty years in the wilderness. That is why Moses is considered a minister of the Old Covenant, and a prophet of the New Covenant. And the apostle Paul says: “*All those things happened to them as examples, and were written for our admonition, on whom the end of the ages have come*” (1 Corinthians 10: 11)<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

<sup>2</sup> St. Jerome: Common. On Malachia, PL 25: 1542.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

## 1- THE NEED OF THE GENERATIONS TO GOD AS A DWELLING PLACE:

***“Lord, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations” (1)***

As God opens up His bosom for us to dwell in Him in security, it is for the church – the congregation of saints – throughout all generations to enjoy the fellowship together. He embraces every member as though he is the only one in the church, and embraces all together to pour on them His love.

Feeling his sojourn in this world, the believer seeks to dwell in the Lord Himself, as a dwelling place, where he feels secure.

❖ ***“Lord, You have been our dwelling place”***. The dwelling place is used as a refuge in case of persecution. If there is no one who persecutes us, we do not need any dwelling place in another. ***“Lord, You are our dwelling place”***. For the intense heat of affliction burns and exhausts us, we seek a dwelling place under Your wings. We fly to Your protection, because the fearful monster is threatening us; and many adversaries are lying in wait against us. Lord, be our refuge<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

❖ ***“Lord, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations” (1)***. Throughout every generation, or in two generations: the Old and the New. As I have already said, Moses was considered a minister of the Old Covenant, and a prophet of the New One; that concerns the New, Jesus Christ, the Kinsman of that Covenant, He who said to the Jews: *“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me”* (John 5: 46).

Now, do not think that this whole psalm was written by Moses. But the name of that great minister of God for the sake of drawing the attention of the reader to a very essential issue<sup>2</sup>.

❖ I wish we would say to the Lord our God: ***“Lord, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generation” (1)***. You have been our dwelling place in both the first and the second generations. You have been our dwelling place, when we were born from void. And You have been our dwelling place when we were born anew, we who were wicked.

You were a dwelling place in feeding those who have forsaken you. But we shall never forsake You; on account of that You saved us from all our wickedness, and filled us with all Your good works.

You have granted it to us, lest we fail on the way. You reform, chasten, strike, and guide us, lest we lose the way. You treat us with compassion, lest we fail on the way; Or You chasten us, lest we go astray<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ God is refuge and strength for him who can say: "I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me." (Philippi 4: 13). Many can say: *“God is our dwelling place”*, and: ***“Lord, You have been our dwelling place” (1)***; But only few can say it in the readiness of the prophet; few are they who do not care much for the human

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 5: 6.

worries, but are attached to God, from whom they draw their courage, and in whom they place their hope.

(St. Basil the Great)

***“Before the mountains wer brought forth, or ever You have formed the earth and the world. Even from everlasting to everlasting You are God” (2)***

The unchangeable God, who worked in our fathers, is still working in us, and will work in the coming generations until the day of His coming. His love is everlasting, limitless, and eternal.

According to **St. Augustine**, the everlasting God, whi was there before the creation of the exalted heavenly creatures, who are as high as mountains; and the creation of man from dust, is refuge, ready to protect us, if we resort to Him.

- ❖ You, the Everlasting, who was ther before we are, and before the creation of the world, became dwelling place for us, once we resort to You. As to the expression “Before the mountains”, As the mountains are the highest locations on the earth, it seems to Refer to the exaltation of the angels, compared to man, created from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2: 7)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## **2- HOW SOON MAN WOULD TURN TO DESTRUCTION:**

***“You turn man to destruction, and say: ‘Return, O children of men’ (3)***

In the Septuagint version it came as: ***“Do not bring man back to humiliation; saying: Return, O children of men”***

Going back from God, the Source of his life, man returns to dust with humiliation; whereas if he returns to God his Savior, he will hear the divine voice say: “You are heaven, and to heaven you will return”.

- ❖ “Do not bring man back to humiliation”; Namely, ‘Do not let man retreat from Your eternal exalted things<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ ***“Do not bring man back to dust”*** Moses prays for the sake of man, saying: “Do not let man perish; he whom you create according to your image”. ***“Do not bring man back to dust”***. Do not look at his worthless body, but to his worthy soul. It was enough for us to hear you saying once: ***“You are dust, and to dust you will return”*** (Genesis 3: 19); when we were crushed because of feeling our sin.

***“Do not bring man back to dust”***. Do not bring him back, but have him changed; having said through your prophets: ***“Return, O Children of men”***. Let this be the end of sin; repentance to have salvation. ***“Do not bring man back to dust”***. Send Your Son to raise the body of our humility; and by the way of a new life, it exalts up to heaven, liberated from the bondage of the earth<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night” (4)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

Encountering God his Savior, man enjoys the deposit of heaven, to count his years, however long they are as a passing moment, and to walk with joy in his journey on earth, to be found eternally with God.

- ❖ Compared to the eternity of God, any extension of man's life, however long it may seem, would be counted as short, and even as nothing, as it limited, and will eventually end.

***“Like a watch in the night”***. The night is divided into four watches, each of three hours. A thousand years in Your sight are like three hours in the night. At the beginning of the world, man lived nearly 1000 years; yet, in the sight of God it was still like a watch in the night. Man's age is counted as nothing compared to the eternity of God<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ We are committed to return to Your dwelling place, where there is no change, like the mortal sceneries around us. For, however long is time, a thousand years in Your sight, is not like yesterday which passed, nor like tomorrow which is to come; all these limited times are counted as though have already passed<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“You sweep men away, they are like a dream, they are like the new grass of the morning” (5)**

According to **St. Augustine**, the temporal things in the morning dry up like grass; die, corrupt, and turn into dust; As it is said by the prophet Isaiah: *“All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.... The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever”*(Isaiah 40: 6-8).

- ❖ So it is with the things tht were not thre, they will come, but once they come, they will soon become as though never existed; because they do not come to stay, but to go away<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ ***“They are like new grass in the morning”*** that will wither. Like the dew of the morning that will soon disappear, so it is with man' life: In his youth he flourishes, then, in the old age the flower of his strength will wither and go way. The evening of our life is dry and withered with various ailments: *“All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field ... The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever”* (Isaiah 40: 6-8).

Although we are still living, yet a part of us has already scattered in old age. Although our souls are still intact, yet we suffer the loss of the past youth vigor; In other words, we are now different from we used to be<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**“In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers” (6)**

The non-believer lives in anxiety, for his life, however long, will one day come to an end, like grass that is dried up and cut down. The believer, on the other hand, sees his

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

life as joyful journey, through which he passes in the company of his Christ, to the bosom of the Father, to live forever.

- ❖ The faithfulness of the Lord surrounding him, he will not fear the terror of the night, nor of anything that walks in the darkness. Looks at the ships of others while sinking, while being away from any danger. So is he who watches others sailing astray on the seas of this world, driven by every wind of teaching; while he is holding fast to the solid land of faith<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

### **3- GOD’S CHASTISEMENTS FOR THE SAKE OF OUR SINS:**

**“For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified” (7)**

The non-believer fears and is terrified of the eternal encounter. Whereas the believer perpetually rejoices by the riches of God’s grace, that opens his eyes up on God’s mercies and love.

- ❖ It is not something secret that this is the punishment on the sin ... We are consumed by our weakness, and are disturbed by the fear of death; For we have become weak, and fear the end of this weakness<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Yes indeed, **“We have been consumed by Your anger”**; We deserve Your anger because of our sin. In Adam we have lost the eternity You have given us. And as according to heredity laws, we have inherited sin; **“By Your wrath we are terrified”**. Becoming in terror, we shall not perish, because violently shaking with terror, we feel the power of Him, whom we have disregarded by committing sin; Then, in humble submission we resort to regret. **“By Your wrath we are terrified”**; Because of our transgressions we came to be intensely disturbed; But believing in Your Christ and recognizing Him, we come to rest<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**“You have set our iniquities before You; Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance” (8)**

Amid affliction, man perceives that his sins and iniquities are exposed before God. But through the cross he sees the Spirit of God covering over him; and lifting him through baptism up to adoption by God.

- ❖ **“You have set our iniquities before You”**. Not one single sin will escape Your sight; all the evils we commit are exposed before You ... Every moment of our life; everything we do are exposed before Your eyes; Darkness itself is not hidden from You<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**“For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; We finish our years like a sigh” (9)**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Patriarchs*, 5: 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 90* (89).

<sup>3</sup> *On Psalms homily 67*.

<sup>4</sup> *On Psalms homily 67*.

❖ These words are proof enough that our submission to death is a punishment. He talks about our days that are finished; whether because we finish them in love of mortal things, Or on account of that they are greatly reduced; something that he confirms by the following words: *“The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty years, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and troubles”* (10)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ *“Our days pass away like a spider’s cobweb”*; Like a cobweb built on a wall by a spider, which will collapse by a sudden wind, So are all the achievements of our life, will collapse by a sudden stroke of affliction or death<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty years, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and troubles; they are soon gone, and we fly away” (10)**

According to **St. Augustine**, the two figures 70 and 80 have spiritual concepts: The figure 70 refers to the figure 7, namely, the Sabbath of the Old Covenant. Whereas with strength, namely, the strength of the resurrection of the Lord Christ, man would enjoy the figure 80, referring to the figure 8, which concerns the resurrection of the Lord Christ in the first day of the week; the eighth of the past week, when man crosses over from the temporal things to the eternal things. The New Covenant has hope in the new resurrected life. Nevertheless our life is nothing but toil and troubles, according to the words by the apostle Paul: *“We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we are saved in this hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees” But if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance*” (Romans 8: 23-25).

We do not marvel that the prophet Moses started his ministry in his 80 th. year of his life, even though his mission was tough, needing a firm stand before Pharaoh and his men; at a time when his own Hebrew people were so collapsing, that when Moses and Aaron came out from the their meeting with Pharaoh, they said to them: *“Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us”* (Exodus 5: 21). As to the troubles of the journey in the wilderness, the murmur of his people, and the opposition of the enemies against him; ... Those were things that even a strong young man could not endure. So how would he say: *“The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty years, if we are strong”* (10). He felt as though his life came to an end after 80 years; and the 40 years during which he ministered until he reached 120 years of age, were a gift from God for work. They are not his own years, but special years given by the Lord for the sake of ministry.

❖ *“The days of our life are seventy years”*. Do you see how human life was gradually cut short? As a start, in paradise we were delivered the gift of eternal life, then lost it by disobedience, and the life of the early fathers was reduced to 1000 years; and now it is cut short to 70 or 80 years.

*“The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty years, if we are strong; even then their span is toil and troubles”*. Most of our years are fruitless; What

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

we see as profit, is nothing but toil and loss. Any extra years are old age, sickness, sufferings, misery, and ultimately, a longing for death<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ These are the features of the non-believers and the doubters. If you so think, which is possible to happen, and will happen, that the wicked will have equal portion to that of the righteous, it would be a great stupidity! When a rich man depart and gives account of his life; How many years you think he enjoyed his wealth in this life? You think 100 years? Let me say 200, or 300 or even 100 years, which is impossible; For it is written: *“The days of our life are seventy years, and perhaps eighty years, if we are strong”* (10). Can you show me a life without end? Tell me, If someone of 100 years sees a nice dream one night, and enjoyed during much luxury and happiness during his sleep; Can he say that this dream is a reward enough and equal to 100 years? Of course not! ... We should think of the eternal life in the same way: Like a dream in one night, compared to 100 years of life; so is our present life compared to the coming life; with a huge difference. And like a small drop of water compared to a limitless ocean, is the enjoyment of the glory to come<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ Are you anxious concerning the ultimate end of life? It is actually very close; yet man’s life and his death is far closer; as it is written: *“The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty years, if we are strong”* (10)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ How about **Jacob**? Hasn’t he endured more troubles than his grandfather? Listen to what he says: *“The years of my earthly sojourn are 130; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the years of my ancestors during their long sojourn”* (Genesis 47: 9). Seeing his own son ‘Joseph’ sitting on the royal throne, enjoying the glory, did it make him forget the troubles of the past? I do not think so!

And how about **David**? How much tribulations has he endured? Didn’t he say what Jacob said: *“The years of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty years, if we are strong; even then their span is toil and troubles”* (Psalm 90: 10).

And how about Jeremiah? Hasn’t he cursed the day of his birth because of the successive calamities through which he went? saying: *“Cursed be the day in which I was born! Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me”* (Jeremiah 20: 14)<sup>4</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ It was said about Abba Apollo, that in his early days, he used to be a very rough shepherd. One day, seeing a pregnant woman in the field, he was seduced by the devil to split her belly open to see how the fetus laid in her womb. But having seen it, he got terrified and was overcome by great remorse. He hastened to a nearby monastery to confess to the fathers what he did. There he heard them singing: *“The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty years, if we are strong; even then their span is toil and troubles”*.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

<sup>3</sup> Hom. On Hebr. 21: 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> عن لعازر والغني، عظة 1.

<sup>4</sup> عن لعازر والغني، عظة 3.

He said to them: I am 40 years old, and I never prayed once. But now I pledge, if I live one more year, I shall never stop praying until God forgive my sins. That he did; he spent the rest of his life as a monk saying to God: [As man, I sinned; But as God You forgive].

(The paradise of fathers)

**“Who knows the power of your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath” (11)**

He who perceives the secret of the cross would know what the sin has done, and would flee from the divine anger to the exalted divine love.

- ❖ If the power of man’s anger may kill the body, then has nothing more to do; It is the power (authority) of God to punish here on earth; and after death, to send to hell. Yet few are who have learned that<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (12)**

Our days are so few that they liken the grass that grows in the evening, then to be struck by the sun of the next morning, to wither, dry, and be cut off. So is God’s wrath, extremely terrifying! What does the prophet Moses seek? He asks God to teach us and to grant us His divine wisdom. That is what he presents to us in this psalm, that although talking profusely about the swift destruction of men, and about God’s anger and wrath; Yet he starts it by presenting God Himself, as a dwelling place for men to live in security (1); and ends it by seeking the grace of the Lord our God to work in us (17). It is as though God is like a bird embracing its young by its wings, on this and that side, to give them the feeling of security. The prophet surrounds his talk about God’s anger by the divine compassion and the divine grace at both the beginning and the end to grant us His true peace.

#### **4- JOY AND EXULTATION IN THE FAVOR OF GOD:**

**“Return, O Lord! How long? And have compassion on your servants” (13)**

By the cross, God returns to us; and sees His image proclaimed in us. And instead of anger, we shall dissolve in His amazing love. By the cross, the reconciliation was realized; and we became the object of God’s pleasure, and have the right to enjoy the fellowship in the heavenly glories.

- ❖ These are the words said by those who endure an abundance of evil in this era of intense persecution. Their hearts are so strongly bound by the chains of wisdom, that these troubles would not be able to provoke them to flee from their God, or to forsake Him for the sake of the goods of this world.

The saying: **“Return, O Lord, How long?”**, (13) refer to seeking the righteousness, and not to frustration or lack of patience<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ **“Return, O Lord, How long?”** Return, O Lord, and look at Your image; Give us Your face and not Your back. He who asks **“How long?”** is someone filled with longing, and cannot endure any further delay<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

(St. Jerome)

**“Oh! Satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days” (14)**

The psalmist not only seeks from God to take His wrath away from him, but lives all his days exulted in the Lord his beloved.

❖ Before us a prophecy shines amid our troubles and sorrows, like a lamp in the darkness, *“until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts”* (2 Peter 1: 19); *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they see God”*; For then the righteous will be filled with this blessing for which he now hungers and thirsts (Matthew 5: 6, 8) as while walking in faith, they are sojourning from the Lord. Hence the words: *“In Your presence there is fullness of joy”* (Psalm 16: 11); *“In the morning I plead my case to You, and look up”* (Psalm 5: 3); **“Satisfy us early with Your mercy”** (14); then they would get satisfied; as it is said in another location: *“In the morning I shall be satisfied beholding Your likeness”* (Psalm 17: 15).

**“That we may rejoice and be glad all our days”** (14). Those are days without an end; they satisfy us because there are no days to follow; and no days that come to an end, because they pass forth; All the days are together; there is only one day that remain without passing forth – the eternity itself <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ In this psalm, the secrets are proclaimed in symbolic forms. Moses, as a symbol of mankind seeks from the Son of God to ordain His descent to earth. He prays: *“For Your right hand to be recognized”*. And when he realizes that his prayer is well received, he prays furthermore, saying: *“Satisfy early with your mercy”*, when Your Son is raised from the dead. ... In the evening He descended for our sake down to the shadows of death to draw us at dawn; then, we experience your mercies. Although your mercies are always proclaimed to Your faithful servants, yet they would not be so clear and abundant like when the Savior of all is risen from the dead for the sake of the salvation of everyone.

**“We may rejoice and be glad all our days”**. Following the joy of the resurrection of our Lord, by which we come to believe that we are saved, and that we shall arise on the Day of Judgment, we rejoice the rest of our days and exult with perfect confidence; and praise God with spiritual songs, by Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**“Make us glad according to the days in which you have afflicted us, and the years in which we have seen evil” (15)**

The psalmist did not intend to concentrate his sight on the days of affliction by the sin, but to live the days of joy and exultation in the salvation of the Lord.

❖ I wish our souls always desire these days, zealously thirst toward them, when we are full and satisfied<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms homily 67.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

(St. Augustine)

**“Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children”  
(16)**

❖ For Your servants are, themselves, Your work; not only because they are human, but for being Your servants, namely, being obedient to Your commandments. For we are His workmanship, not only created in Adam, *“but in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”* (Ephesians 2: 10). *“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Philippians 2: 13). *“And for the glory of their children”*, to be upright in their hearts; as God is generous to such people; generous to Isreal; namely, to the upright in hearts<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“And let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish the work of our hands for us;**

**Yes, establish the work of our hands” (17)**

In the Septuagint version it came as: “Let the light (splendor) of the Lord our God be upon us.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalm ends with the phrase *“the work of our hands”*; where the word *“work”* came in the singular and not the pleural tense; for the end of the commandment is *“love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith”* 1 Timothy 1: 5). There is only one work in which all abides: *“faith working by love”*.

❖ For the sake of this, came the words: *“Lord, Lift up the light of your countenance upon us”* (Psalm 4: 6); and *“Establish the work of our hands”* (17); to practice it, not for the sake of any earthly reward, lest it would not be upright but pervert. In many versions it came as: *“Establish the work of our hands (upright)”*. It so seems to me that as all our good works are the work of love, because *“love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Romans 13: 10), the word *“work”* here came in the singular tense<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

The soul – the living woman who has the free will – says: “When I look at the face of, my lover Reflected on the beauty of his face. And the apostle Pau, clearly imitating these words, says: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2: 20). And when Paul says: *“For to me, to live is Christ”* (Philippians 1: 21), he cries out that he has purified himself from every human attribute, like sorrow, anger, fear,, cowardice,, pride, foolishness, the wicked desire, envy, revenge, love of possession, profit, or any attribute that could lead to the destruction of the soul. He, alone, fills my soul, only Him, and not any of the mentioned attributes. I have uprooted from myself my whole apparent nature, and nothing remains other than Christ. For me the truth of life is Christ; or as the bride of the song says: *“I am my lover’s and my lover is mine ”* (song6: 3). This is purity, non-pollution, light, and truth, that feeds my soul; it is not fed by dry grass, but by the inspiration of lilies, by the splendor and radiation of its beautiful colors

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 90 (89).

He who feeds among the lilies, would lead his flock to the pasture of the lilies, that “*the favor of our Lord is upon us*” (17)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 15 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نؤار.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 90**

**RETURN TO US, O LORD; AND PROCLAIM YOUR SALVATION TO US**

- ❖ I am a stranger on earth;  
I have no place to abide in security;  
But Your divine bosom calls on me and waits for me;  
You find pleasure in me, for I am the work of Your hands;  
And I find pleasure in You, for You are my life and the joy of my heart.
- ❖ When I see You on the cross; my soul moans over my sins;  
My depths are terrified because of my slothfulness;  
But Your love lifted me up, as though to heaven;  
Your Holy Spirit is my support;  
Instead of bitterness, my soul is filled with joy;  
My depths shout for the sake of Your grace working in humanity;  
Keep on working; so that I shall keep Your commandment;  
And walk by Your Holy spirit to enjoy your glories.

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# **THE PROTECTION BY THE MOST HIGH FOR HIS PIOUS BELIEVERS**

During my childhood, in the church atmosphere in Higher Egypt, I learned the prominent position of this psalm in the Christian teaching. The fathers priests and monks most always used to seek from the suffering confessors to sing this psalm. And the departed H.H. Pope Cyril VI used to write down its first verse for those who seek his blessing.

Some scholars believe that this psalm, was presented to those who came to Jerusalem to worship in the temple, as though to provide them with two wings to embrace them while feeling the true divine presence, the Grantor of the inner peace; ... And see it as the most magnificent pearl among the psalms of comfort. According to 'Muis', nowhere in the Latin, or in any of the modern languages, you can find an equal to it; and no Latin, or Greek poetry could be compared to this Hebrew piece<sup>1</sup>!

It is a Messianic psalm; not just on account of that Satan quoted its verses 11 and 12 (Mathew 4: 6; Luke 4: 10 & 11), during his temptation of the Lord Christ in the wilderness; But because what came in it, would be enjoyed by the believer in Jesus Christ, our true Rock. The old Jews, as well, used to count it as a Messianic psalm.

In its Hebrew version, the psalmist mentions the name of God with four titles: 'Gel-yohn' (the Most High); 'Shadai' (the Mighty One – the name of God the Creator); 'Elohim' (God); and 'Jehovah' (the Lord who dwells among His people).

Being the psalm, by which Satan dared to tempt our Lord Jesus Christ, I wish we carefully listen to it, to get armed, to resist the tempter; Not that we may dare on our own, but by Him who was tempted before us; so as to conquer him when he tempts us. Temptation for Christ was not mandatory, but was meant to teach us,... Let us then enter through the door; through Christ, who says: "*I am the door*" (John 10: 7); Entering through Christ is following His example<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

### **1- The protection by the Most High for the believer 1 - 2**

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<sup>1</sup> *W. S. Plumer: Ps. 91.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 91 (90).*

- 2- The believer who enjoys the divine protection
- 3- The divine promise of His salvation

3 - 13  
14 – 16

### The title:

Safety of abiding in the presence of God.

## 1- THE PROTECTION By THE MOST HIGH FOR THE BELIEVER:

*“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (1)*

Because man – even a little child -- often suffers a feeling of sojourn and isolation; the psalmist cries out: *“My father and my mother have forsaken me”* (Psalm 27: 10). But the believer who fears God, while in the bosom of God, feels security, freedom, care, and a divine fatherly warmth.

The Hebrew word for *“dwells”* bears a sense of security.

Our Christ – the Head of the church – dwells in the bosom of God the Father; a secret that no heavenly or earthly creation could recognize.

The Lord, Himself, says: *“I came forth from the Father”* (John 16: 27, 28). It is as though He came forth to carry us in Him, to bring us *“into the secret place of the Most High”*, to settle down eternally in the divine bosoms.

❖ This is how the soul which loves God think; God is its place; it knows no other place, but to dwell in God; according to what is written: *“God is a dwelling place in us to the age of ages”*. The true Christian, therefore, wherever he is, dwells in God; and God dwells in him. Never trusting in any other dwelling place, there is no need for him to move from one place to another like it. ... I, therefore, beseech you, to serve Your God with a divine love, however, and wherever you are<sup>1</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

❖ He who utterly deliver himself to the care of the God of heaven, will abide, protected against any harm. And according to St. Athanasius the apostolic: The care – or the secret place -- of the Most High is the statutes of God; on account of that, it was given for the sake of our

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<sup>1</sup> الرسالة الأربعون.

conquest against the unseen enemies. Protected by them, he would be dwelling in that care, or in that secret place.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ He who dwells in Jesus – according to the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 5: 1), will build his house without human hands; like that provided by the Lord for the two midwives in the land of Egypt (Exodus 1: 21), where he would dwell in the secret place of the God of heaven<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ When you suffer from the troubles of the world, brought by Satan over men, openly, or in secret; Have courage and longsuffering, for you dwell under the protection of the Most High, as expressed by psalm 91: 1. Because, if you forsake that care of the Most High, without getting a strength to help you, you will fall ... Do not be afraid; for when the Lord Christ was tempted, He was alone in the wilderness. Satan tempted Him in secret, and was defeated, as he was when he tempted Him openly. ... He who follows the lead of Christ, and endures all the troubles in this world, through His hope in God, will never fall in a net, nor is destroyed by terrifying fears; for he dwells in the secret place of the Most High, under the shadow of the Almighty<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust’ (2)***

When man feels the multitude and the power of the enemies, and perceives his own weakness, he would seek a refuge, in whom he would get protected. That is one of the blessings of the spiritual war against the devil and the hosts of darkness. It reveals man’s need for God to be his refuge, and a fortress to protect his life; he would find in God the only bosom to lean on.

Let the enemies, therefore, increase, and let their opposition against me get stronger; For I, even though I may get terrified in the beginning, yet I will find my protection in God. He is the Holy One, capable, not only of rescuing and protecting me from the corruption of sin, but also of letting me enjoy sanctification; Hiding in Him, I would not fear the violence and the cruelty of the enemies, but would, as well, enjoy an exalted divine strength. Hiding in Him, and getting covered by His righteousness, wisdom, and perfection; my soul would be clothed with heavenly features, a product of the flow of divine grace.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms Homily 20.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 91 (90).

❖ He said well “*my refuge*”; ... There are a multitude of persecutors, Yet You are my only refuge. There are many wounds, but You are my only Physicians<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Because I am under siege by my enemies, You are my refuge ... Persisting on our life in sin, we are, for sure, not trusting in Him; but if we put an end to it, our hope in Him would be confirmed<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

## 2- THE BELIEVER WHO ENJOYS THE DIVINE PROTECTION:

*“Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from the perilous pestilence” (3)*

According to St. Jerome<sup>3</sup>, the expression “*the perilous pestilence*”, is translated as (the cruel word), Or as it is in Hebrew (the deeply hidden word); on account of that, the heretics always promise deep and dark secrets, to corrupt and tear apart everything true and clear.

If the devil is a crafty fowler, his main role is to train his followers on setting nets and snares to catch the souls to his account. These snares are many and diverse, between sins and heresies. The work of Christ, though, is to rescue the souls of His believers, and to help them escape from these snares, and fly like a bird.

From what will He rescue you? “*From the snare of the fowler*”, and from (a cruel word). To be saved from the snare of the fowler is a great blessing; but how would it be possible to be saved from (a cruel word)? ... There are many who fall into the snare of a fowler through (a cruel word)! How?! ... Satan and his hosts would never dare to set their snares in Christ; they set them, not along His way, but on the side of His way. Therefore, if your way is Christ, you will never fall into the snares of the adversary.

What is the (cruel word) by which Satan catch his victims? ... As an example, a Christian who lives among heathens; if he fears and does not endure their many reproaches, he would fall into the snare of Satan..... So will be a Christian living among Christians, and seeking to be more diligent than the rest of them; he has to endure their reproaches. They may ridicule him by saying: [You are strong! You are righteous,! You are Elijah! You are Peter!! You are, as though, descend from

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 68.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms Homily 20.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 68.

heaven! ... etc.]. If he fears such words of reproach and ridicule, and forsakes the way of Christ, he would fall into the snares of the fowlers<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ The sayings of the heretics may catch the souls of the weak, and greatly disturb them.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ I will trust in Him, for “surely, *He shall deliver me from the snare of the fowler*” (3). In this age, there are many fowlers who attempt to catch us in their snares; but, according to the psalmist: “*Our souls have escaped as a bird from the snares of the fowler*” (Psalm 124: 7). In the Holy Book, we often notice that the fowlers or hunters take an adversary role against us. As an example we have the mighty ‘Nemrud’, who was “*a mighty hunter before the Lord*” (Genesis 10: 8); So was ‘Esau’ who was “*a skillful hunter*” (Genesis 25: 27) ... In the Holy Book we read: “*Do not let the evil woman allure you with her eyelids*” (Proverb 6: 25 LXX); and, “*Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” (Matthew 5: 28). There are many snares, and many fowlers, as there are many sins; ... The teachings of the heretics are deadly snares<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ Although we find in the Holy Book several examples of evil fowlers and hunters like ‘Nemrud’ and ‘Esau’, Yet we do not find many evil fisherman, they are mostly faithful. ... As long as we are in a state of grace, our souls will always be in peace; But, once we start to play with sin, our soul would become disturbed, like a boat struck by mighty waves<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“He shall cover you with His feathers; and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler” (4)***

God often likens Himself to a bird which covers its little ones under its wings.

According to **St. Gregory of Nyssa**, God created man in His image, and accordingly, with two wings, not in the physical, but in the spiritual sense; ... he lived in the garden of Eden, but his depths flew as though with two wings in a heavenly atmosphere.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 91 (90).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 68.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms Homily 20.

And according to **St. Jerome**, God surrounds us with His word, which is the truth, to become our shield, the shield of truth, capable of destroying the vanity, the deception, and the lies of the heretics.

And according to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist calls upon us to hide between the arms of God, and under His wings, to be surrounded on all sides, so that no fear or harm would dwell upon us. Yet we should beware not to depart from there, lest the enemy would attack us<sup>1</sup>.

❖ If the hen protects her little ones under its wings, how much more protection would the wings of God give us against Satan, his angels and hosts, and the birds of prey, like hawks, that catch the weak little ones<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ Who covers you? It is the God of heaven, as the hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Matthew 23: 37). With the same sense, the praise in the book of Deuteronomy says: “*The Lord carries the people of Israel on His shoulders, as an eagle carries its young on its wings*” (32: 11). This verse could also refer to the Savior on His cross, providing us with the protection of His wings; as “*Under His wings you take refuge*” (Psalm 91: 4); and, according to the prophet Isaiah: “*All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people*” (See Romans 10: 21). The Lord stretched His hand toward heaven, not to seek help, as much as for protecting us -- His miserable creation<sup>3</sup>.

❖ Look up at His stretched hands on the cross; as according to the prophet, if, in the wilderness of this world, you are bitten by a serpent, a scorpion, or any other poisonous reptile, you will be healed if you look up at the bronze fiery serpent, put on a pole in the wilderness (Numbers 21: 8-9)<sup>4</sup>.

❖ “*His truth shall be our shield*”. It is an all-around shield, namely, it protects us on all sides. “*For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield*” (Psalm 5: 12). Notice what this verse says: “*You, O Lord, will (crown) us with the shield of Your favor*”. Could anyone be crowned with a shield? ... Yes, You protect us, and make us conquerors, then You give us a crown.... And as the psalmist said that the Lord will save us against

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 91 (90).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 91 (90).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 68.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms Homily 20.

the word of perdition; we can understand it as being the teachings of the heretics, the philosophers, and the Jews; It is not the word of truth, but of lies<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Although Jerusalem has destroyed herself by her sins, yet, God covers her by the warmth of His compassion, expressed by His two wings, an analogy we see in all prophets: as in the song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32: 11), and in the psalms (Psalm 91: 4), referring to His great protection and care<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ It is rather difficult to know who uttered the following words, or to whom it is addressed: *“Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me; Your hair is like a flock of goats, coming down from Gilead”* (Song 6: 5). Most probably they are addressed by the Lord Christ to the pure soul. ... In the Holy Book I often read that ‘wings’ refer to God, as for example: the prophet David says: *“Keep me as the apple of Your eye; Hide me under the shadow of Your wings”* (Psalm 17: 8); And, *“Under His wings you shall take refuge”* (Psalm 91: 4). The prophet Moses says: *“As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings”* (Deuteronomy 32: 11). And the Lord, Himself, says: *“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 its chicks under her wings, but you were not willing”* (Matthew 23: 37).

These expressions conform with what we believe. ... If the inspired Holy Text says -- for some secret reason that we do not know -- that the divine nature has wings; it would be that the early man, who was created in the image of God, must have been like Him in every respect (See Genesis 1: 26). I, therefore, assume that the early man was created with (spiritual) wings, to be like the divine nature.... Yet the word “wings” probably refer to the power, grace, non-corruption of God, etc.; and man would have possessed all those features, as long as he was in the image of God in every thing. But our tendency toward evil, and being no more under the protection of God’s wings, have robbed those wings from us; and even our own wings were taken away from us. ... That is why the grace and blessing of God appeared to us, and

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms Homily 20.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Matt 74: 3.

enlightened our minds, so as new wings would grow in us, through purity and righteousness, after we manage to forsake the worldly desires, and concentrate our hearts and minds on God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)**

❖ Like an eagle, God spread His wings on us, we, the little chicks. It is a befitting analogy to liken God to an eagle that protects its young; God protects us like a father, and like a hen that protects its young, lest a hawk would snatch them. ... We can also provide another interpretation: When it is said: “*Under His wings you shall take refuge*” (4). Being lifted up on the cross, He stretches His hands to protect us; and to let us take refuge under His wings”<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

**“*You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day*” (5)**

The night often refers to the devil, the ruler of the hosts of darkness. Yet he who hides in Jesus Christ, the true Light, would never be caught by the devil; All his tricks, hosts, and evil works, would not be able to catch him. As to the arrow that flies by day, many fathers of the church believe that it refers to the heretics who misquote from the Holy book, the light of life, and corrupt its interpretation. These are the arrows that fly by day, and misuse the word of life.

❖ The terror by night is the hidden murder and the unknown treason that take place by night; and the physical lusts that stir up by night. Whereas the arrow that flies by day, is the apparent opposition.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ “*You shall not be afraid of the terror by night*”. The righteous would not fear the night, as much as he would fear the day. “*Come, you children, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord*” (Psalm 34: 11). Satan would not aim his arrows by day, lest they would be seen, as “*All things that are exposed are made manifest by the light*” (Ephesians 5: 13). ... Now, some may object, saying: If Satan does not aim his arrows by day, what then does the psalm mean by saying: “*nor of the arrow that flies by day*” (5)? ... The arrow that flies by day, is the teaching of the heretics that fly here and there by day. By their disturbing views, and their false interpretations, they rob us of every truth; “*Like a pestilence that walks in darkness*” (6).

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 15 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

<sup>2</sup> Homily on Psalms, 20.

He does not say “stands”, but says “walks”, As the heretics always change their views, moving to and fro all the time.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ We are completely surrounded by enemies on all sides. Our weak body which will soon become dust is just one confronting many, fighting against huge legions of enemies; and when the ruler of this world comes he will find no sin in him. Until then, let us listen to the words of the prophet: “*You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day*” (5).<sup>1</sup>

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ If you are righteous, no one can make you afraid. If you fear God, you would be afraid of nothing. For “*the righteous is as bold as a lion*” (Proverb 28: 1); and, according to David: “*You shall not be afraid of the terror by night*” (5); and he adds as well: “*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?*” (Psalm 27: 1); and, “*Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear*” (Psalm 27: 3). Do you see the courage and steadfastness of the soul that keeps God’s commandments<sup>2</sup>?

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

**“Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday” (6)**

While God confirms that His eyes are on those who fear Him all the year long; and that His care would not cease day and night; So the adversary, on his side, would use any chance to destroy the children of God; he would terrorize them by night, aim his arrows at them by day, send pestilences in the darkness, and destruction at noonday.

Let the devil, then, work with all his energies, and under every circumstances; For those who fear God are kept in Him, their Refuge; that no arrow could pierce, nor go through. God’s protection is enough; it gives security day and night, and even every moment. Nothing will come over the believer, except through allowance from God, and for his own edification.

❖ Why does he say “*at noonday*”? As noonday refers to intense heat, so the persecution by the devil is extremely hot<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 22:3.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 105: 6.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 91 (90).

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday*”. In the book of Genesis we read that Joseph held a banquet for his brothers at noonday. And in the Song of Songs, it is written: “*Tell me, O whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon*” (Song 1: 7). The saints take rest at noon; while Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11: 14); and his servants pretend to be vain ministers of righteousness. That is why Arius and other heretics are called ‘the demons of noonday’<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The sixth of our struggles is against what the Greeks call ‘boredom’, a close relative to depression, and a serious ailment which comes, in particular, upon the solitary monks, and the dwellers of the wilderness. It usually disturbs the monk at the sixth hour of the day (10 o’clock in the morning), like a wave of fever associated with a rise of body temperature that comes upon the sick at certain regular hours of the day. Some elders call this spirit, mentioned in psalm 91: ‘the demon of noonday’<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Cassian)

❖ The devil of boredom, called ‘the demon of noonday’, is the most serious of the demons, attacks the monk at about the sixth hour of the day (10 o’clock in the morning), and lets his soul go around itself like a whirlpool, until the eighth hour of the day (2 o’clock in the afternoon).

It starts by letting the monk watch the sun with anguish and a narrow chest, to see it move slowly as though it does not at all; and as though the hours of the day came to be fifty hours instead of 24 hours. Growing boredom lets him look through the window, or get out of his cell, look here and there, hoping to see someone like him out of his cell. A feeling of grudge grows in him against the way of his life; feeling that there is no one to comfort him, because there is no more love among the brethren. This feeling becomes more intense through the work of the devil, in case that someone happen to cause him any harm.

Now, the devil starts to provoke in him a longing to go and dwell in some other place, where he may lead a much easier, and less cruel life. He attempts to convince him that pleasing God and worshipping Him could be done in any place, and not in a particular one, and binds

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<sup>1</sup> *On Psalms, homily 68.*

<sup>2</sup> *De institutis caenoborum. Book 10.*

such thoughts in his mind with reminding him of his loved ones; of the past happy early days of his life; and of what he would end up to, if he goes on living this cruel and tough life of monastic strife. The ‘demon of noonday’ uses every available means to deceive the monk, until he succeeds in letting him forsake his life as a monk.

But if the monk manages to oppose such a war, and to overcome the evil provocations of the ‘demon of noonday’, his soul would exult, and would be filled with unutterable peace<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Such demons that keep on disturbing the soul even up to death, are even more persistent than the other demons that provoke the lusts of the body, and are easier to retreat than the former ones. The other demons may touch one side or another of man’s soul; but the ‘demon of noonday’ would cover the soul on all sides, and drown the whole mind in its whirlpool of thoughts.

That is why the ‘seclusion’ together with a victory over lusts, are the sweetest of victories, for nothing more than mere memories of the spiritual wars would remain in man’s soul and mind<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Oghris of Pontus)**

❖ It became evident that the unclean spirits are of diverse kinds: some are specialized for fornication and evil pleasures; others for vain pride; other are experts in lying, or in inspiring blasphemy; as is expressed by one of them in (1 kings22: 22), by saying to the Lord: “*I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of prophets*”. ... On account of such spirits, the apostle rebukes those deceived by them, saying that “*some depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy*” (1 Timothy 4: 1, 2). There are other kinds of unclean spirits that strengthen the spirit of evil lusts and uncleanness, as proclaimed by the prophet Hosea, saying: “*The spirit of harlotry have caused them to stray, and to play the harlot against their God*”<sup>3</sup> (Hose 4: 12).

In the same way, the Holy Scripture<sup>4</sup> teaches us that there are ‘demons of the day’ and ‘others of the night’ (Psalm 91: 5, 6). Calling them by the names of several wild vicious animals, refer to their ferocity<sup>5</sup>.

**(Father Serinus)**

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<sup>1</sup> القديس مار أوغريس البنطي: إلى أناتوليس Anatolius عن "الأفكتر الثمانية"، 7.

<sup>2</sup> القديس مار أوغريس البنطي: توجيهات إلى أناتوليس Anatolius عن "الحياة العاملة"، 25.

<sup>3</sup> "فضلوا بعيداً عن إلههم".

<sup>4</sup> راجع مز 116: 113؛ لو 10: 19؛ يو 14: 30؛ أف 6: 12.

<sup>5</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 7: 32.

❖ He is a deceiving and crafty enemy, whose twisted ways and diverse forms, we cannot perceive, except by Your Light

He sometimes appears like a lamb, and other times as a wolf.

Sometimes as light, and other times as darkness.

He knows how to change his form, and to conform his plans, according to the circumstances of man.

To deceive those who labor with grief, he grieves together with them;

For the exultant hearts, he corrupts the atmosphere of their happy times.

For the hot in spirit, he appears to them as an angel of light;

To take away the weapons of the spiritually strong, he appears to them like a lamb.

To devour the meek, he turns into a wolf;

He terrifies some by night fears; and others by arrows flying by day; he bring the former down into darkness, and fights the later openly in noonday (Psalm 91).

Who can distinguish his diverse crafty ways?!

Who can count the number of his horrible fangs?!

He hides his arrows in his bag; and keeps his tricks until the time most convenient to attack.

O my Lord, You are my hope ... Without Your light, it would be difficult for me to distinguish the devil's diverse tricks and maneuvers.

(St. Augustine)

*“A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand on your right hand, but it shall not come near you” (7)*

St. Jerome noticed that he did not say ‘on your left hand’, but said “*at your side*”. And he also noticed that the fallen on his side are a thousand, while, on his right hand, they are ten thousands... According to him, on one aspect, the believer has no left hand, he uses his left hand as though a right hand; he has two sides, and both are holy. On another aspect, the enemy fights his victims, more on the left side; namely by the evil lusts.

❖ Most surely, the righteous has no left side! The Lord advises us, saying: “*Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him*” (Mathew 5: 39). Notice that He did not say: “turn the left cheek to him”, but said: “*turn the other to him*”. It is as though, the righteous, has two cheeks on his right side; like the righteous ‘Ehod’, mentioned in the book of Judges, who, being left-handed, seemed as though had two hands on his left side, by which he thrust his dagger

in the belly of the foolish fat king of Moab (Judges 3: 14). ... There are many who lie in wait for you on your right side, but not as many on the other side. A thousand fall on our left side, and ten thousands on our right side. Wherever there are greater battles, there would naturally be greater conquest<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ “*A thousand may fall on your side, and ten thousand on your right hand*”. The psalmist does not say “on your left side”, for the righteous has no left side. That is why, in the gospel, it came: “*Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him*” (Mathew 5: 39). The Lord did not say: “turn the left cheek to him”... The (left) side of the righteous refers to the physical weakness; while the right side refers to the perfection of the soul. By the suffering of the body, by fasting, and chastity, a thousand may fall; while on the right side, where there are the free spirit, and the teaching of purity and holiness, ten thousands may fall; but “*they will not come near you*”, namely, they will perish before they reach you<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ For us humans, life is a kind of race. We wrestle here, and will be crowned elsewhere. No one can take fear away, while serpents and scorpions are attacking man on all sides. The Lord says: “*My sword shall be bathed in heaven*” (Isaiah 34: 5). Do you expect to find peace on earth? Of course not!, for the earth produce only thorns and thistles, and its dust is the food for the serpent (See genesis 14: 18). “*For 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). We are surrounded by host of enemies on all sides, The body is weak, and will soon turn into dust; One confronts a multitude, fights against horrible adversaries; The ruler of this world has not come yet, when no sin will be found in him (John 14: 30). ... So far, you are not listening in peace to the words of the prophet, saying: “*You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day*” (5)... When you are confronted by hostile enemies; when you are infected by fever; when your lusts are stirred up in you; when you say: “What shall I do?”; you will then hear the words of the prophet Elisha, saying: “*Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them*” (2 Kings 6: 16). He would pray for your sake, saying: “*Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he*

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms Homily 20.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms Homily 68.

*may see*". ... And when your eyes are opened, you will see a fiery chariot like that of the prophet Elijah, waiting to take you up to heaven (2 Kings 2: 11). Then, you will joyfully sing, saying: "*Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken, and we have escaped*" (Psalm 124: 7)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ By saying ten thousands fight on the right hand, and a thousand fight on the other side; means that the works of the right hand, which bring pleasure to God, will be fought by all the hosts on the left. According to St. Isicheos, many will perish through works they think to be (right-handed) and pleasing to God; because they, claiming certain vain rights, they consequently fall into perdition. Whereas those who seek the help of God, may see many adversaries come against them, but they will not reach them; "*they shall not come near them*" (7)

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***"Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the punishment of the wicked"* (8)**

Unfortunately, in moments of weakness, some believers get disturbed to see the success and the prosperity of the wicked, while the saints confront a multitude of troubles. But, it is befitting of them to wait for the great day of the Lord, to see the eternal punishment of the wicked.

In this phrase, some see a prophecy about the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ. In His first coming, He came emptying Himself, and

delivered himself even to death on the cross for the sake of the world; Whereas in His second coming, He will come in His glory; and will bring punishment on the wicked who scoffed His salvation work, persisted on persecuting His body, namely, the church, and did not repent.

- ❖ "***Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the punishment of the wicked***" You will see the bodies of the dead, and will marvel at the greatness of the Lord, the divine Savior. You will see the punishment of the wicked which they deserve. All that will mean that you will make God your refuge; and in security, you will see the punishment of the heretics, having protected yourself from their teachings<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Eustochium*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms Homily 68*.

***“Because you have made the Lord your refuge; the Most High your dwelling place” (9)***

While in the last phrase, the righteous see what will dwell upon the wicked of an eternal punishment for their persistence on their wickedness; Here, he proclaims that the righteous, even if he suffers afflictions and temptations in this world, yet, they are not intended for his perdition, as much as they are a precious chance for him to make God his refuge, and the Most High his dwelling place, to protect him against the strikes of the enemy.

Oftentimes, the righteous may suffer tribulations; but they are not strikes, but temptations, like the ones that came upon the righteous ‘Job’; Whereas for the wicked, these tribulations are not to be called temptations, but strikes.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

The last words are said to the righteous in the name of the Lord. Here we see the righteous respond to the Lord, saying: *“Lord, You are my refuge”*; *“O, Most High, You are my dwelling place”*<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“No evil shall befall you; Nor shall any plague come near your tent” (10)***

Strikes may be directed to all; Yet, while they pierce the depths of the wicked, and destroy him; As far as the righteous is concerned, what the world count as an evil, will turn for him into a kind of temptation that will increase his splendor, and justify him. No temptation can come near the tent of his soul, nor reach his heart, mind, or his holy will.

Let the enemy strike with his whole might; he has no authority over the believer without the allowance of God, his Savior; and then, it would be for his justification.

- ❖ Through scourging Jesus, we are spared of being scourged; and according to the Holy Book: *“No plague come near your tent”* (10)<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ If the Lord, Himself, was scourged, and has gone through with a diversity of afflictions and temptations; Who among the righteous was not scourged by the devil? Let us think about the meaning of *“No plague will come near your tent”*. It means that the devil will be roaring outside, and attempting to provoke sensory pains on the

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms Homily 68.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Matt 4: 27: 27.

believer, but the tent of his soul or mind, namely the tent of his faith, will not be touched<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ I entreat you, not to count your physical ailment (blindness), as though it has dwelt upon you because of a sin you have committed! When the apostles entertained such thought about the one who was born blind; and asked the Lord, saying: “*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*”, the Lord said: “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the work of God be revealed in him*” (John 9: 3)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Because no sin by the strikes of the devil could come near the body of the Lord, He resisted the temptations of the enemy to bring conquest to humanity; He turned the devil into a toy, as proclaimed by David: “*He made Leviathan a toy to play with*” (Psalm 104: 26).
- ❖ Again he says: “*He will break in pieces the oppressor*” (Psalm 72: 4), and, “*You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces*” (Psalm 74: 13, 14). And, “*You will pierce Leviathan’s nose with a snare, and drag it along*” (Job 40: 24)<sup>3</sup>.

(Father Khromatius)

“*For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways*” (11)

Commenting on this saying, which he believes applies to all Christians, **the scholar Origen** says: [It is the upright who need the help of the angels, lest they would be crushed by Satan, or an arrow that flies in the darkness would pierce their heart<sup>4</sup>].

According to the belief of some Jews<sup>5</sup>, the souls of the departed righteous are received and escorted by three good angels; whereas those of the wicked are received by three evil angels. Other Jews believe that three groups of heavenly or peace angels accompany the righteous on his departure<sup>6</sup>:

The first group will sing: “He shall enter into peace”

The second group will sing: “He shall rest in his bed”.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Psalms, homily 68.*

<sup>2</sup> *Letter 68 to Castrutius, 1..*

<sup>3</sup> *Tractatr on Mathew 14: 5.*

<sup>4</sup> *Hom. On Num., 5,3.*

<sup>5</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia, Angelology.*

<sup>6</sup> *Tosef. Shab. 17: 2; Shab, 119b.; ket. 104 a., Hag. 16a.*

The third group will sing: “*He shall walk in his uprightness*” (Isaiah 57: 2).

And on the departure of the wicked, three groups of evil angels will accompany him, singing: “*There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked*” (Isaiah 57: 21)<sup>1</sup>.

The Jews believe that angels attended the funeral of Abraham<sup>2</sup>; took over the burial of Moses<sup>3</sup>; and bring forth the souls of the righteous into heaven<sup>4</sup>. And an angel is designated to proclaim the new arrivals to the pit<sup>5</sup>.

On account of that the moments of death are awesome, the Book confirms that angels would accompany the true believers during them.

The Lord Christ says that “*when poor Lazarus died, he was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom*” (Luke 16: 22). The angels, as faithful ministers wish for us, and even help us to enjoy salvation, to partake of their heavenly glory; They help to carry the souls of the true believers, the martyrs in particular, to the heavenly kingdom, with exultant shouts of joy<sup>6</sup>.

In the prayers of funerals, the priest prays for the soul of the departed, saying: “Let the angels of light carry him to paradise”.

According to the Jewish tradition, the archangel Michael guides the souls of the departed<sup>7</sup>; And according to the apostle Jude, a dispute happened between the archangel Michael and the devil over the burial of the prophet Moses (Jude 1: 9).

❖ When the soul, all of a sudden, set forth from the heavy burden of the body, through death, although it gets terrified on seeing the face of the angel, designated for receiving the departed soul, yet it realizes that her eternal adobe has been finally set<sup>8</sup>.

**(The scholar Tertullian)**

At the moment the soul departs from the body, the righteous will be segregated from the wicked; and the designated angels will take every category to their deserved places<sup>9</sup>.

**(St. Justine)**

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<sup>1</sup> Ket. 1049, Num. A. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Testament of Abraham A 20.

<sup>3</sup> Deut R. 11; Targ. Yer. Deut. 39:6.

<sup>4</sup> Testament of Abraham A 20; Targ. Yer. Song of Soloman, 4: 12; Luke 16: 22.

<sup>5</sup> Ber. 18b.

<sup>6</sup> Origin, Hom. In Judic., 7, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Daniélou: *the Angels and Their Mission*, (trans. By David Heimann), 1993, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> De Anima, 53.

<sup>9</sup> Quaest. Orth., 75 (منسوبة إليه)

- ❖ If we need a guide when we go from one city to another, how much more will the soul need to be guided on its way, once the chains of the body are broken, and it crosses over to the life to come<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ A huge crowd will gather together to watch you, called for martyrdom.

If you go through such a battle, say together with the apostle Paul: “*We have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men*” (1 Corinthians 4: 9). The whole world, all the angels on the right and on the left, all people, including those on God’s side (Deuteronomy 32: 29; Colossians 1: 12), and all the others, will all watch us while we strive for the sake of our Christianity.

The angels will either exult for us; the rivers, together with all the trees of the valley, will clap their hands; and the mountains will rejoice (Psalm 97: 8; Isaiah 55:12 LXX); Or, God forbids, the evil joy would overwhelm the lower world, rejoicing over our fall<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ Once our present tent (our body) gets dissolved, and we start on our way to the sanctuaries, Those who are truly holy, and will have their place in the Holy of Holiness, will see, on their way, the angels surrounding them; and on their arrival at the divine dwelling place, they will stop to be carried on the shoulders of the angels, and to be lifted up with their hands. All that was seen by the prophet in spirit, saying: “*For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways*” (11). What he wrote in this psalm, apply without doubt, to the upright, more than it does to the Lord.

St. Paul, dealing with this same secret, supports the belief that some will be carried over the clouds by the angels, saying: “*then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*” (Thessalonians 4: 17)<sup>3</sup>.

- ❖ “*For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways*” (11)... It is the righteous who needs the help of the angels, lest the demons would cast him away, or an arrow that flies in the darkness would pierce him.

(The scholar Origen)

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. In Lazar. 2: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Exhortation to Martyrdom. 18 (ACW).

<sup>3</sup> In Num. 5, 3. See also Eusebius, Comm. In Is., 66: “*the angels will lead the elect to their blessed and, when they be lifted up, carried as was Elias on an angelic chariot, amid the rays of heavenly light*”.

❖ Keep on praying, lest the demons would find a chance to sow tares in your field (Matthew 13: 25). Do not have compassion on your body, and let it oversleep, but you should rather get up to sing praise to the Lord. If you do not know how to sing praise, give God thanks, and say: ‘Glory be to You, O Lord’; say it several times; and if you can, say it a thousand times. Then the Lord will send His angel to help you cast the demons away. Do not fear them (Isaiah 8: 12), for you are given a guardian angel, as it is written in the Holy Book: “*The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him*” (Psalm 34: 7); And “*He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways*” (11). ... But do not put you hope only in the angels, and say: ‘They are keeping me’, but keep on praying, for they are given charge over you to proclaim your righteousness, and to present it to God<sup>1</sup>.

**(Pope St. Theophilus)**

❖ Keep slothfulness away from yourself, for it weighs your body down, to keep it from getting up to pray.

Strive to pray and to fast; for nothing would drive the demons away like prayer and fasting (Mark 9: 29). And if they disturb you and keep you from sleep, get up and pray, to “*let them be like chaff before the wind*” (Psalm 35: 5). Then you can sleep in peace.

Do not say: ‘It is not yet the time to pray’, but pray all the time, for prayer is like an arrow that chases the demons away. And if Satan appears like the morning star before your eyes, you should know for sure that it is Satan and not the Lord, who appeared to let you become proud of yourself.

**(St. Abba Arsanius)**

**St. Jerome** says that the devil, tempting the Lord, quoted this phrase (Psalm 91: 11), but did not quote the one following it.

He quoted the first part concerning the weakness of the Savior, having become man, and did not quote the one concerning the authority given by the Lord Christ to His church to tread upon Satan and all his hosts.

❖ We truly appreciate the kind of authority given to the saintly apostles, to trample over the serpents and the scorpions, through the apostolic way of life. Let us then pray to the Lord, that He who has given gave them such authority, would also give it to us, we who are still babes

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<sup>1</sup> رسالة القديس أنبا ثيوفيلس إلى الرهبان، 4 (فردوس الآباء).

in the shadow of their righteousness, to follow their lead, and be helped by their worthiness in Jesus Christ our Lord<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone” (12)***

This phrase bears a prophecy about the Lord Christ, Who would never sin, and would never perish; As He, although in no need of the angelic help, yet the angels have always shown a great longing to minister to Him in His birth, during His temptation, passion, resurrection, and ascension! ... Nevertheless, the devil wrongly assumed, through this very phrase (11), that he could set for Him a net to fall into sin,

Elisha the prophet, perceiving the value of the angelic help, did not fear the huge number of the Assyrian army, with its horses and chariots, that came to surround the mountain where he dwelt, to catch him (2 Kings 6: 16). The hosts of angels bear an exalted love for us, being our fellow servants, who desire to minister to their Lord through us (Revelation 22: 9)... How joyful and exulting is the fact proclaimed by the Holy Book, that angels and humans form one unified family under God<sup>2</sup>!

❖ Yes, God has given his angels of light, charge over men, and in particular the righteous among them; as according to the apostle Paul: *“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”* (Hebrew 1: 14). These angels exhort the righteous to adopt the exaltation of vision and work, lest their feet would dash against the stone of vain humility and disobedience; and lift up, as well, the weak, during their difficult walk, lest their mind would stumble, and become a footstool for the devil.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Concerning the angelic support, he seems to speak, as though to a weak human, (and not about the Lord Christ)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample under foot” (13)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 68.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Plumer: Ps. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on Matt. 1: 4: 6.

The devil is often called a lion, dragon, and a serpent; And, likening the devil, their father, intending the perdition of the Lord Christ, the wicked crucified Him; Yet, by His cross, He destroyed their authority, granting His believers the authority over the hosts of darkness.

God granted us to trample upon the enemy under our feet; as according to the apostle St. Paul: “*The God of peace will crush Satan under Your feet shortly*” (Romans 16: 20). The Evangelic St. Luke says: “*Then the seventy returned with joy saying, ‘Lord, even the demon are subject to us in Your name’. And He said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you’*” (Luke 10: 17-19). And to the Evangelic St. John says: “*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because, He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*” (1 John 4: 4).

**St. Cyril the Great** says: [The only begotten Son of God came down from heaven; That is why Satan fell down like lightening<sup>1</sup>].

❖ Many truly complain of the weakness and frailty of humanity; but greatest among them are the righteous Job and David, by their unique distinguished ways:

The former is characterized by his talent of reaching directly to his goal, together with the exaltation of his way of expression, greatly influenced by the extreme painful temptations he passed through.

Whereas the later, with his soul filled with peace and thanksgiving, quietly and gently believing in his case; reflected what actually came upon him as being like “*a deer*”, to become a role model for others (See Psalm 42: 1, 2).

Do not get disturbed to see that great prophet being likened to such a wild animal (a deer); if you take into consideration the famous words said by the Lord to the apostles: “*Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*” (Matthew 10: 16).

The Lord Himself was likened to the deer; having come to earth, and trampled over the serpent, namely, the devil, exposed His heel to him, yet was not harmed, nor bitten by its venom (See Genesis; psalm 40 (41): 9); For it is written: “*The serpent, You shall trample under foot*” (13).

Let us then be “*deer*”, to be able to trample over the serpents. ... We could be “*deer*” if we follow the word of Christ, who created the

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on Luke, homily 64.*

deer to be without fear of the stings of the serpents. About them, the Lord said to 'Job': "*Can you mark when the deer give birth? Can you number the months they fulfill? Or do you know the time when they bear young? They bow down, they deliver their offspring (without fear)*" (Job 39: 1-3).

You can learn from the prophet Isaiah, how the young of those deer live without fear, saying: "*The nursing child will play by the cobra's hole; and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all*" (Isaiah 11: 8, 9). With this he means the children of the church<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ By the incarnation of our Savior which surpassed has surpassed everything else; holiness has taken roots all over the earth; and the darkness that hides the truth has come to no avail<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ We trample over the serpents, the scorpions, and all the power of the enemy (Luke 10: 19); thanks to the authority given to us by the Lord Christ. Those who are in Christ, are also qualified for the divine promise to be fulfilled in them, to keep and save them everywhere, and to be proclaimed fruitful: "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28: 20)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

- ❖ Do you want to be among those who trample over the serpent, the scorpion, and all the power of the enemy? (Luke 10: 19); And to "*tread upon the lion and the cobra?*" (11); Instead of letting the devil, that worthless king, reign and set his kingdom of sin in you; Let our Lord Jesus Christ, alone, reign in you, and take him away. Glory, and authority be to Him, forever and ever, Amen<sup>4</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ Those are the devil and his evil hosts, on whom, our Lord gave us the authority, saying: "*I give you the authority to trample upon the serpents, the scorpions, and all the power of the enemy*" (Luke 10: 19). He, who controls his temper and anger, would trample upon the dragons; Who breaks his pride by humility, would trample upon the lion; He who takes out of his heart the venom of envy, would tramples upon the cobra – the king of serpents, that can kill by a mere

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer of David 4: 1: 4.

<sup>2</sup> الرسالة الفصيحة الأولى، ترجمة د. ميشيل بديع عبد الملك، مايو 2004، ص 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Glaphyra on Genesis*, 3: 4.

<sup>4</sup> *On Joshua*, homily 11: 6.

look of its eyes!; And he, who refrain from uncleanness and fornications, would crush the heads of the serpents crawling on the earth.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“I saw Satan fall down like lightening from heaven”* (Luke 10: 17). Satan was not in heaven when he said: *“I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God”* (Isaiah 14: 13); He did not fall down from heaven, but fell down from his greatness and authority ..., Why then does He say: *“from heaven?”*. He means to say: It is as though he fell down from heaven. ... Lightning does not fall down from heaven, but from the clouds that creates it. Like lightening that suddenly happens in a moment, Satan falls under the conquest of the cross ... And like the lightning which comes out, never to go back to its place, so is Satan who fell, and will never get his authority back<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)**

### **3- THE DIVINE PROMISE OF HIS SALVATION:**

*“Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name”* (14)

The psalmist ends this psalm by a divine joyful talk (14-16); in which God presents to those who love, and attach themselves to Him, divine promises that provide their hearts with heavenly comforts. When our souls cling to the Heavenly, He sets us on high, as though to heaven, where the enemy cannot catch us in his snares, he sets for us. He, not only saves us, but will also *“sets us on high”*, Namely, He pours upon us a kind of honor or glory; because we knew His name; namely, we became His friends, keeping His commandments.

❖ These are the words of God, addressed to the church ... We, as well, who still labor on earth, still go through temptations, and still fear lest our steps would fall into the snares, We hear the voice of our Lord God comfort us: *“For he has set his love upon Me...<sup>2</sup>”*,

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The name of God is His glory and His majesty, known by him who worship God with upright faith, pure of any idol worship, and of corrupt dogmas; who does according to His will, trusts in Him, and keeps His commandments. He would be saved of any possible danger by God’s help.

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron, 10: 13.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 91 (90).*

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him” (15)***

About the Lord Christ, as a representative of humanity, 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 reverent submission” (Hebrew 5: 7). It is therefore, befitting of us to follow His lead, trusting that prayers and supplications are the source of all blessings, and the way to salvation and glory.

When you are in affliction, do not be afraid as though God is no more with you; If you hold fast to your faith, God will be with you in your labor. Christ has fallen asleep in the boat while His disciples were about to perish (Matthew 8: 24-25). If your faith is asleep in your heart, Christ would be as though asleep in your boat, for Christ dwells in you by faith. When the waves start striking your boat, wake Christ up from His sleep; Wake your faith up, and Christ will never forsake you<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation”***  
**(16)**

Showing us His salvation means revealing to us the eternal glories He prepares for us.

❖ The time of life has an end and fixed number of days. It is well said by the psalmist: “Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am” (Psalm 39: 4). Even if the life we live is good and filled with enlightenment; the days of life given under the sun are days of vanity, as they will eventually be replaced by greater joys, expressed by the psalmist, saying: “With long life I will satisfy him” (14)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

❖ By “long life” is meant (eternal life) ... Having no end, it will surely satisfy; for those with an end will never do. Let us then ask for the eternal life, a long life with no end<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 91 (90).

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Ecclesiastes 277.7.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 91 (90).

- ❖ If man calls upon Him with vehement cries and tears, He will answer him, will be with him in the time of sorrow, not only to save him, but to honor him, satisfy him with a long life, and show him His salvation, for He is the Savior of the world; like what He did with Simon the elder who said: “*My eyes have seen Your salvation*” (Luke 2: 30).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 91

### LET ME BE COVERED BY YOU, AND TAKE REFUGE IN YOU

- ❖ My soul blesses You, You who came down to our earth;  
You became for me a dwelling place and a refuge;  
And received me as Your dwelling place  
You became for me a secure way;  
Through which You carry me, and bring me forth into the bosom of  
your Father;
- ❖ Let that crafty fowler set his snares;  
For he cannot set them on my way;  
For he cannot approach Christ, my Way;  
He sets his snares on the sides of the way;  
And does his best to let me deflect right or left;  
But, as I shall never forsake my Christ;  
I shall never fall into his snares and nets
- ❖ You cover me with Your wings;  
and hide me in your bosom;  
As You become a shield for me,  
Let the enemy aim all the arrows he has in his bag;  
I shall not fear him day or night,  
For his arrows cannot touch me,  
As long as You surround me.
- ❖ Whoever deflect from you to the right, by self justification,  
Or to the left, by the lusts of sin,  
Will fall into the snares of the devil, and be killed by his fiery  
arrows;

Let me get attached to You, and hide in You;  
That no strike from the enemy can reach me.  
Your angels desire to minister to Your children;  
For Your sake, they carry them on their hands;  
To keep them from dashing their feet against a stone.

- ❖ You granted us the authority over the devil and all his hosts;  
He would never be able to seduce us, as long as we abide in Your bosom;
- ❖ I praise and glorify Your name;  
and in the midst of affliction, I get in touch with the depth of Your thoughts;  
You reveal to me the secrets of Your salvation;  
And bring me forth into the deposit of Your heavens.

## **PSALM 92**

### **A SONG FOR THE SABBATH DAY**

This psalm which had its special position in the ministry of the Sabbath day in the temple, reveals the true meaning of the Sabbath for the Jews. It did not mean just having rest from work, but meant the enjoyment of comfort and gladness through worshipping and praising God. Worship is not a burden to which the believer is committed, but is comfort and gladness of the soul.

In the Chaldean version, it came that Adam was the author of this psalm; a view that was adopted by many Jewish scholars, and few of the Christians. They believed that Adam wrote it, either before falling, or directly after his expulsion from paradise. Yet some object to this view on account of the fact that Adam, in paradise, did not know the musical instruments.

Some believe that it was written by the prophet Moses; while still others believe it to be written by the prophet David, after God relieved him of his enemies.

It is a call or an exhortation to praise God for the sake of His works, whether as a Creator, or for His care and protection of His people; and His justice in dealing with the wicked.

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|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>1- A call to praise God</b>       | <b>1 - 5</b>    |
| <b>2- The perdition of the fool</b>  | <b>6 - 11</b>   |
| <b>3- Blessing for the righteous</b> | <b>12 - 15.</b> |

#### **The title:**

A psalm. A song for the Sabbath day. A praise to the Lord for His love and faithfulness.

Commenting on this title, **St. Jerome** says: [There would be no Sabbath unless it is preceded by six days. We work the six days to have rest on the seventh. We cannot praise God while being preoccupied with the works of this world. But on the Sabbath day, or the day of the comfort of the Lord, no one can do any lowly work, but only what concern the Sabbath. Do you know that on the Sabbath day, while the priests work in the temple of the Lord, no one was allowed to make a fire or even to gather sticks. He who was found doing that was stoned to death (see Numbers 14L 22-36). ... It is therefore befitting of us to

praise God on the Sabbath day, and to leave aside the works of this world<sup>1</sup>].

According to many fathers, allowing the people to gather manna enough for two days (including the Sabbath day), refers to the serious work for the sake of the enjoyment of the heavenly food in the eternal life. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says: [This day is the present life, during which we prepare ourselves for the life to come<sup>2</sup>]. And **the scholar Origen** says: [The manna that was gathered in advance for the Sabbath day did not corrupt, nor infested by worms. But in case you store for the present life, for love of this world, it will be corrupted by worms<sup>3</sup>].

Therefore, our Sabbath means sharing with our God His rest, which is a divine work whose holiness never ceases (Exodus 31: 12-17). That is why the Holy Book often uses the expression “Keep the Sabbath”, on account of that it is an encounter with God through the holy worship and the sacrifice; Not that we honor God by our worship, but, what is greater, to enjoy the work of God in us, granting us a fellowship with Him, to enter by Him into His holiness<sup>4</sup>.

The “Sabbath” was the (deposit) of the enjoyment by the chosen people, of the holiness of God, a day every week; a year every seven years; and another every fifty years. They used to stop every temporal work, not to live in idleness, but to lead a holy life, to experience the (deposit) of heaven.

As the “Sabbath” was the sign of membership in the divine household, and of belonging to heaven; breaking the Sabbath was punished by death (Exodus 35: 1-3),

In the psalm of praise of the Sabbath day (Psalm 92), the psalmist meditates in the works of God, saying: “*O Lord, how great are Your works; Your thoughts are very deep*” (5). And perceiving that his success is through the Lord, the believer says: “*The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree. He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age*” (12- 14). By that, the believer’s soul is filled with joy, to sing “*on an instrument of ten strings, on the lute, and on the harp, with harmonious sound; for You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands*” (3-4).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Vita Mos. 2: 144.

<sup>3</sup> In Exod. Hom. 7: 6.

<sup>4</sup> Thierry Maertens: *A Feast in Honor of Yahweh*, Geaffret Cheplen, 1966,p. 166.

According to **the scholar Origen**, the believer's life become Sabbatical, not through refraining from doing good works, but through meditation in God, His works, and His heavenly glory<sup>1</sup>.

And according to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the Sabbath refers to the seventh day in which the Jews used to have rest from physical works, to concentrate on spiritual ones, to offer sacrifices, to raise prayers and to sing praises. It refers, as well, to the eternal life to come, when all physical works come to an end. ... The time when our Lord was incarnate, was also called a 'Sabbath', for in it, we have cast away from ourselves the works of our sins.

❖ God proclaims the 'Sabbath' to us. ... What kind of Sabbath? And where could it be? ... It is in the heart inside us! As there are many who are idle, as far as their body members are concerned, while disturbed in their conscience. ... The Joy and the tranquility of our hope is our Sabbath. ... That is the issue of praise and singing in this psalm. How could the Christian be in the Sabbath of his heart? Namely, in the tranquility and purity of his conscience with no disturbance? ... Here he tells us how to keep the Sabbath in our hearts<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## **1- A CALL TO PRAISE GOD:**

***"It is good to give thanks (to confess) to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High" (1)***

The psalmist calls on others to partake of the moments of joyfully praising God, using musical instruments. A perpetual work that endures till eternity.

❖ When we (confess) to the Lord, we trust in His mercy; And when we sing praises, we consummate the good work<sup>3</sup>.

❖ ***"It is good to (confess) to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High"***. Why didn't the psalmist say first: "It is good to sing praises", before saying: "It is good to confess"; On account of that (confession) prepares the way for the true singing of praises?!

It is good for man, first, to repent and confess his sins to the Lord; And once he recognizes his sins, he could sing praises to God. By

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<sup>1</sup> Source chretienne 147: 30.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 92 (91).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 21.

remorse, he would be strongly qualified to praise, without being handicapped by the seriousness of his sins<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ What then does this psalm teach us? ... *“It is good to confess to the Lord”* ... What is the confession to the Lord? ... You should confess to the Lord in both cases: In your sins, you have committed; And in your good works; for God has done them through you. You can then *“sing praises to the name of the Most High”*; seeking the glory of God, and not your own glory; the glory of His name, and not the glory of yours. If you seek His name, He would seek your names; And if you disregard the name of God, He will wipe out yours<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“To declare Your loving kindness (mercy) in the morning, and your faithfulness every night”* (2)

The praise starts at dawn, early in the morning; and the soul keeps on praising Him until late at night; Man would continue meditating in God’s mercies, and in His faithfulness in realizing His divine promises. Nothing will grant man sweetness at the start of the day; nor comfort and rest at its end, like praising God.

- ❖ What then is the meaning of: *“To declare Your loving kindness (mercy) in the morning”*?... It means that we cannot confess to the Lord, and have His mercy, unless when the light clearly starts to enlighten our hearts; Unless when the shadows of the night retreat, and the dawn starts to appear; You can truly declare the loving kindness of God, once the Sun of Righteousness shines in your heart<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ Why would we declare mercy at dawn, and faithfulness at night?... Listen carefully, for these issues are not easy to understand! ... He first says: *“It is good to confess to the Lord”*; as singing praise, should follow the recognition of sins. He who repent his sins, and is qualified to sing praises, starts to declare Him whom he praises. ... What does it mean to declare His mercy at dawn; and sing praise to His faithfulness at night? ... Where God’s mercy is, there would be light, namely, there would be dawn, when the sun starts to shine, and the darkness of the night starts to retreat. ... Your faithfulness is at

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 69.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 92 (91).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 21.

night, when justice is; Whenever justice is, there would be trial; and once the verdict is issued, there would be no more chance for mercy, but there would be the threat of the catastrophe of sin; there would be night and not day; according to the words of the prophet: “*What good is the day of the Lord to you, It will be darkness and not light*” (Amos 5: 18). On that day, every man’s life will be examined according to his worthiness. According to another prophet: “*The day of the Lord is great, and very terrible*” (Joel 2: 11) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ What does it mean to declare the mercy of God in the morning, and his (truth) at night?... The morning, is, when we are still in good mood; and at night, with the dwelling of the sorrow of temptation. ... When you are flourishing, Rejoice in God, for it is through His mercy, that you flourish. And when you are in trouble, praise His truth, for He justly scourges on sins... At night, confessing the truth of God, the prophet Daniel said in his prayer: “*We have sinned and committed iniquity;... O Lord, righteousness belongs to You; and to us, the shame of face*” (Daniel; 9: 5, 7). Do not ever accuse God for your suffering; but refer it to reforming you on your sins,... By declaring His compassion early in the morning, and His truth late at night, you praise God perpetually, confess to Him, and sing praises to His name<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ The Sabbaths and feasts, that are consummated with gluttony, drinking, licentiousness, and unbefitting acts, are all abominations hated by God, and their doers deserve His reproach, according to His words on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah: “*Your new moons, and your appointed feasts, My soul hates; they are trouble to Me; I am weary of bearing them*” (Isaiah 1: 14). This psalm, therefore, teaches us that, when we refrain to work during feasts, it would be for the sake of the following four goals: which we continue doing every morning and every night.

1- To confess to the Lord; namely, to meditate in His goodness, and the salvation He has done for men.

2- To sing praises to His name.

3- To declare His mercy which He has done to us.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 69.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 92 (91).

4- To remind Him of His truth; namely, of His promise to Abraham, that in his seed, all nations will be blessed.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“On an instrument of ten strings, on the lute, and on the harp” (3)***

❖ When you pray *“lift up holy hands, without wrath or argument”* (1 Timothy 2: 8). We pray to the Lord on an instrument of ten strings; ... our body, soul, and spirit; will all play together in harmony, to produce a nice tune<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ The instrument of ten strings refers to the ten commandments of the law. It is befitting of us to play on this instrument, and not just carry it, as the Jews did with the law... *“On the lute”*, namely, by good words, as well as by good deeds. If you just utter words, you would have only the melody without the lute; And if you work and not utter words, you would have the lute without the melody. You should therefore, talk well, and do well, to have both the melody and the lute<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ *“On an instrument of ten strings”*; namely, that our singing and talk about the mercy of the Lord, as well as our prayers, should not only be by the tongue, but together with the contribution of the five strengths of the soul, and the five senses of the body; together with love for one another; through the help of the Holy Spirit; Not only during feasts, but all the time.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands” (4)***

Sanctifying the day of the Sabbath started first for the sake of glorifying God on His works of creation.

Man’s true rest is set upon praising God through a study and meditation in His amazing works, both hidden and manifest.

God’s perpetual care for His creation, is not less than the act of creation itself. If, by His love, He created everything; By the same love He keeps on caring for His creation. Then came the Christian Sabbath; namely, Sunday, to bring joy to the soul of believers, when they come to

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<sup>1</sup> *On Psalms, homily 21.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms, 92 (91).*

enjoy the new resurrected life, through the resurrection of the Lord Christ in the dawn of a Sunday.

God's deeds and the works of His hands, bring joy to our souls, and exhort us to sing joyful praises to His name.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the word "**Your work**", refers to the resurrection of the Lord of glory at the beginning of the week. The psalm refers to the joy of the church in the work of His resurrection on a Sunday; the day that became our feast and day of rest.

According to **St. Jerome**, this phrase is an answer to the Gnostics who, despise the matter, wrongly claiming that it is not the work of God, the Good Creator, but of another evil creator, of a lesser status than God.

And according to **St. Augustine**, the true believer rejoices in the works of God for his sake; on account of that the goodness he enjoys is a divine gift.

❖ If you come close to God, you will be in the light; That is why the psalm says: "*They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed*" (Psalm 34: 5). You cannot do any goodness unless you are enlightened by the light of God, and come to be in the warmth of His Holy Spirit. Therefore, when you see yourself doing a good deed, do not get puffed up, but confess to God, and say together with the apostle, "*What do you have, that you did not receive?*" (1 Corinthians 4: 7) <sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ Whenever I meditate in Him, I become full of gladness, and bless God; ... I am equally amazed when I look at the huge elephant, or look at the tiny ant<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ "*On an instrument of ten strings, on the lute, and on the harp, with harmonious sound; for You Lord, has made me glad through Your works! I will triumph in the works of Your hands*" (3, 4). Beware of Many<sup>3</sup>, Mercion<sup>4</sup>, Valentinus<sup>5</sup>, and the rest of the heretics, who dared to revile the Creator! ... Look at how the prophet glorifies the Creator, and rejoice in His works! He knows for sure that anything

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 92 (91).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 21.

<sup>3</sup> الرجاء القراءة من الكتاب ص 42، 43 لانه محتاج ترجمة إلى الإنجليزية

<sup>4</sup> الرجاء القراءة من الكتاب ص 42، 43 لانه محتاج ترجمة إلى الإنجليزية

<sup>5</sup> الرجاء القراءة من الكتاب ص 42، 43 لانه محتاج ترجمة إلى الإنجليزية

that looks evil is not as such by nature, but so became through the free option of man's will<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“O Lord, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep” (5)***

The more modern discoveries man comes to enjoys, the more amazed he becomes before the greatness of the wisdom, and care of the

Creator, that surpass the human thoughts. Yet, on the great day of the Lord, we shall perceive new depths of the work of salvation, given by the Lord, by His crucifixion, and His resurrection. When we enjoy seeing Him face to face, and the fellowship of His glories, we shall stand in awe before His amazing salvation.

❖ Indeed, O brethren, there is no sea as deep as such thoughts of God, ... how He makes the wicked flourish, and the righteous suffer; which are indeed very difficult to perceive! ... Do you wish to cross over this deep sea? Do not ever forsake the wood of the cross, so as not to drown! Hold fast to the strength of Christ; ... You heard the prophet Isaiah say: *“He gave His back to those who struck Him; and His cheeks to those who plucked out the beard”* (Isaiah 50: 6). Why did the Lord choose to suffer all that, except to comfort those who suffer? Endure, therefore, the temptations in this world with the same goal; and do not ever let those who do evil and flourish in this life, shake your faith.

*“Your thoughts are very deep”*, ... Do not do like a fish that rejoices to have the bait in its mouth! The fisherman hasn't pulled the line yet! What you think of as a long time is actually a very short moment. Everything will pass soon enough. ... What is a long life for man, compared to the eternity of God<sup>2</sup>?!

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“O Lord, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep!”***. These are the same feelings of the apostle who proclaims: *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”* (Romans 11: 33). His thoughts are so deep that no human contemplation can perceive His works<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 69.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 92 (91).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 69.

- ❖ Notice how the angels proclaim His beauty; but keep silent concerning His Essence<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

## 2- THE PERDITION OF THE FOOL:

*“A senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this” (6)*

What is the thing that a senseless man does not know, nor the fool understands, but the deep thoughts of God, who allows for the wicked to flourish, yet soon to wither like grass. It is befitting for the wicked not to rejoice in his flourishing, but to present repentance and return to God, to enjoy the heavenly glory, instead of a temporary flourishing, followed by an eternal perdition.

He who only trusts in his knowledge, and rejects the teaching of God, will enter into a kind of apathy and foolishness; according to the words of the prophet Jeremiah: *“For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all Your kingdoms, there is none like You. But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish... But the Lord is the true God”* (Jeremiah 10: 7, 8, 10); And, *“Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge”* (Jeremiah 51: 17); And in the book of proverbs: *“Surely I am more stupid than any man, and do not have the understanding of a man. I, neither learned wisdom, nor have knowledge of the Holy One”* (Proverbs 30: 2-3); And according to the apostle who calls upon us to enjoy the spiritual knowledge through the Spirit of God, saying: *“No one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God”* (1 Corinthians 2: 11-12).

- ❖ Although Your works are amazing, and the depth of Your wisdom could not be perceived; yet, by Your grace, we can imagine it, and teach it to others. But the senseless and the fools do not know, nor perceive.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever”*  
(7)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 69.

- ❖ Where are all the great emperors, kings, and military leaders of the world, whom we got to know in the past?!; where are they now? They are no more! ... Nothing is good except what is eternal<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

***“But You, Lord, are on high, forevermore” (8)***

***“For behold, Your enemies, O Lord, For behold, Your enemies shall perish; All the workers o iniquity shall be scattered” (9)***

God, on high, waits until the wicked, attached to corruption, passes away, and the righteous comes forth to the eternal glory.

- ❖ For behold, O Lord, even if You have condescended and have become Man like us, yet You are still up high!

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ If you wish to be longsuffering and perseverant, get attached to the eternity of God; As, when your hearts get attached to the Most High, everything else under you will become mortal; and you can say, together with the psalmist: ***“Behold, Your enemies, O Lord, shall perish”***<sup>2</sup>

(St. Augustine)

All the workers of iniquity shall perish, and be scattered; as, within themselves, they carry corruption and perdition..

- ❖ Like a wife, who could not be an adulteress, unless she is an enemy of her husband, so is the soul which, through its love for temporal things, could not be, but an enemy of God. All the lovers of the world; and all those who seek the counsel of the diviners, astrologers, and those with evil spirits, are enemies of God<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil” (10)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “Like a unicorn, my horn is exalted; and in my old age, I have been anointed with fresh oil”. (The unicorn is a wild animal with the body of a horse, and the tail of a lion, and a single horn coming out of the middle of its forehead).

The “Horn” refers to strength; hence the psalmist says: *“The Lord ... is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold”*

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 21.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 92 (91).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, 92 (91).

(Psalm 18: 2); and, “*I said to the boastful, ‘Do not deal boastfully’, and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up the horn, ... do not speak with a stiff neck’*” (Psalm 75: 4, 5).

Having got in touch with the work of the Lord that scatters iniquity, the psalmist perceives here that He will save him from the condition of despair that came upon him because of the wicked; and seeks from Him the spirit of strength, joy, and freedom; and to anoint him with oil, to make him dedicated to the Lord; (the way kings were anointed by prophets) ( 1 Samuel 15: 1; psalm 2: 2; Samuel 12: 20).

Commenting on the term “horn”, St. Jerome says: Hornless animals should not be offered as a sacrifice in the temple; on account of that the sacrifice refers to the crucified Lord Christ, stretching His hands on the cross, to strike the devil with the (horn) of the cross, On the cross, the Lord Christ crucified the devil and all his hosts; and granted us the spirit of conquest and victory.

As to the divine oil, the Lord Christ ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives; that, by being anointed with the oil of the Lord’s divine mercy, our hearts would truly be detached from the bonds of this world, and would ascend to the kingdom of heaven. He did not ascend from the (Valley of Olives), but from the (Mount of Olives); for He intends to lift us up high to heaven. The heretics, the followers of the devil, likewise, have their own oil in their ungodly philosophies, by which they promise enlightenment to men; but do not lift them up to the kingdom of heaven, but bring them down to the love of the world, and to the earthlies.

- ❖ “***My horn, You have exalted like a wild ox***”. Unless an animal has a horn, by which it can defeat its enemies, it would no be counted worthy of being offered as a sacrifice to the Lord. Hence, the Lord is described as “the Horn” (Psalm 18: 2), for those who believe in Him. By the horns of the cross, He defeated His enemies; On the cross He brought the devil, and his hosts to shame. The cross was the sign of conquest, the banner of victory. The ultimate goal of being lifted up on His cross, was to lift us up from the earth. I think that the cross of the Savior has been the ‘ladder’ seen by Jacob<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Like when our bodies are exhausted from hard work, and would be revived by being anointed with oil; and like the light of a lamp would be extinguished if not provided with oil, So is the light of my old age, which needs the oil of God’s mercy to remain lighted with

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 21.

splendor. That is why the apostles, having been psychologically disturbed, they had to ascend up on the Mount of Olives to get enlightened by the oil of the Lord. In conformity with this line of thought, the righteous David says: “*I am like a green olive tree in the house of God*” (Psalm 52: 8); and, “*Your children like olive plants all around your table*” (Psalm 128: 3) ... Why was it necessary for the Lord to ascend up to heaven from the Mount of Olives? To realize what the Holy Book teaches you. Unless you, and your lamps have the oil, you cannot ascend up to the kingdom of heaven. You have to be on the Mount of Olives, and not in the (Valley of Olives). To explain what is meant by the (Valley of Olives), we say that the devil, likewise, has his own olives; namely, the philosophers and the heretics, who have their own oil; and who also promise the light of knowledge. But their gardens of olives will lead down to the valley. ... Let us then pray to the Lord, that the darkness of our old age would be enlightened by the oil of His olives<sup>1</sup>

(St. Jerome)

***“My eye also has seen the downfall of my adversaries. My ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants” (11)***

The adversaries of the psalmist, having been doers of iniquity, their end had to be perdition; his eyes will see what will dwell upon them, and his ears will hear their doom.

The Hebrew word translated here as “adversaries”, refers to those who watch his every move with evil eye, anticipating his perdition.

### **3- BLESSING FOR THE RIGHTEOUS:**

***“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree; He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon” (12)***

“The palm tree” is known to be tall, upright, beautiful, and evergreen; its fruits are nourishing, and under its shade people find comfort. It is used as a symbol of endurance, perseverance, fruition, and conquest.

“**The cedar of Lebanon**” is known for its great height, shadow, strength, long life that may extend to 1000 years, and the high value of its wood which is widely used for construction.

Both trees are used as a symbol of the righteous person.

The righteous and the wicked, both flourish, yet in different ways: the former, flourishes like a palm tree, and his growth endures forever; While the later, flourishes like grass, just for sometime, about

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 21.

which it is said: “No sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat that it withers the grass, its flowers falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes” (James 1: 11). The former finds his happiness in the eternal things, to be carried together with them; while the later finds his happiness in the temporal things, to be destroyed together with them.

❖ The Mountains of Lebanon were described in many ways by the prophets in the Holy Book, both for commendation and condemnation: While it is written: “The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon; He makes them skip like a calf, like a young wild ox” (Psalm 29: 5-6). (This prophecy teaches us that every evil that lifts itself up against the knowledge of God will end up to nothing); It is also written: “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon” (Psalm 92:12).... The just grows like a high palm tree (The Lord Christ, is the only Just One, who ascended from the earth to heaven for our sake). He is a Palm tree that carries a multitude of leaves. In our human nature, The Lord Christ, became like a mountain covered with cedars; namely, with all those who believe in Him, and grow on Him. When we are planted in the house of God, we grow and flourish in His courts<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)**

❖ The palm tree is high, fruitful, evergreen, with sweet fruits of different colors. It is a long-lived tree, that needs long time to grow. With its slender stature, it is difficult for wild animals to climb to its top. And its branches are used as banners for those who conquer in battle. For all those features, the righteous is likened to it; on account of that virtue is sweet, needs a long time to grow, and much labor to develop; Yet, it is durable, evergreen, with sweet fruits, white heart; and a diverse and a multitude of good features.

The righteous is also likened to the cedars of Lebanon, for their extreme height, firm rooting, fragrant smell, plentiful branches, and rich leaves.

Saying “Lebanon” refers to the Gentiles who are justified by their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; planted in the house of the Lord (namely in the church), and in His courts, namely, in the congregations of believers, all over the world.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 14 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

- ❖ It is written: *“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree”* (12); namely, that their exalted works are always good, right, and rewarding. Like a palm tree with a good and a white heart, so are the righteous, whose hearts are simple, seeing only God; white, being enlightened through faith; and like a palm tree, have tapering heads to defend themselves against the devil.

**(Garden of the fathers)**

- ❖ I wish the spiritual fire ignites perpetually in your heart; about which the Lord Christ says: *“I came to send fire on the earth”* (Luke 12: 49). ... I wish the peace of the Lord reigns in your heart, according to the words of the apostle (Colossians 3: 15). ... I wish your palm tree goes up high, and flourish like a righteous (12)... I wish you are purified from anger and wrath, those terrible abominations, to become like the perfect saints *“who dwell in prosperity”* (Psalm 25: 13), with meekness, and without deceit; to be like suckling babes for Christ; like lambs without blemish; ... I wish your eyes *“can see God”*, as someone with pure heart (Matthew 5: 8); ... I wish you are longsuffering in afflictions, to become worthy of the divine promise of the Lord. saying: *“In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16: 33); ... I wish you reach up to that unconquerable love, that makes you worthy of being a brother of Christ.

**(St. Parsonovius)**

- ❖ Although Christ is One Person, Yet He is diverse according to the needs of him, in whom He works. For him, who is weak and slothful; He would be a chastisement rod (that does not blossom!), But, for the righteous, he could be a Rod, blossoming with the fruit of the Spirit, which are *“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (Galatians 5: 22), and other virtues in Jesus Christ our Lord<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

***“Those who are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God”* (13)**

According to **St. Ambrose**, the Lord Christ likens a Vinedresser, or a Farmer, who cares for His believers, as well as their children, to set out of them fruitful and blossoming plants.

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<sup>1</sup> In Lev. 9.

❖ “*Those who are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God*”. We are planted in a location, and flourish in another. In the church we are planted, and in the Kingdom of God we flourish ... In the church we are planted, not within its walls, but in its teachings; according to the words of the Lord: “*The kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17: 21). Everyone who is planted, and his roots grow deep in the house of the Lord, will produce flowers up there ... Compared to the angels and the heavenly hosts, we are here, not in an ultimate dwelling place, but just in a kind of a temporary ‘tent’; ... We are now at the beginning, and not at the ultimate end of perfection. We shall not be angels, but (like) angels, which is a great thing to be<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

❖ He enters into the garden to plant little olive plants in the house of the Lord (Psalm 128: 3); and the righteous would flourish like a palm tree (Psalm 92: 13); watered by the fountain of his blood<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ All the blessed believers, will have, at first, to travel along a narrow and a difficult path, as though in a winter storm (Matthew 7: 14), to reveal the extent of the knowledge they have acquired to go through their life; by which they would be able to perceive the significance of the words of the bride of the Song of songs, saying: “*My beloved spoke and said to me, ‘Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away. For Lo, the winter is passed, the rain is over and gone*” (Songs 2: 10, 11); ... and the flowers will appear, those “*planted in the house of the Lord, and shall flourish in the courts of our God*” (13).

❖ It is befitting of you to perceive the significance of the passing of the winter (Songs 2: 11), in no other way but to enter into a struggle against the present winter, with your whole strength, and capabilities, to let the flowers planted in the house of our Lord. flourish in the courts of our God<sup>3</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

***“They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing” (14)***

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<sup>1</sup> *On Psalms, homily 21.*

<sup>2</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit, 3: 119.*

<sup>3</sup> *Exhortation to Martyrdom 31.*

If God allows for man to be physically weak in his old age, yet He makes it up for him, by providing him with increasing fruition in the Spirit.

The young flower-laden tree may be joyful for the soul, yet, the old tree laden with fruits will give more joy to behold. It is always amazing to see a perennial tree still green and fruitful!

It is not strange to see a little tree with green leaves; but it would be always amazing to see an old tree, still green.

*“They shall still bear fruit in old age”*. Blessed is he who becomes more active, day after day<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

*“To declare that the Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him”* (14)

On the great day of the lord, the righteousness and justice of God will glitter in His saints.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 21.

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 92**

### **LET OUR HEARTS CELEBRATE YOUR SABBATH DAY**

- ❖ For our sake You sanctified the Sabbath day;  
Not that You needed rest after Your work of creation;  
But to proclaim Your rest toward us; when we find rest by You;  
You command us to celebrate the true rest;  
As Christians, our Sabbath is Your resurrection, that granted us the  
resurrected life;  
Our Sabbath is the rest of our hearts, by and in You;  
What shall we benefit if our body members find rest;  
While our hearts stay disturbed with no true peace or tranquility?!
- ❖ Your resurrection provided us with the true rest;  
Our heart, together with our tongue, keep on confessing to You;  
In our weakness, we confess to You that we are sinners; and You are  
the Forgiver of sins;  
In walking with the truth, we confess to You that You are our  
righteousness and goodness;  
We praise You and sing to Your holy name, O Most High;;  
We glorify Your name, O You, who inscribe our names on Your  
palm;  
And write them in Your book of life;  
We do not seek the glory of our names, but that of Your holy name.
- ❖ We proclaim Your mercy, and glorify You early in the morning;  
And proclaim Your faithfulness by night;  
Whenever blessings dwell upon us, we exult in Your mercies early in  
the morning;  
And when You allow for us to go through temptations and afflictions,  
We proclaim Your faithfulness in fulfilling Your promises;  
Both in joy, as well as in anguish, we testify to You;  
We proclaim Your great mercy, as well as Your exalted faithfulness.
- ❖ When I celebrate Your true Sabbath;  
Your Holy Spirit plays music on the strings of my harp;  
He plays by my tongue, and by my whole being;  
My body, together with my soul, and my spirit, all sing Your praise.
- ❖ What is my instrument of ten strings, but Your holy commandments?  
I play on them through enjoying practicing them;  
I rejoice, not just by carrying Your holy book;

But by walking according to Its commands, and by being enlightened  
by its light;  
I shall praise You, both by my tongue, and by my behavior;

- ❖ Let my heart turn into an unceasing Sabbath;  
Let me perpetually celebrate for the sake of Your works with me;  
Any goodness in me, is from You; Your works fill my soul with  
perpetual gladness.  
How deep are Your thoughts, O Lord;  
You allow for the wicked to flourish;  
He is not aware that he is enjoying a bait in his throat;  
That the time will soon come when the bait will be drawn;  
There, like a fish, he would perish through the same bait it enjoyed;  
Grant me to exult in the eternity You are preparing for me.
- ❖ I see You look down from Your heavens up high ;  
You long-suffer on the wicked, hoping that he may turn back from his  
corruption;  
And You encourage Your righteous to endure their anguish with  
perseverance;  
So as to make them justified and eternally glorified;  
The time for the wicked will soon pass away, and become past;  
Then the eternity of the righteous, that exalts above all time, will  
surely come.
- ❖ Your cross revealed Your wisdom to me;  
You, the Only begotten Son of God, received suffering with pleasure;  
So that I, the sinner, would receive my suffering the same way;  
I will become attached to Your cross, and will receive the cross  
together with you;  
By the horn of Your cross You struck the devil, and destroyed his  
authority;  
You granted me the spirit of strength, and gave me the enjoyment of  
the horn of salvation;  
You granted me the horn of strength;  
And anointed me with the oil of Your grace

## **PSALM 93**

# **THE LORD REIGNS IN THE MAJESTY OF HIS HOLINESS**

This is the first of the psalms of “**Praising God as a King**” – a group of psalms from 93 to 99, (with the exception of psalm 94). In these psalms, the heart of the believer is lifted up to the throne of God; and his eyes are concentrated on God. We seldom find in them any reference to the believers’ troubles or problems, nor hear any moaning or groaning.

These psalms of “The Lord King” were used in the celebrations of the Sabbath, and in certain Jewish feasts, like the feast of the harvest. In the ‘Mishna’ it came that this psalm was used in praising God on the eve of the Sabbath, as a preparation for the day of rest, a symbol of eternity.

This psalm was most probably written by the prophet David; and was considered by many old Jewish scholars as a Messianic psalm, that refers to the kingdom of the Messiah.

<b>1- The King in His majesty</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2- The Mighty King</b>	<b>3 – 4</b>
<b>3- The Holy King</b>	<b>5</b>

### **The title:**

The eternal reign of the Lord.

According to the Septuagint, and the Coptic versions, it came as ‘The blessing of the praise of David’, referring to the day preceding the Sabbath, when the earth was established..

This title was rejected by the Jews, on account of that it clearly refers to the Lord Christ who reigned by the cross on Friday, the day preceding the Sabbath, when He blessed the earth by His holy church by His salvation work.

❖ It means that death, having got the upper hand on mankind, destroyed the wall of our city which protected us .... Yet, our Lord, by His passion and death on the cross, on the day preceding the Sabbath, put death to death, rebuilt our city, set the walls of our life, and made us dwell in it.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

### **1- THE KING IN HIS MAJESTY:**

***“The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the Lord is clothed; He has girded Himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved” (1)***

The devil will not cease to oppose God along all generations, by some way or another. Yet, according to the prophet Daniel, all the nations opponents to the divine Truth will be destroyed.

God’s greatness, majesty, and might, would grant the believers confidence and hope amid the afflictions; would let them get attached to God, come closer to Him; enjoy His love, and His exalted divine care; motivate them to receive His royal commandment; and to practice worshipping him with fear, and with reverent heavenly thought.

His might, care, and love, did not stop at creating the world, but extended to a perpetual work to fulfill its mission. He is the Savior, care-Giver, and Philanthropic Creator.

The two words: “*clothed*”, and “*girded*”, are military terms; as God is the Defender of His people against Satan and his hosts; according to what is written: “*Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord*” (Isaiah 51: 9).

- ❖ About God, Himself, in a befitting way, having made the church increase in fertility, it is said: “*The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty*” (1). In other words: “*Girded himself with praise and beauty*”<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Being fairer than the sons of men, He gives from what is His; for one cannot give what is not his. That is why it is written: “*The Lord reigns; he is clothed with (beauty)*”. He is clothed with the beauty through the grace of the church. As in baptism all disobedience and abominations are taken away, and the splendor of the heavenly grace shines on the baptized, hence the divine Groom says: “*Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners*”<sup>2</sup> (Songs 6: 10).
- ❖ He, who came in the form of a servant, in the likeness of man, renewed man with His Spirit, poured His grace in his heart, and girded himself with the exaltation of the salvation of mankind<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Isaac or the Soul*, 7: 60.

<sup>2</sup> *The Patriachs*, 10: 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Duties of the Clergy 1*: 45: 230.

❖ “*The lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; He has girded himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved*’ (1). In these three expressions, the prophet speak about the lord Savior; whereas the rest of the psalm is addressed directly to the lord himself ... the lord who became a servant is a king; he who is described by the prophet Isaiah as “*he has no form or comeliness; no beauty, that we should desire Him; ... a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*” (Isaiah 53; 2, 3). Is clothed with majesty

The Lord reigned as a King, and is clothed with majesty. The meaning here is that He who, in the weakness of the human body, had no form or comeliness, is now splendid in the majesty of his Godhead. The weakness in him is referred to our condition; whereas what concerns beauty, conforms to his majesty.

“*He girded himself*” is an expression that bears a kind of secret. For when we are not girded, our dress would probably falls down to our feet. That is why, on account of that we could not endure the perfection of the Lord’s strength, He girded Himself with a human body. This same kind of thought appears in the book of Exodus, when God said to Moses: “*You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen*” (Exodus 33: 23); And in the book of kings, it is written that the prophet Elijah stood at the entrance of a cave on Mount Sinai, and from there he saw the Lord as He passed by (1 Kings 19: 11-13).

Notice how it is said that Moses stood in the cleft of a rock and saw the back of the Lord; as the rock is a symbol of the Lord Savior; according to the words of the apostle Paul: “*The Rock was Christ* (1 Corinthians 10: 4). Therefore, we actually see the cleft of the rock, through the body, to perceive God. I say all this, for in this same interpretation, we include what is meant by the verse: “*The Lord is clothed with majesty, and girded Himself ...*”. As through the cleft of the rock, the Lord Savior is perceived; through the girdle, as well, we perceive His majesty<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Preparing to work, man girds himself; as it is written; “*Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One ... The peoples fall under You*” (Psalm 45: 3, 5). The sword of the Lord by which He overcomes the world, through destroying iniquity, is the Spirit of God in the truth of the Word of God<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Psalms, homily 70.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms, 93(92).*

It is said that the Lord girded Himself with a towel and began to wash His disciples' feet. He humbly girded Himself with a towel; but all strength is in humility, and all frailty is in pride. It is so written to remind us how our Lord girded Himself with humility, when He washed the feet of his disciples (John 13: 4-5).

Now, if strength is in humility, do not then fear the proud. The humble is like a rock, which may look as though collapsing, when it is actually firm.

The proud are like smoke, although it goes up high, yet it is to be eventually scattered away<sup>1</sup>.

❖ What does he mean by saying: *“The world is established; so that it cannot be moved”* (1). He would not say that, unless there is another world that could be moved. The good people, firm in faith belong to the first kind of world; which is not the case for the wicked whose faith is moved with affliction.

Speaking about ‘Hymenaeus and Philetus’ *“who have strayed concerning the truth saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrew the faith of some”*. Do those two belong to the immovable world? They were actually more like chaff. ... *“Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal; The Lord Knows who are His”*. What seal is this? *“Everyone who names the name of Christ, depart from iniquity”* (2 Timothy 2: 17-19)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ After being crucified, dead, resurrected, and consummated our salvation, the glory of the divinity of the Lord Christ was revealed in His Manhood, which became immortal, not prone to hunger or thirst, and not in need of clothing. His Godhead so covered up His Manhood, that His disciples, looking at Him, thought that He is a Spirit without a body, because of the greatness of His light, which He was hiding until the consummation of our salvation from the enemy who deceived us<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)**

❖ The soul is commended for its fertility, because, on one aspect, it is productive of virtues, and on another aspect, it is without evil in itself.

What is good is beautiful; whereas what is evil is not. Fertility in good works is beautiful; whereas barrenness is not; as there is evil in

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 93(92).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 93(92).

<sup>3</sup> تفسير تك :1 19-14

what lacks beauty and fittingness. What is evil is barren and infertile; as is proved by nature: the good earth is fertile and fruitful, while the bad one is barren and fruitless.

It was well said about the Lord Himself, having made the church increasingly fertile: *“The Lord reigns; He is clothed with majesty”* (1); and, *“The Lord is clothed with honor and majesty”* (Psalm 104: 1). It is thus obvious that what is productive and fertile is beautiful, while what is barren is not. The condition of the soul is like that of the soil; the soul is beautiful when it is plentiful in its worthiness and counsel; whereas the barren soul, preoccupied only with material things is ugly; for barrenness, being a weakness of the soul, that deprives it of fruition, makes it in need, provokes fear, evil desires, and idle thoughts; it ends up falling<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ The Lord washes the feet of all those who walk on the Way, and dries them with the towel by which He is girded; which indeed has the power to purify from sin<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ The bride entered into this way, and had her feet washed by the Lord Christ, and dried by the linen cloth by which He was girded, that had the power to cleanse of sins. *“The Lord reigned, He is clothed with majesty: he has girded Himself with strength”* (1). Once she put her feet on the royal way, the bride started to watch herself, lest she may deflect to the right or to the left; and spoil her feet by mud through walking out of the way. ... You certainly know what is meant by these words! The bride kept her feet clean on the paved way, as David did when he set his feet upon a rock, after washing them from mud; saying: *“He brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps”* (Psalm 40: 2). We understand that this Rock is Christ – the Light, the Truth, the Non-corruption, and the Righteousness. He designates the spiritual way; if we keep walking on it, and do not deflect to the right or to the left, our life would remain unspoiled by the miry clay. That was how the bride kept her door open to the Lord Christ, and promised not to go back to filth or to any earthly rejected pollution on the way of this life; by which she kept her spirit sanctified. ... Christ, Himself, is this sanctification (1 Corinthians 1: 30)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> إسحق أو النفس، 60:7

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on Canticle, sermon 11.*

<sup>3</sup> عظة 11 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

❖ Today all valleys exult with joy, because the soil of the soul drank of the dew of heaven. “*The Lord reigns; He is clothed with majesty*” (1). In the old, Adam, after being a master and a king, became, because of disobedience, a slave of sin. But today, behold, the second Adam, reigns over His enemies, For, as it is written, “*He must reign*” (1 Corinthians 15: 25).

Today, the Lord established the earth (Psalm 93: 1); namely, the soul, which was before, because of sin, desolate, terrified, and overwhelmed by fear, as it is written: “*You are cursed from the ground ...; a fugitive, and a wanderer on the earth*” (Genesis 4: 11-12). Actually, when the temple of the soul was set upon sand (Matthew 7: 26), it was shaken and unsteady; but today, being set upon the Rock of Godhead, it would never be moved or shaken<sup>1</sup>.

❖ A king, intending to grant a royal gift to someone, sends him a message to come to him to be decorated. Unless this person goes to the royal court, reading the king’s message would do him no good.... The divine King of kings (Psalm 93: 1) sent His Holy Book and messages (Revelation 1: 4) to exhort us to believe in Him and to pray to be granted the inheritance reserved for us in heaven (1 Peter 1: 4). Unless we do according to His command, we shall benefit nothing by reading the Holy Scripture, but “*the divine word will judge (us) in the last day*” (John 12: 48); For we have rejected the gift of life from the heavenly King, without which we would never get the eternal life, which is the Lord Christ Himself (John 11: 25); to whom is the glory, forever, Amen.

**(St. Maccari the Great)**

❖ When He proclaimed His power by overcoming the demons and the unclean spirits, all people knew for sure that He is truly the King, and the Lord of hosts.

The beauty (the majesty) by which He was clothed, is relieving the body of corruption after the resurrection from the dead. Before the resurrection His body was prone to passion and death; but relieving it of them, ascending to heaven, and sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is said to be clothed with beauty and majesty.

Saying “*He is girded with strength*”, does not mean that He drew from His manhood a power, it did not have, because, according to the

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<sup>1</sup> الرسالة الثانية، 2 (في عيد الميلاد غالبًا في إحدى سنوات القرن الرابع – فردوس الآباء).

apostle, “He is the Power of God”; but it means that with His incarnation, He revealed the power of His divinity through His work of salvation; And the world that was before, shaking of vanity, He abided in truth, and set a world, established on the rock of His faith, so that it would never be moved by the gates of Hades; namely, the holy church.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting” (2)*

The kingdom of God, the King of kings, “*is established from of old*”, and will remain forever. That is why the godly men would never fear time, for the true God of the church is the Everlasting and Eternal; who will never change. In every generation He sets leaders, but on them, we shall never trust, but on the true unchangeable Leader, something that would bring gladness to our hearts, and would never let hope be taken away from us. Hence the psalmist sings: “*Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom*” (Psalm 45: 6); And about Him, it is also written: “*He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: ‘KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS’*” (Revelation 19: !6).

❖ What is the throne of God? Where does God sit? ... In His saints. If you wish to be the throne of God, prepare a place for Him to sit in your hearts. The throne of God is where He dwells; namely, His temple. ... Is it surrounded by walls? Far from it! ... The world, so huge, and assumed to be fit to accommodate God, yet it is not. ... God is rather found in the tranquil soul, the righteous soul<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ In the creed of faith it came: “He ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father”. Although the significance of the “throne” is not perceivable, yet we would never accept the interpretation of those who say that the Son sat at the right hand of the Father after His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension up to heaven; for the Son did not get the throne through promotion, but He was always there; which was known by the prophet Isaiah long before the incarnation of the Savior, saying: “*I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up*” (Isaiah 6: 1). And, as it is written that “the Father was never seen by anyone at any time” (John 1: 18), It was, therefore, the Son, whom the prophet Isaiah has seen<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 93(92).

<sup>2</sup> مقال 14:27.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- ❖ *“Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved”* (1). What then, would it mean to say, *“Heaven and earth will pass away”* (Matthew 24: 35)? ... The word ‘Olkoumene’, translated as *“the world’ in this phrase*, seems to refer to the church, about which is written in the gospel: *“My Father and I will come to him, and make our home with him”* (John 14: 23). It is rightly said to be “inhabited”, by the father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. ... If we apply this to our souls, if we have the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit, we would forever turn into an established unmovable land<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Speaking about the kingdom of the Lord, and the glory of his garment, the psalmist refers to his power, and to that the world would not be moved. Now he turns his talk to the Lord himself as a splendid king, saying: *“your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting”*. The phrase; *“the Lord is clothed with strength”*, although it concerns the weakness of the human body, yet, *“his throne is established from of old”*, with no beginning. ... he did not say: *“from of old, you started”*, but said: *“you are from everlasting”*, namely, you are perpetually there; ... You, who said to the prophet Moses: *“Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘I AM’ has sent me to you”* (Exodus 3: 14)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ God’s throne is perpetual; not new, but everlasting.  
it also means that the secret of incarnation, by which He revealed His kingdom to all, and on which He sat as though on a throne, He set since the creation of man, having been His divine image; ... knowing that after a designated time, his divine Person will unite with it; Hence the psalmist says; *“You are the everlasting God; you are the one incarnate at the end of time”*.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## 2- THE MIGHTY KING:

*“The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves”* (3)

The floods here, which *“lifted up their waves”*, may refer to the diverse nations, stirred up against the Lord. But what can the waves do

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 70.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 70.

against the kingdom of Christ, He who walked on the waves, and commanded them to obey Him?!

Yet, according to St. Jerome, the rivers with their sweet waters, refer to the persistent preaching in the world by the ministers of God in the Old and the New Covenants.

❖ I believe that the rivers (floods) that flow water over the world, are the prophetic and the apostolic works. “*The floods have lifted up their voice*”, with the praise and glory of God, and proclaimed his ordinances in the world: “*Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world*” (Psalm 19: 4); louder than the voice of many waters; “*Yet the Lord on high is mightier*” (4)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ “*The floods have lifted up their voice*” (3). We did not hear the voice of the floods when our Lord was born, nor when He was baptized; nor when He suffered on the cross; we never heard them talk! These rivers did not just lift up their voice, but did so loud and with courage. What are these rivers which talk? ... The Spirit, Himself, is a mighty River, by whom streams are filled up. About this River, the psalmist says: “*There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God*” (Psalm 46: 4). Rivers came to flow from the disciples when they received the Holy Spirit; And they, themselves turned into rivers<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The rivers are the messages of the saints, the preachers, and the rest of the ministers who likened the streams that made glad the city of God; having lifted their minds and thoughts up to God, then lifted up their voices, to tell the world what their minds have seen.

The rivers or floods are also the gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to the words of the Lord: “*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*” (John 7: 38). These gifts lifted up their voices, namely, were shown and proclaimed all over the world.

They are, as well, the rivers of the sayings of the Divine Books, that were fulfilled.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 70.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 93(92).

***The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea” (4)***

If the opposition from the nations is consistent against God, it is no more than the noise of waves; but the Lord on high is mightier.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as; “Although amazing are the horrors of the sea; yet, more amazing is God on high”. That is what was realized on a magnificent level in the church of the New Covenant; and probably in the unique and marvelous example of the encounter of the Lord Christ with the Samaritan woman, who belonged to the stirred up bitter water of the nations. She encountered Him who promised: “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water*” (John 7: 37, 38). That woman, whose water was salty, and could not satisfy her, nor those around her, the Lord turned her from being a salty sea with deadly waves, into a joyful river. He lifted her heart, mind, and all her depths up to Him, to make her perceive the heavenly divine things. Then she lifted up her voice to her fellow Samaritans in the town of Sokhar, to make out of them sweet water rivers, and turn them into the house of God, with the sanctification that befit it. Yes indeed, our Lord Christ, on high, is mightier than the stirred up seas, and could turn them into rivers whose streams shall make glad the city of God.

According to **St. Jerome**, the prophetic and apostolic works, grant the believer a greater authority than the voice of many waters, and than the persistent mighty waves of the sea. The secret of this authority and strength is the Lord, on high, the Grantor of sanctification to the believer. If sin has corrupted man, destroyed his authority, and took away from him the ability to look up to heaven, yet our Lord Jesus Christ grants him sanctification, to enjoy an exalted strength.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, as the waves, stirred up against the disciples, were calmed down by the Lord Christ, So will be the peoples who oppose and persecute the believers, they will be calmed down by the amazing power of our Lord; and at the same time, He will grant strength to the believers, like rivers that lift the minds of the persecuted up to heaven, which is more amazing!

❖ Let the waves, then, be stirred up as much as they would like. The threats and persecutions may be great; but “*The Lord on high is mightier*”.

The sea may be rough, and the waves may strike the boat ferociously (The boat is the church, and the sea is the world). The Lord

came and walked on the sea and its waves. The rulers and kings ultimately came to believe in Christ, and submitted to Him. Therefore, have no fear, because “The Lord on high is mightier” <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### 3- THE HOLY KING:

*“Your testimonies are very sure; Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever” (5)*

The psalmist calls the congregation of believers to practice the holy life, befitting of the children of the Holy One, and to stop committing sins and iniquities, as there is nothing better in the life of believers, than becoming like their Holy Father, testifying to Him by their life and their fellowship with Him. By losing holiness, the angel has turned into Satan.

His holiness is the beauty and glory of His temple, and the flood of His grace on His people -- His living temple; according to the words of the apostle: *“If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are”* (1 Corinthians 3: 17).

❖ *“Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever”* (5). If anyone thinks that he dwells in the house of God, when he is not pure or holy, he is actually a stranger from it, for he does not acquire the adornment befitting to the house of God. If we believe the words of the apostle, that we are the house and temple of God, our behavior should become the adornment and honor of the church. On the contrary, if sins and transgressions are obvious in us, we would become disgrace and corruption, and not adornment to the house of the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ *“Your testimonies, O Lord, are very sure”* (5). The Lord Himself said; *“These things I have spoken to you, that in me, you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation”* (John 16: 33). But He added: *“But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”*. Having said: *“I have overcome the world”*, Be attached to Him who has overcome the world; He who is on high, *“mightier than the sea”*; whose *“testimonies are very sure”* <sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 93(92).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 70.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, 93(92).

❖ **“Holiness adorns your house, O Lord”**. Adorns Your house, Your whole *house*, not just here or there, but all over the world. The Lord’s house will be strong, and will overcome all over the world. Many may fall, but His house will hold fast; Many will be disturbed, but His house will never be shaken. **“Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord”**; not for some time, but **“forever”**.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ As the house becomes inhabited, man starts to care for recognizing the requirements of Him who dwells in it ... Because if the house lacks everything good, the King would never dwell in it.

So it is befitting of man, to become a house for Christ, to be aware of everything required for serving Christ who dwells in him, and for giving Him pleasure. He should first be aware that the building is set upon the foundation of faith; which requires pure fasting, which confirms faith. pure prayer, by which faith is received; love, created by faith; alms, presented through faith; humility, that adorns faith; virginity, loved by faith; sanctification, planted by faith; wisdom, sought by faith; and generosity, as well.

He should also seek simplicity, for the sake of Christ dwelling in him, perseverance, consummated by faith; longsuffering, sought by faith; remorse, proclaimed by faith; and purity, kept by faith.

All these things are sought by faith, set upon the true Rock, namely, Christ; All these works are sought for the sake of Christ, the King, dwelling in men, built by such works<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Aphrahat)**

❖ **“Your testimonies are very sure, O lord, forever”**; Namely, what you have proclaimed by your prophets, to happen to us, have been realized, and we came to believe the truth of your words. Moreover, all what was written in the divine Holy Books and the prophets, concerning Christ, the Lord, have been fulfilled and consummated.

The house of God, being the holy church and the congregation of believers, should have sanctification and purity forever. He said **“forever”**, lest the Jews would think that the house of God, worthy of sanctification is the temple of Solomon, the place of their worship; for that temple did not last forever.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Demonstrations, 1: 4 (of Faith)*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 93**  
**SUPPORT ME, O MY HOLY KING**

- ❖ To You are the majesty, might, holiness, O King of kings;  
By Your love you were lifted up on the cross for my sake;  
The splendor of Your love shone, O Sun of Righteousness;  
And You have lifted up our hearts as living rivers, up to your heavens.
- ❖ You are clothed with Your majesty, to take away my reproach;  
And poured Your exalted beauty on my depths.  
You girded Yourself with strength to cleanse me of the defilements of sins.  
To sanctify me completely, O Amazing Holy One.
- ❖ You were lifted up on the cross, as a unique throne;  
When You, as the King of kings, cares from old for Your church;  
You lead her in her battle against the devil and his hosts;  
You grant her the conquest, and crown her with the eternal glory;  
You keep on caring for her forever;  
So that your believers would never fail;  
Nor despair, nor terror would crawl into their hearts.  
The hosts of darkness will keep on stirred up;  
The floods will keep on lifting up the voice of their waves;  
But how would they stand before You?  
You who walk on the waves of the seas?  
You, whose command, the wind and the waves will obey?
- ❖ Let the sea and the horrors of its waves keep on stirred up against your believers;  
Let the many waters keep on seeking to drown Your children;  
Being amazing, in Your strength and works,  
You will turn the seas, with the horrors of its waves, into joyful and peaceful rivers;  
You will proclaim Yourself among the persecutors of Your people;  
You will lift their hearts up to heaven, to let them discover Your secrets  
In place of persecution, You will raise their voices high to preach Your gospel  
As You have turned the Samaritan woman into a preacher among her people.  
As You have turned Saul of Tarsus into such an amazing apostle!

Out of the seas with their horrible waves, You will set Your holy  
house, Your pure church!  
To You is the glory, O Philanthropic One.

- ❖ Your testimonies, O Lord, are very sure;  
You let us be aware, that in the world, we shall have affliction;  
Yet, You let us have a good cheer, and rejoice;  
For You bore the anguish of the cross with gladness;  
As You conquered by the cross, By it we shall also conquer;  
For You are our Lord and our King;  
You are our Conquest and our Crown.

## **PSALM 94**

# **GOD, JUDGE OF THE EARTH AND AVOCATE OF THE OPPRESSED**

Man often stands astonished before what goes on in this world; when God seems not to see what dwell on men, nor hear the cries of the oppressed; when the wicked keep on practicing oppression, as though no one can stand against them; when the righteous cry out day and night, as though there is no one to hear them, nor listen to their supplications.

This psalm, most probably was written during a great affliction that dwelt upon the people by some foreign enemy.

According to the Septuagint version, and in the 'Mishna', this psalm was used by the people to praise God on the fourth day of the week (Wednesday), namely in the middle of the week.

This psalm gives rich comfort amid afflictions on the level of the congregation, as well as on that of the individual. It is also rich in its literature language, carrying lamentations, supplications, enquiries, and teachings; portraying the oppressions that dwell on the righteous; and assuring the justice of God, as an Advocate of the oppressed in due time.

❖ It is a well known fact to all – and I hope we are not among them – that some people may murmur, because of the long suffering of God, who lets the non-pious wicked live in prosperity, and have great authority in this world, by which they would apply pressure against the righteous, and make them suffer. Watching such discrepancies, some, with weak minds and less perseverance, would get deflected, and may even reach the conclusion that doing good is futile and vain; and would assume that God is not aware of, or does not care for the good deeds done by the pious believers,. ... He who so thinks, even though he may cause no harm to anyone else, yet he does it to himself; ... he is doing evil, not against God, but against himself<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

<b>1- Bringing a legal case before the divine Judge</b>	<b>1 - 7</b>
<b>2- God sees and perceives</b>	<b>8 - 13</b>
<b>3- God will take care of His people</b>	<b>14 - 19</b>
<b>4- The ultimate end of the wicked</b>	<b>20 – 23</b>

**The title:**

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 94 (93).

God, the Refuge and the Righteous.

In the Septuagint version, it came as: “A psalm of David in the fourth day”. According to St. Gregory of Nyssa, it concerns what the traitor Judas did on Wednesday (of the Passion week).

❖ On the fourth day, “*God created the lights in the dome of the sky*” (Genesis 1: 14); “*The sun to rule the day; ... and the moon and the stars to rule the night*” (Psalm 136: 8, 9). That is how this psalm took its title; concerning the perseverance on the prosperity of the wicked, and the sufferings of the righteous. Referring to this same issue, the apostle Paul says: “*Do everything without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*” (Philippians 2: 14-16)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## **1- BRINGING A LEGAL CASE BEFORE THE DIVINE JUDGE:**

The psalmist here, on behalf of the people of God, who fall under sufferings and sorrows, brings a legal case before the divine judge of the whole universe. This case is like that brought by the widow who suffered from oppression, in the parable said by the Lord Jesus. She came to an unjust judge who did not fear God nor regard man; who would not give her justice for a while, but afterwards he said within himself:

“*Because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me*”. Then the Lord said: “*Hear what the unjust judge said: “Shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily”* (Luke 18: 6-8).

**“O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs – O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth” (1)**

The word “*vengeance*” in many modern languages, may refer to unhealthy feelings of hatred and grudge; but here, it bears the meaning of giving justice to the oppressed, and bringing punishment upon those who persist on oppressing others; a basic principle that came in the book of Deuteronomy 32: 35, as; “*vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand; and*

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 94 (93).

*the things to come hasten upon them*'. This basic principle gives assurance to people, that recompense is in the hand of the Almighty God alone, Who is aware of the inner secrets and intentions of His creatures.

The psalmist repeats the expression "*O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs*", because of the bitterness that filled his heart because of the evil practiced by the wicked against the simple pious. And by saying: "*Shine forth*", he reveals that God is the "*Sun of righteousness*".

❖ "*The Lord, to whom vengeance belongs*", who was despised in his humility, now acts with vengeance in his majesty<sup>1</sup>.

❖ If God says of himself; "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord*" (Romans 12; 19); Why then would you seek vengeance. O man? God will repay on your behalf! That is the essence of what the apostle says: "*If your enemy hungers, feed him; If he thirsts, give him a drink; for on so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head*" (Romans 12: 20) ... Namely, your perseverance will overcome his cruelty; Refraining of seeking vengeance will purify him of his sin<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ As God is called "*God of compassion*", and, "*God of comfort*", He is also called "*God of vengeance*".

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Do not murmur because the wicked are not punished, lest you yourselves would be among those punished.... If you wish for the wicked to be reformed, You should reform your own tongue toward this man; and reform your own heart toward God; lest the "*God of vengeance*" would judge you among those who are persistent on their evil; on not being thankful for his mercy and longsuffering; and, "*in accordance of your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds*" (Romans 2: 4-6)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***"Rise up, O Judge of the earth; Render punishment to the proud" (2)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 22.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, 94 (93).

This prayer is a prophecy, to be realized, if the wicked persist on their pride and opposition of the divine truth. It is not a vengeance, as a kind of reaction in the divine Essence, but a natural fruit of the human pride, with what it bears of corruption; And a compassion on the humble and meek, whose rights are despised by the proud. It likewise bears a warning to the proud, to make them realize their own weakness; as their pride actually conceals weakness and corruption.

- ❖ **“Rise up, O Judge of the earth”**. Hear, O heretics! If God judges the earth, In case there is evil in heaven, why should there not be judgment in heaven as well?! If souls in heaven commit sin, why should there be judgment only on earth<sup>1</sup>?!
- ❖ **“Render punishment to the proud”**. All sins should be avoided, for all sins are against God; albeit being different in level. As the proud – as an example – are enemies of God, *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (James 4: 6). As the devil is the prince of the proud, *“lest being puffed up with pride, (man) fall into the same condemnation as the devil”* (1 Timothy 3; 6); He, who glorifies himself in his heart will be a partner of the devil who is used to say: *“By the strength of my hand, I have done it; and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; Also I have removed the boundaries of the peoples”* (Isaiah 10: 13)... All the other weaknesses of men are worthy of God’s mercy; for they, in humility, submit to God’s judgment; But pride alone honors itself beyond its worthiness, and resists God. The adulterer or the fornicator does not dare to lift his eyes up to heaven, but, with a sad soul, he anticipates the mercy of God. But that man (the proud), the same conscience that may bring him down to earth, may also lift him up to heaven. When pride and the unbecoming desire for vain glory, stir up in him, they would bring him down through his sin, and would make him an enemy of God<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ You, who suffer, **“Rise up”**, namely, ‘Get up’, and look up to heaven! ... The church, as well, should, with longsuffering, endure what the Head of the church has endured ... **“Rise up, O Judge of the earth; Render punishment to the proud”**(2) ... He will definitely do, O brethren; Those are words of one who prophesies, and not of one who dares to command! It is not that the lord Christ obeyed the prophet’s

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

command to rise up, resurrect, and ascend to heaven; but because He was going to do that, the prophet prophesied it<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ As the eternal reward was promised to the humble poor, the endless punishment was promised to the proud rich. By the words; “**Render punishment to the proud**’, God will wipe out the memory of the proud, for pride is an abomination before him<sup>2</sup>.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- ❖ “*Rise up*”, namely, proclaim Your authority, for all to know that You are the divine Supreme Judge of men, And to break down the haughtiness of the proud. That particularly happened when the Son of God humbly incarnated, while still high up in the honor of His divinity; when He judged the world, revealed that all men are sinners, and He alone is without sin.

He rendered punishment on the proud; namely on the scribes and the Pharisees, who intended to kill Him, and on the adversary hosts that provoked them to crucify Him.

The words “**Rise up**” is also a provocation to consummate His crucifixion, which our Lord called “lifting up“, saying: “*I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself*” (John 12: 32). When He was crucified, He rendered punishment on the proud; having conquered by His cross the adversary hosts who deceived Adam and provoked him to eat from the fruit of the forbidden tree. Hence Paul says: “*Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it*” (Colossians 2: 15)

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“**Lord, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked exult?**” (3)

God is longsuffering on the wicked and the proud, not in disregard to the cries of the oppressed, but in compassion on the sinners, hoping that, coming to perceive their actual status, they may forsake their evil doings.

Standing astonished when they see God’s longsuffering on the wicked, even the martyrs in paradise “*cry with a loud voice, saying: ‘How long, O lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’*”(Revelation 6: 10).

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 94 (93).

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 48: 4.

The cries of the suffering here, reveal the feeling of the oppressed, as the hours of anguish through which they pass, seem to them like long years, that make them say and repeat: “*How long ...*”. Whereas the days of peace may quickly pass!

❖ “*Lord, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked exult?*”

Men normally wish that God be longsuffering on them, but not on their enemies. When they do wrong, they supplicate to God to be longsuffering on them; But when someone else do wrong against them, they ask God to hasten to render punishment on them.

“*How long will the wicked exult?*” They not only sin, but they, as well, exult doing it. They never repent, nor bow their heads in humility, but publicly boast in their sins<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**“*They utter speech, and speak insolent things; All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves*” (4)**

Men often get so confused, that they may come to deny God’s care and good works; and to utter insolent things. Even, some of the righteous, in their weakness, when they see how the wicked are prosperous and successful, unfortunately assume that God does not see what they are going through on the hands of the oppressors.

According to **St. Jerome**, the workers of iniquity who boast in themselves, are the heretics, as he, who is arrogant with his tongue, is definitely evil with his doings; “*for out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaks*” (Luke 6: 45). When there is something wrong in the conscience, there will be an abundance of insolent utterances with the tongue.

❖ The sinner who entreats God is worthy of forgiveness, whereas he who boasts in his evil is proud, and his pride makes him an enemy of God. Man, lacking longsuffering, would become astonished to see the longsuffering of God; and say: Being a sinner, I can not endure sinners, But how can You, being the Righteous, endure all that from them? How long, O Lord, will their boasting in evil last<sup>2</sup>?

(St. Jerome)

**“*They break in pieces Your people, O Lord, and afflict Your heritage*” (5)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 22.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

This is the cry of the church along the generations; as the devil will not stop, through his followers, to humiliate God's people, and to break them up in pieces. His animosity against the church of God is not new, and will go on as long as the chances are there.

- ❖ The people of God are perpetually crushed and trampled upon ... they humbly fall like their Lord who is "*gentle and lowly in heart*" (Matthew 11; 29) <sup>1</sup>

(St. Jerome)

***"They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless" (6)***

The devil knows no compassion upon the helpless, the grieving widows, the gray-haired elders, the needy fatherless, or the strangers, deprived of their homes and families. His law is violence, cruelty, and lack of mercy.

Speaking of those who arrogantly talk, and boast in their iniquity, as being the heretics, whose victims are the widows, strangers, and the fatherless, **St. Jerome** presents the following symbolic interpretation;

- ❖ The widow is the soul of the sinner who lost God, as her Groom; The stranger, being the homeless, who lacks a permanent residence, is the new believer who quickly falls with the first offence he encounters; And the fatherless is he, who loses God as his Father ... Those are the victims of the wicked heretics<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***"Yet they say, 'The Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob perceive" (7)***

The wicked deny God's care; counting Him as non-existent, which is a great sin. Or if He does exist, He is in seclusion in His heavens, with nothing to do with mankind, or even with all the creation; not hearing, not seeing, and not perceiving.

- ❖ "*They break in pieces Your people, O lord, and afflict Your heritage*". Who are they? The proud. "*They slay the widow and the stranger*". History is very clear ... the proud devil, together with his followers daily persecute and afflict the church; and say: "***The Lord***

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 22.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 22.

*does not see, nor does the God of Jacob perceive*". They consider the longsuffering of God as a lack of understanding<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Nobody can escape the eye of God, who sees, not only the secret places, but even the depths of the heart<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ By so saying (Psalm 94: 3), the psalmist showed the longsuffering of God. Saying "*They afflict your heritage*", he refers to the rulers of the Jews, and the elites of the Greeks, who stood in the way of the people's faith in Christ, humiliated them, had no compassion on the widows and the fatherless, assuming that the Lord does not see, and that God of Jacob does not perceive.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

## **2- GOD SEES AND PERCEIVES:**

*"Understand, you senseless among the people; And you fools, when will you be wise?" (8)*

Those who claim that God has nothing to do with the creation, and deny Him His divine care, are actually denying themselves the understanding, perception, and wisdom. They are in need to seek from God to grant them these gifts.

❖ Most people say: Does God think about me now? Does He know what I do in my household? Does He care for what I intend to do while lying on my bed?

*"Understand, you senseless among the people; and you fools, when will you be wise?"*

If you, as a man, are committed to be aware of what goes on in your household, Do not you think that God is likewise? He certainly sees, and knows what you are doing.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Because of the abundance of God's goodness and compassion, He does not hasten to bring his vengeance upon the guilty, but begins by advising them, saying: "You, senseless and fools, understand and be wise!".

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 94 (93).

***“He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who planted the eye, shall He not see?” (9)***

God, who provided man with ears to hear, and with eyes to see, to respond to those around him, and even to the rest of the creation of animals, birds, and plants; How could we deny Him His exalted divine care?!

***“Does He who disciplines nations, shall not chastise? Does He who teaches man lack knowledge?” (10)***

God does not only care for His own people, and for those who believe in Him, but He even chastises and instructs the Gentiles; and even works to bring back the heathens to Himself. ... How could he not teach his beloved, and grant them knowledge?!

**St. Clement of Alexandria**, calls the true believer, enjoying the sound and true knowledge, “Gnostic”, namely, ‘Knowledgeable’<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Surely, when I cannot understand everything, and yet am preoccupied with the Holy Books, and meditate in God’s law day and night (Psalm 1: 2); I shall keep on asking, discussing, and researching; and above all, praying to God to seek the knowledge from him (10); to show that I dwell at “*Beer-lahai-roi*” (Genesis 25: 11), namely, at (the well of revelation).

If you are negligent or not preoccupied with reading the word of God at home; and if you go to the church only sporadically to hear it, the way I see some of you who come to the church only in the days of feasts; You are not dwelling at “*the well of revelation*”. And even when you come to the church, you do not quench your thirst by drinking from the water of the well, because you are still preoccupied with the thoughts of your hearts, which you bring forth with you to the church; and would come out of the church, still thirsty, even for the dwells of the holy books<sup>2</sup>.

❖ It is the Lord who teaches knowledge and understanding... Such a Teacher of virtue, could not be human. “*He teaches man knowledge*” (10). No one but God to whom the prophet says “*Teach me Your statutes*” (Psalm 119: 12), knowing that God is the true and perfect Teacher who enlightens the soul of the learner; enlightens his mind by His light -- the word of truth. Hence the righteous who received the gift of teaching, teach us<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Stromata* 6: 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Genesis* 11: 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Fragments on Job* 16: 4.

**(The scholar Origen)**

Seeking the knowledge of the law on a daily basis, not just through reading, but through the guidance and the enlightenment of God, they say; “*Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths*” (Psalm 25: 4); “*Open my eyes that I may see, wondrous things from Your law*” (Psalm 119; 18); “*Teach me to do your will, for You are my God*” (Psalm 143; 100; and, “*Who teaches man knowledge*” (Psalm 94: 10).

- ❖ Seeking from the Lord the understanding to perceive His statutes, despite knowing that they are written in the books of the law, the blessed David says; “*Give me understanding that I may know your testimonies*” (Psalm 119; 125)

David surely had the understanding, naturally given to him as man; and had, as well, the commandments written in the books of the law; Yet he prays to God to teach him the statutes more precisely; knowing that what he has got by nature would not be sufficient, unless God enlightens his spiritual understanding.

Likewise, Paul, the chosen vessel, proclaimed this issue more clearly and in a deeper way, saying: “*For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2: 3); Namely, that the good will and the perfection of our works are consummated in us by the Lord. He also says: “*For to you, it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake*” (Philippians 1: 29). This proclaims that receiving faith and enduring sufferings are both gifts to us from the Lord.

Knowing this, as well, David prays to be given these same gifts from the mercy of God, saying: “*Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us*” (Psalm 68: 28); showing that He did not only grant us the beginning of our salvation, as a gift and a grace, but He consummates what He has done by the same consistent compassion and care<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Pavnotius)**

***“The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile”***

**(11)**

He who does not care for the salvation of his soul, his eternity, and his fellowship with God; his thoughts and plans are all futile and worthless.

- ❖ It is befitting for everyone to be faithful (a believer) in his conscience. “*but who can find a faithful man?*” (Proverbs 20; 6). Reveal the truth

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian: Conf. 3; 14, 15. (N. & P.N. Frs).

of your faith (faithfulness) to God “*who tests the hearts and minds*” (Psalm 7; 9), and who “*knows the thoughts of man*” (Psalm 94; 11); and do not reveal them to me; “*for you will not be judged by human courts*” (1 Corinthians 4; 3-5) <sup>1</sup>

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ The (material) perception of the carnal man is his sole guide for understanding. He believes only in what he sees, and do not believe in what he does not<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ If you do not know that God’s thoughts are righteous, God knows that man’s thoughts are futile. But there are those who know God’s thoughts, to whom He became a friend; and to whom He reveals his counsel. Do not underestimate yourselves, O brethren, for, if you come close to God by faith, you will be able to hear His thoughts.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“*Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law*” (12)**

God’s chastisements are a sign of His love and care; intending to instruct man by His divine commandment, to prepare him for the blessed heavenly life. The fruits of chastisement in this life for the pious are beyond perception, as in them they could feel His compassionate fatherhood, and his care for their eternal salvation, according to the words of the psalmist, saying; “*it is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes*” (Psalm 119: 71).

- ❖ You perceive that the law should be taught, to have the vague things clarified. Moreover, the apostle says: “*The law is spiritual*” (Romans 7: 14); and David says: “*open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from your law*” (Psalm 119: 18); and, “*“Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O Lord,, and teach out of Your law” (12)*” <sup>3</sup>,

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ The prophet blesses him whom the Lord instructs in this present life, for, in the days of grief and temptations, finding comfort in what came in the law of God, man’s burden of calamity would become lighter, when he remembers that he who is chastised on his sins in this present life, will find comfort in the life to come.

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 5: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 242: 1.

On Psalms, 94 (93).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“That You may give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit is dug for the wicked” (13)*

In the midst of the afflictions and chastisements, the children of God will enjoy divine comforts, namely peace of heart; whereas the wicked, on the other hand, in the midst of their prosperity, will feel a kind of strange void and of deprivation. The chastisements with the inner peace of God is far better than the apparent prosperity and success, together with an inner void.

God often uses the evil of the wicked to chastise His children. While God’s children are justified, the cup of the wicked is filled. That is what happened with Joseph and his brothers. They intended to do him harm, but God turned it to his good.

The expression “*may give him rest*” came in an interpretation of this psalm as (may give him perseverance). The psalmist probably means To say, that, although it may be bitter for the righteous to see God’s longsuffering on the wicked, and how He lets them live a prosperous life, and have authority, when the righteous, themselves suffer oppression and injustice on their hands; Yet, God adorns His children with perseverance as a beautiful trait, befitting to the children of the divine longsuffering One. And at the same time, the pit is dug for the wicked if they persist on not returning to God.

Do not imagine the angels of God being preoccupied with digging an eternal pit or Hades in a material sense; But the wicked, cast Themselves by themselves, in the fire of their sins and corruption, which they have chosen by their own free evil will. I do not think that by saying “*until the pit is dug for the wicked*”, he means that God, Himself, prepares Hades for the wicked! ... We do not deny the existence of Hades, but we cannot imagine the angels of God being preoccupied with digging it. ... While promising us, saying: “*If I go and prepare a place for you* (John 14: 3). namely, the eternal life with its exalted glories, the Lord Christ did not say to the wicked; ‘I go and did prepare Hades for you, the eternal pit’.

❖ “*That You may give him rest from the days of adversity*”. That is why God instruct man from His statutes, to have mercy on him in the future. He reforms him at the present time, so as not to judge him in the future. The verdict of the judge may seem cruel to the one who is justly condemned, when it is actually not<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

❖ *“Until the pit is dug for the wicked”*. Who digs the pit for the wicked? ... Let us listen to what the psalmist say in another psalm; *“He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made”* (Psalm 7: 15). God, therefore, did not dig the ditch, but the sinner did; and has fallen into it. The Lord, himself, says; *“If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch”* (Matthew 15: 14) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

## **2- GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF HIS PEOPLE:**

*“For the Lord will not cast off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance”* (14)

Allowing for the chastisements of His people, does not mean that God casts them off, nor forsakes them. At the same time, God allowed for Jacob to be chastised, He appeared to him, blessed him, and said to him: *“All the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and your offspring. Know that I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you”* (Genesis 28: 14-15).

Allowing the enemies to oppose His people, God let His prophet Moses confirm to them: *“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them, for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you”* (Deuteronomy 31: 6).

❖ Rejoice while under chastisement, for the inheritance is kept for you, *“For God does not cast his people off”*. He may chastise for some time, but He will not condemn forever. As to the others, He may give them rest for some time, but will condemn them forever<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“But judgment will return to righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it”* (15)

In due time, whether in this life or in the eternal one, divine justice will prevail and be realized; when all will perceive the wisdom of God, and the reason of His longsuffering on the wicked; something that will fill the upright in heart with peace and joy.

*“Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?”* (16)

A pious man, feeling sometimes the violence of the wicked workers of iniquity against him, cries out from his depths seeking whom

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 94 (93).

will stand up against them, and confront their evil. ... Few are those who stand up with the righteous in the moments of their anguish. The prophet David found Jonathan standing with him against his father king Saul; as did the prophet Jeremiah when 'Ebed-Melech', the Ethiopian eunuch in the king's court, spoke to the king on his behalf ( See Jeremiah 38: 8) . But the apostle Paul, on the other hand, proclaimed that all have forsaken him in the time of his anguish.

According to **St. Jerome**, the psalmist seeks first who will rise up for him, then who will stand up to his account against the workers of iniquity. He is in need for Him who will raise him up from the land of silence (17), namely from among the dead in the tomb. No one can raise him up except Him who is risen, being the Firstborn of those who were laid down; and who stood up to his account to raise him up together with Him.

❖ *“Who will rise up for me against the evildoers?”* Moses came, and could not put things in order; then came the other prophets, and could not save me from the nets of the sinners. Who then, could rise up for me? He is risen as though He was sleeping or relaxing; to Him the psalmist said; *‘awake, why do You sleep, O Lord?’* (Psalm 44: 23); and to Him the disciples cried out, saying: *“Lord, save us, we are perishing”* (Matthew 8: 25). ... Who will rise up for me against the multitudes of demons? Who will support me? Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity? ... If it is not for Him who was laid down in His suffering, and slept in death for our sake, we would not be able to overcome our enemies. That was why St. Stevens, in the time of his anguish, saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father; he saw Him standing up fighting to the account of His martyr.... *“unless the Lord had been my help”* (17); Unless the Lord Christ is risen from the lower world, my soul would have gone down into the pit<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ In the time I fight against the principalities and the hosts of darkness of this age, or against the workers of iniquity, who will help me but you, O Lord? If it is not for your help, I would perish, soul and body!

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence”* (17)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

Although few would stand up for the righteous in the time of anguish, yet God will always surround His children and place them under His wings. Therefore, it is befitting of all to lean upon God.

By “silence” or ‘the land of silence’, he most probably means the grave. In the interpretation by **st. Augustine**, it came as “Hades”.

❖ **Germanus**: Where then is the freedom of will? How could we be worthy of honor, as the fruit of strife, if it is God who starts, and ends everything for us, concerning our salvation?

**Pavnotius**: ... We know that God creates for us opportunities for salvation in different ways. It would be up to us, in turn, to use these opportunities given by Him; whether seriously, or slothfully.

God gives us the opportunity, like when He said to Abraham; “*Go from your country*” (Genesis 12: 1). But obedience had to follow on the part of Abraham, who actually did. If God’s saying “*Go from your country*”, turned into action by him who obeyed, adding those words: “*to the land that I will show you*”, comes through the grace of God who commanded and promised.

It is of benefit for us to be sure that, even though we practice every virtue with unceasing effort and zeal, yet we cannot reach perfection on our own. Man’s mere activity and strife are not enough for him to reach the rich gift of grace, unless he combines his strife with cooperation with God, and His guidance of the heart toward the truth.

Hence, we should always pray, saying together with David; “*Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip*” (Psalm 17: 5); and, “*He set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps*” (Psalm 40: 2). God is the unseen Bishop of the human heart; who grants them the guidance toward virtues; yet with our complete will; because those hearts are always ready to deflect toward iniquity, whether because of a lack of the knowledge of goodness, or the pleasure of lusts. This is clear from the words of the prophet, addressed to the enemy; “*you pushed me violently, that I might fall, but the Lord helped me*” (Psalm 118: 13); proclaiming God’s help to our will.

We, accordingly, do not perish when we fall with our free will, for God stretches His hands to supports and helps us,. By saying: “*my feet slip*”, he means ‘my will slips’; and by saying: “*Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up*” (Psalm 94: 18), he proclaims God’s help for our weakness; that, it is not through our effort, but through God’s mercy, that the steps of our faith do not slip.

Also, “*In the multitude of my anxieties within me*” (which surely come through my free will), “*Your comfort delight my soul*” (Psalm 94:

19); Namely, by the entrance of your comforts into my heart, through the divine inspiration, the portrait of the blessings prepared by God for those who work in his name, will be proclaimed. Those comforts, not only take away the anxieties from the heart, but will also grant it great joy.

And also: *“Unless the Lord has been my help, my soul would soon have settled in (the land of) silence”* (Psalm 94: 17). Here, he proclaims that, because of the weakness of our free will, we would settle down in the pit (the land of silence). If it is not for the help and the protection of God.

That is also said about the perfect purity; as no one can, on his own, seek righteousness, unless the mercy of God stretch her hand, to help him when he falls any moment, lest he would perish, when he falls because of the weakness of his free will<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Pavnotius)**

❖ Do not you think that it is the will of God, that we do not fall in further diverse fantasies and shortcomings? That, because of our slothfulness, God allows for us to suffer from such things? And because of His compassion, that through our evil, He grants us humility for the sake of our salvation? ... What then? Shall we refer our salvation to our evil shortcomings? Far from it! But we refer it to the fullness of His mercy and wisdom. Notice then, how God holds our minds up on all sides, to remember to say: *“Unless the Lord has been my help, my soul would soon have settled in the (land of) silence”* (17). Now, knowing that, because of our weakness and slothfulness, we suffer those things, let us then do our best not to fall into them, God will then, by his mercy save us from them.

**(St. Parsnovius)**

*“If I say, ‘My foot slips’, Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up”* (18)

The slipping of the foot here, refers to a serious danger that may dwell upon man in this life; if not for the intervention of God’s mercy to save the believer at the moment at the right time, lest he would perish. As by the slipping of the foot, he may probably means, man’s falling into danger, despite his experience; It is, therefore befitting of him to lean upon God’s mercies and care.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Cassian: Conf. 3; 11,12 (N & P. N Fathers, p. 325-6).

❖ *“If I say, ‘My foot slips’, Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up”*. Recognizing the weakness, will surely guarantee the acquirement of God’s help; for He is most pleased with humility, the same way He dislikes pride. When I say: *“My foot slips”*, I confess my sins, and do not trust in my own strength. And when I do not boast in my strength, Your mercy will instantly come to help me<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The word *“my footsteps”*, does not refer to the physical feet, but to the steps of the heart, and its desire for a certain thing. If it leans toward what is not befitting, it is said that the devil has caused this man’s footsteps to slip, and his chastity to fall; But God’s mercy would reach and support him, who confesses his own weakness,. The more he repents his sins, and his conscience blames him for doing evil; the more the Lord would comfort and delight his heart.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comfort delights my soul” (19)*

God’s comfort are perpetually enough to support the soul at the time of sorrow. When the church seem suffering and moaning, God’s peace would fill her depths.

❖ God proclaims His compassionate care toward us, not only by His comforts, but also when He allows for us to suffer. Today I repeat what I always say, that not only being saved from evil, but also allowing them, would happen through the goodness of God. Whenever he sees us falling in slothfulness, retreating from the fellowship with him, and not caring for spiritual things, God would forsake us for sometime until we return to reason, and come back to him with more zeal<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ *“In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comfort delights my soul”*. The more sorrow You see in my heart, through my cry- out of repentance, the more mercy You grant me. The multitude of anxieties within me, would become an opportunity and a cause for comfort<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

<sup>2</sup> Concerning Statues, homily 14: 1.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

❖ God’s commandments carry the weight of repentance; a useful burden that includes a remedy for sinners; as it is only through sweat and labor, that God’s commandments are consummated. No one will surely expect to be crowned while plunging in pleasures, as “*she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives*” (1 Timothy 5: 6) ... And “*Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life*” (Matthew 7: 14). Virtue would never be acquired without strife. If reaching the summit of a mountain is done by great effort and labor, how much more would it be to reach heaven? According to the gospel, “*The kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force*” (Matthew 11; 12). It is taken by violence because, what nature fails to submit in us, could be smoothened by grace. ... From where the angels have fallen, men can ascend<sup>1</sup>.

❖ By shedding one tear, I become qualified for one comfort; And by shedding ten tears, I become qualified for ten comforts. The weight of my repentance is proportional to the multitudes of God’s comforts<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ In several terms, the Holy Book proclaims that man has to suffer a multitude of troubles in this life; and that he would, as well, have a multitude of comforts. Amid them all, a spirit characterized by strong will, alertness, and perception of truth, would certainly overcome afflictions, and look forward to the promises of eternal joy<sup>3</sup>.

God’s comforts will surely, and actually, surpass afflictions and labors, for they would grant peace and tranquility amid the present anxieties, and provide hope in the things to come. Hence the apostle Paul says; “*The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Romans 8: 18); they definitely could not be compared to the comforts<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

#### **4- THE ULTIMATE END OF THE WICKED:**

**“*Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You?*” (20)**

By “*the throne of iniquity*” he probably means the wicked with authority, who, in their corruption would never have fellowship with the

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 71.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 22.

<sup>3</sup> Cassian, Conferences 3:12.

<sup>4</sup> De interpellatione Job et David, Book 1: 1:1. ترجمة جرجيس كامل

Holy God; those who keep on inventing accusations against the church and the believers.

❖ Nobody will receive a crown while asleep, and no one will guarantee the acquirement of the kingdom of heaven while slothful. It would not be befitting of any one to talk about fasting while having a full stomach. All the commandments of God require strife, without which we cannot acquire the kingdom of heaven. Do you want to know why? Listen to the words of the Lord Christ, Himself, saying: *“If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, ... and come follow Me”* (Matthew 19: 21) <sup>1</sup>

(St. Jerome)

❖ So he says: No wicked person can sit with you; and You have nothing common with the throne of iniquity<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“They gather together against the life of the righteous, and condemn innocent blood” (21)***

The wicked gather together and plot against the righteous, and seek shedding his blood. That was a prophecy of what would happen in the future, when they tried and crucified the Lord Christ, when the devil and his hosts gathered together against Him, and when the hosts of darkness sought His blood.

***“But the Lord has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge” (22)***

How can the devil and his hosts, together with the wicked, with all their plots, stand against the children of God, to whom God Himself is the defense and the rock of refuge?!

***“He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their wickedness. The Lord our God shall cut them off” (23)***

Here, the psalmist proclaims his trust in the promises of the Just God, who will not leave those persistent on their evil have their own ways; but, in due time, will let them reap the corrupt fruits of their evil. They say: *“The Lord does not see, nor does the God of Jacob perceive”*

(7). But the time will come when they will perceive their fault.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 22.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, 94 (93).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 94  
WHAT CAN THE WICKED DO TO ME?**

- ❖ In the midst of my affliction;  
When the wicked surround me, and gather together against me;  
I may think that you are hidden for a long time;  
I beg you to shine on me and on them, O righteous One;  
To fill me with your comforts;  
That I do not seek vengeance for myself;  
But with my longsuffering, I would gain them for You;  
I seek from You to make vengeance against evil, and not against the evildoers;  
To take away their evil, that they would return to You  
And instead of the eternal perdition, they would enjoy the heavenly glory.
- ❖ My God, You know that I am a sinner;  
I perpetually seek from You to have longsuffering on me;  
But, in my weakness, once somebody does wrong against me;  
I would become astonished for Your longsuffering on him;  
Grant me Your longsuffering;  
To endure my opponents with joy;  
And to pay back your compassion on me, by my compassion on my opponent;
- ❖ if the wicked intend to crush me;  
Let me look at how you, the Almighty God, have endured being crushed for my sake;  
Let me be crucified together with you; it would be a glory of which I am not worthy.  
There the wicked heretic;  
Attempt to catch the widowed souls, who lost their heavenly Groom, in their nets;  
And the strange souls that are not abided in You;  
And the souls of the fatherless who lost their heavenly Father;  
The heretics boast in the attractive philosophies;  
And instead of the holy life they present valueless nonsense;  
They think they could catch a multitude;  
Assuming that you do not see nor perceive;  
Bring back those poor souls to You;  
To make them enjoy their heavenly Groom, their eternal dwelling place;

And their membership in the divine family;  
To become members of God's household.

- ❖ The opposition of the wicked against faith will not cease;  
They will do their best to keep men from believing in You, and get saved;  
They assume that they carry the spirit of strength;  
And claim that you do not see what they plot in secret;  
And do not perceive what they practice against you.
- ❖ In my weakness, my footsteps may slip;  
But your grace supports me;  
That I return to seek your help;  
For you are the hope for the hopeless;  
And the help for the helpless.

## **PSALM 95**

### **A COLLECTIVE SONG**

According to an old tradition, this psalm is considered by 'Mishnah' as the psalm of the new year<sup>1</sup>. It is a part of the liturgy of the fast of the fall season, in which 'Jehovah' is proclaimed as the Creator and Lord of the universe. It is sung before the procession enters the temple. God is celebrated as the King who renews the covenant with his people, and seeks from them to keep his commandments. It is thus very close to psalm 81.

- 1- Preparing the people to debate with the Creator    1 - 7**  
**2- A commitment to obedience                                    8 – 11**

#### **The title:**

A call to worship and to obedience.

#### **1- PREPARING THE PEOPLE TO DEBATE WITH THE CREATOR:**

Heading toward the temple, the procession probably started from a holy location like Gihon (1 Kings 1: 38-40); where Solomon was enthroned as king, then, moved on toward the valley of kedron, during which the people used to sing the two verses 1 and 2, then the chorus, inside the temple would respond by singing the verses 3 and 4, proclaiming that the Lord is the king, the Creator of the earth, the mountains, and the seas, etc. Once the procession ascends the mountain of the Lord, the congregation enter the temple through the gate of beauty, and come to be before the Holy of Holies, they used to prostrate themselves to the ground, sing the verse 6, as an invitation to worship before the Creator; and the chorus would respond by singing the first part of verse 7.

***“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord, Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation” (1)***

In the Old Covenant, this song probably was said, to-and-fro, between those approaching the temple, and the chorus of singers inside it; so that the souls become exulted in the Lord, the Fountain of true joy.

According to **St. Augustine**, no one but the repentant, could practice this invitation to praise God; as it is a call to repentance and

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<sup>1</sup> Artur Weiser: *The Psalms*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1962, ps. 95.

confession to God, and consequently, to get attached to Him, and to renew the covenant with Him.

And according to **Pope Athanasius**, this invitation is also addressed to Christians to celebrate the feast, not by temporal festivities like the other people of the world, but in the Lord.

Whereas, according to **Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the invitation here is directed from the church of Christ to the Jews, the deniers of faith, calling on them to believe in Christ, to gather together in Him, and to enjoy the joy of the Spirit.

It is an invitation directed to every soul to get attached to the Lord through repentance, and to a fellowship with Him, to enjoy the heavenly joy.

❖ He invites us to a banquet of great joy, not of this world, but in the Lord.

By saying: “*Oh come*”, he invites those away from Him. ... To whom shall they come? But to Him, who, by getting together with Him, they would rejoice!

But how far are they from God? ... Is it possible to be far from Him location-wise; He who is everywhere?... They are far from God, being no more like Him.... by living a wicked kind of life; and by having bad habits, that would be alienated from God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ As for us, we have got the feast.

We have got the holy day, in which we are committed to blow the horn, calling every one to come to the feast; and to present ourselves to the Lord with thanksgiving. We consider it as our own feast, to sanctify, not for our own sake, but for that of the Lord; and to rejoice, not in ourselves, but in the Lord, who carried our sorrows, saying, “*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death*” (Matthew 26: 38).

The heathens, and all those aliens to faith, keep their feast for their own sake, and hence, they have no peace, and commit evil to God; The saints, on the other hand, living for the Lord; keeping the feast, everyone of them would say, “*I will rejoice in your salvation*” (Psalm 9; 14; 35: 9).

The commandment to the righteous is to rejoice in the Lord; that, by gathering together, they would sing this psalm concerning the feast; saying; “*O come, let us sing to the Lord*’ (1), and not to ourselves.

**(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, 95 (94).

❖ *“Oh come, ... let us shout joyfully to the Lord”* ... The expression *“Oh come”*, is an invitation to those scattered and far away through their own preoccupations, to come. The Christian congregation call on the Jews, scattered away by their rebellion and disobedience, and counsel them to gather together in harmony, to believe in Christ the Lord, and to sing the praise of conquest to God, who saves the believers from the perdition of the devil, from the oppression of sin, and from the requirements, and the condemnations of the Mosaic law; who justifies them by faith, grants them adoption, and lets them enjoy the Holy Spirit, and the kingdom of heaven.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms’ (2)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as; *“Let us hasten to reach His face by confession; and shout joyfully to Him with psalms”*

The word *“thanksgiving”* here, came meaning ‘confession’; either by repenting our sins, or by proclaiming God’s works with us; as all the good works we may practice, are the works of His hands.

There is no other way to join the procession to encounter God, except by ‘confession’. Being sinners, we are in need of daily repentance, and confession of our sins. And, as God perpetually works in us, it would be befitting of us to confess them, presenting thanksgiving to Him.

❖ I wish we do not imagine withdrawing from the song of praise. And perceiving that confession is an admittance of our disobediences, this, actually is an integral part of the song of praise; As by confessing our sins, we praise the glory of God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Let us be encouraged by His love for mankind, and strive to show repentance before the dwelling of the day when we cannot benefit, any more from remorse. Now, everything depend on us; whereas later, He, alone, will judge and issue verdicts<sup>2</sup>.

❖ The face of God is His Son, the image and icon of the Father, who first came to the world, in the form of a servant; while his second coming will be in his Deity, namely with majesty, glory, and power;

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<sup>1</sup> *On Psalms, 95 (94).*

<sup>2</sup> *In Matt. Homily, 14: 4.*

and He will sit on the throne of judgment to judge the living and the dead. Let us then, precede His second coming by repentance, confession of our sins, and thanksgiving for what He has done to us; By seeking His compassion and favor before the dwelling of the day of judgment; and by shouting joyfully to Him by psalms; namely by the tools of the soul; and purifying our bodies by a chaste and virtuous behavior.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Let us counsel them (the sinners) to lean upon his mercy, lest they would perish by the extreme torments. It is obvious that, if it was God's intention to severely punish us, he would not meet the transgressions of the sinners by His merciful love. It is also obvious that God has put aside from his mind, the curse, on those whom, by his prior mercy, He made judges of themselves. Accordingly, the psalm says; *"Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms"* (2); And the apostle Paul says; *"for if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged"* (1 Corinthians 11; 31) <sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Gregory the Great)**

***"For the Lord is the great God, and the great king above all gods"* (3)**

In the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as; "For you are, O Lord, a great God, and a great king above all gods; for God does not send his people away".

According to **St. Augustine**, God calls all nations to believe in Him, and to praise Him; ... He would never forget His people, from whom the Fathers, the prophets, the disciples, the apostles, and a multitude of others, have come to believe in Him on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2; 4); ... And He would not send his people away by the entrance of the Gentiles into faith; when, in the last days, they would seek the heavenly Physician, to heal the serious wounds that inflicted them, because of their past denial of the Lord Christ.

Talking here about the Lord Christ, being *"The Lord, the great God, and the great king"*, This verse, together with other similar verses were used by some fathers to confirm the Divinity of the Lord Christ.

- ❖ This talk would mute 'the heretic 'Arius'; for it testifies and confirms that our Lord Jesus Christ is the great God. it is also supported by

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<sup>1</sup> Pastoral Care, 3: 29.

what the great apostle Paul wrote to his disciple Titus, saying; ‘*Looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*’ (Titus 2; 13). For He is a great king above all gods, namely above all the hosts of angels in heaven and of the saints on earth; who are called gods, according to the words of God to Moses; “*You shall be to him (to pharaoh) as god*’ (Exodus 4; 16). Yet, the Lord Christ is the true God, equal in essence to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“In his hand are the deep places of the earth; and the mountain peaks also belong to Him” (4)***

According to **St. Ambrose**, the earth is well established, not on its own, but according to the will of God<sup>1</sup>.

**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem** believes that, according to his divine care and ordinance, He has in his hand the earth and all its nations; namely, the nations that were before set aside, and far away from knowing him; according to the words of the psalm; “*Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession*” (Psalm 2: 8). As to ‘*mountain peaks*’, they refer to the angelic hosts, lifted up in honor and majesty, high above the stars of heaven. They are his possession, as ministers, who unceasingly praise Him, on account of that he created the land, the sea, and all creation to obey Him.

He is the Almighty God, in whose hand are the heaven, the earth, and all their inhabitants of men and heavenly hosts, who gather together as a unique chorus to praise Him, who created them and cares for them. Although He is in no need for their goodness and their praise, Yet, He is pleased with their rejoice in Him, and would pour his grace upon them.

❖ Just meditate in how awesome it is, to listen, and to learn about God, the exalted in features, the incomprehensible, and immeasurable, in whose hand are the deep places of the earth, “*He who looks on the earth, and it trembles; touches the hills, and they smoke*” (Psalm 104: 32).

Just meditate, in how this imperceptible God, whose splendor of glory, no one can endure; that the cherubim cover their faces by their wings; has condescended to become man!

How he took on himself a body from the dust of earth!

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Six Days of Creation* 1: 6: 22.

How he entered into the womb of a virgin to carry him for a duration of nine months!

How he was nourished by her milk, and endured every thing like a regular man!

How, although what happened was so strange and difficult to believe, even after it did actually happen; Yet he sent prophets beforehand to proclaim it!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**(St. John Chrysostom XE)**

***“The sea is His, for He made it; and his hand made the dry land” (5)***

This amazing procession, perpetually moving to enjoy the encounter of the Savior face to face, is not a seen procession, nor is connected to a particular location. Whether man is in the sea or on land, both are made by the great Creator.

Our exultation is not connected to a certain place, but to its Creator. Let the sea, then, be disturbed with its waves; And let the Leviathan, the great dragon be stirred up against us; Our Christ commands the winds and waves, and they obey His command.

❖ Take what I said about anger as a basis in all your temptations. When temptation charges against you; and disturbs you like violent wind or mighty waves; Wake Christ up; let Him speak in you; for *“the winds and the sea obey him”* (Matthew 8; 27). ... Who is He, whom the sea obeys? It is He who *“The sea is His”* (5), and *“all things were made through him”* (John 1; 3). ... Let us then, like the winds and the sea, obey the Creator. ... The sea gave ear to Christ, and you do not? ... The wind calmed down, and you do not? ... What I am saying is that all this is nothing more than a lack of desire to obey the word of Christ. ... Do not let the waves disturb your heart; for although we are but humans; yet we shall not despair when the winds push us around, and the tempests of our spirit stir up. Let us wake Christ up; so that we would sail in a calm sea, and reach our home<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Oh come, let us worship, and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker” (6)***

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 13:3

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as; ‘Oh come, let us worship, and bow down before Him, and weep before the Lord who created us’.

If the heavenly hosts find their pleasure and gladness in worshipping before the great Creator in his glory; Let us partake of their happiness, by worshipping Him, kneeling before Him, and weeping before our Creator.

Why weeping?... It is not the weeping of despair, nor of anxiety; but the language of someone who cannot express his feelings with any human language; it is the weeping of a sinner who confesses his sins; and that of the exultant soul in her encounter with her Savior; when the tears of remorse mix with those of joy.

❖ Every time we worship down, then stand up, we demonstrate that sin has casts us down to the ground; and that the love of Christ calls us up to heaven<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

❖ Our lord and Savior exhorts and counsels us through his prophet, on how we are committed to come to Him after being so long slothful; saying; “*let us worship, and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker*” (6); And also; “*Return to me with all your heart, by fasting, weeping, and sorrow*”. If we think carefully, O beloved brethren; The holy days of the great lent, refer to our present life on earth; whereas the feast of resurrection refers to the eternal paradise<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

❖ Now, we can flee; ... Let us then get up from our fall; ... Let us not despair, as long as we are fleeing from evil.

The Lord Jesus Christ came to save the sinners. ... Let us then come and worship him; let us weep before him (6).

The divine Word calls upon us loud to repent, saying; “*Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11; 28).

There is a way to salvation if we want; “*He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces*” (Isaiah 25: 8).

God is faithful in all his words; He tells no lies when he says; “*though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool*” (Isaiah 1; 18). The

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<sup>1</sup> *Treatise on the Holy Spirit, 27.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon 198:1.*

great Physician of the souls, is ready to heal your wounds, not only yours, but of all the captives of sin.

From His sweet saving lips, he uttered the words; *“Those who are well have no need of a physician; ... I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”* (Matthew 9; 12, 13) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

*“For He is our God, We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today if you hear His voice...”* (7)

By saying ‘today’, he refers to the present time; as long as we are in this world, It is befitting of us to listen to His voice, and to obey Him, when He calls us to repentance and to return to Him.

He is the Good Shepherd who precedes His sheep, to hear His voice, and follow Him in peace and confidence. Let us then listen to His voice, as long as it is *“today”*; for we are not sure if there will be ‘tomorrow’!

❖ Let us listen to the voice of the divine Word ... *“Today”* is the symbol of Light; and Light to people is the *“Word”*, through whom we see God the Father. Truly, on those who believe and obey, grace will flow; Whereas on those who do not obey, have sin in their hearts, and do not know the way of the Lord; the wrath of God will dwell<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

❖ The Lord exhorts people to repent, and promises to forgive them, on the tongue of His prophet Isaiah, saying; *“I, even I, am who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins; Put Me in remembrance; ... State your case that you may be acquitted”* (Isaiah 43; 25). Truly. God exhorts the people to repent, saying; *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4; 17). By the confession of sins they would be qualified for approaching the kingdom of heaven; for no one can receive the grace of the heavenly God, unless he is purified from every wrinkle of sin, by confession and repentance, through the saving gift of baptism of our Lord and Savior<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Chromatius)**

## **2- A COMMITMENT TO OBEDIENCE:**

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<sup>1</sup> رسالة 46 رسالة إلى عذراء ساقطة

<sup>2</sup> Exhortation to the Heathen, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Chromatius: Tractate on Matthew 15: 3.

***“Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah; as on the day at Massah in the wilderness” (8)***

The psalmist warns us against hardening our hearts, as the Israelites have done, when they refused to enter the promised land, with the excuse of being to fight against its inhabitants; when they rebelled against God, and deprived themselves of the enjoyment of His promised land.

❖ It is possible; yes, it is possible for everyone who used to be completely negligent, to show himself as zealous; to mend what came upon him of damage! Hence the psalmist says; *“today, if you listen to his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah”* (8). He so says, to encourage us not ever to despair; for, as long as we are still here, we would have a good chance. Let us then holdfast to what is before us, and hasten toward the high reward from God<sup>1</sup>.

*“Today”* in the words of the psalmist, means any moment of our life, even in the very old age; if you wish, repentance is counted, not by the number of days, but by the status of the spirit.

❖ Let us take another example; of ‘Ahab’, the most evil of all kings, who sinned under the influence of his evil wife ‘Isabel’. Once he regretted, condemned his own sins, and put on sackcloth, he gained the mercies of God, who said to his prophet Elijah; *“See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me, I shall not bring the calamity in his days”* (1 kings 21: 29).

The people of Nineveh did not need many days to have their sins wiped out, but a small portion of a day was enough to be forgiven.

So has the robber who was crucified on the right hand of the Savior; he needed only a very short moment of a single word to have all the sins he has committed in his whole life to be cleansed. He got the reward from God, even before the saintly apostles.

And the martyrs, have got the crowns of glory, not after several years, but after few days, and even after a single day, in which they received both Christianity, and martyrdom.

Hence, we are in need of zeal on every aspect, a great readiness of thought. and a conscience, ready to denounce our past evils, and to choose the other way with a greater activity, according to God’s will, and to His commandments; to gain a great reward in a very limited time. For many who were the last, have preceded those who were the first<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Instructions to Catechumens, 2:1.*

<sup>2</sup> رسالة من القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم إلى ثيودور بعد سقوطه.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Who was there, O robber, to teach you to glorify your Partner in crucifixion? ... It was the eternal Light who gives light to those in the darkness!

You heard those words; 'Exult! your deeds were indeed not good; but here is a king, distributing gifts! ... Your request has come in the right moment; Grace will be yours momentarily! ... *"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in my paradise"*, for "You have heard my voice, and have not hardened your heart'. ... The way I instantly judged Adam, I will instantly forgive you; ... Today is the day of your salvation; ... By a tree, Adam has fallen, and by a tree (of the cross), you will enter into paradise<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

❖ Work diligently on repentance; Plow the land; Take the stones and the thorns away from your field; I wish you do not have a hard heart that makes the word of God inactive in you<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

*"When your fathers tested Me, and put Me to the proof, though they had seen My work' (9)*

*"for forty years; I loathed that generation; and said, 'they are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard My ways' (10)*

Here, God reveals his grief over his people all along the forty years in the wilderness, whose hearts were corrupted by sin, and whose minds deflected through ignorance of the ways of God, that grant salvation. Sin melds with ignorance, to destroy the heart and the mind, to deny man the chance to partake of the procession of praise and exultation, to proceed toward God to settle down forever in His heavenly bosom.

*"So I swore in my wrath; 'they shall not enter my rest' (11)*

In the old, the people have walked in a procession through the wilderness, but, unfortunately, they denied themselves taking part in the procession of the true exultation; the entrance into the promised land, where the rest in God is.

The Holy Book presents to us several journeys that would grant rest; of which are the following;

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 13 : 31 .

<sup>2</sup> Sermons on N. T. Lessons 73: 3.

1- The journey of the people through the wilderness to enjoy the entrance into the promised land, that refers to the heavenly Canaan.

2- The return of the people from the Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple; a reference to the liberation from the servitude of the devil, and the entrance into the higher Jerusalem.

3- The three annual journeys in the major feasts to the temple in Jerusalem, referring to the perpetual longing of the church to the exultant heavenly life.

4- The journey of the soul from this world through the word of God to enjoy the icon of Christ her heavenly Groom.

5- The experience of the ascension of the heart together with Christ, the crucified, risen from the dead, and ascended to heavens, through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

❖ We as well, have got the promise to enter into the kingdom of heaven, through our faith, and the way of our spiritual life, the same as those who received the commandment through the law ... to gain the land promised to them; But *“the message of the law which they heard, did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it”* (Hebrew 4: 2). We, on the other hand, who believe in Christ and His gifts, will enter by faith into that rest; contrary to those, who have not entered into that rest, according to the words of God through David, saying: *“I swore in My wrath, ‘they shall enter My rest’”* (Psalm 95: 11) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)**

❖ It is befitting of him who wishes to enter into that rest, not to go back to the ancient practices, despising the works required by the sound statutes of the law, destined to control the disobedience<sup>2</sup>.

**(Theodore, bishop of Messisa)**

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<sup>1</sup>Commentary on Hebr., 4.

<sup>2</sup>Fragments on Hebr. 4: 4-7.

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 95**

### **LET ME JOIN THE PROCESSION TO ENCOUNTER YOU**

- ❖ Your Holy Spirit draws me;  
To join the procession of Your church;  
To set forth, exultant, to encounter You;  
I long to see the whole humanity partake of this procession.
- ❖ We would then, be in an unceasing feast;  
Our souls would exult in Your amazing salvation;  
We confess our sins to You, O Forgiver of sins;  
And confess to You the riches of Your grace working in us;  
Our whole being would turn into a musical instrument;  
On which, Your fiery Spirit would play!  
We glorify You, O Great in Your love;  
And rich in Your grace.
- ❖ What an amazing procession!  
The sinners, by You, become righteous;  
Humans gather together with the heavenly hosts;  
All sing and praise Your exalted care;  
All glorify You, on account of that You incarnated for the salvation  
of men;  
You have been crucified to liberate those believing in You from the  
captivity of the devil.
- ❖ What an amazing procession!  
Proceeding toward You, O Creator of heaven, land, and sea!  
Let the winds blow, Let the tempests stir up!  
The whole nature would not be able to corrupt the peace of that  
procession!  
For it is a procession going by, and to You.  
No power could ever hinder it!
- ❖ In this procession, the heavenly hosts worship You;  
For they cannot stir at the splendor of Your greatness.  
We, the earthly creatures will worship You;  
Will confess our sins to You;  
And will give You thanks for Your multitude of mercies;  
Our tears will unceasingly flow from our eyes;  
Tears of true repentance;  
Tears of joy for encountering You.

## **PSALM96**

# **THE DAILY BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE OF GOD**

Although, according to some, this psalm concerns the new temple built by Zerubbabel after the return from the Babylonian captivity. It is actually the song of the whole humanity praising the Lord for the sake of her liberation from the captivity of the devil, and her building a holy spiritual temple for the Lord.

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|--|----------------|
| <b>1- A new building, and a new song of praise</b>             | <b>1 - 2</b>   |
| <b>2- A building in every nation</b>                           | <b>3 - 8</b>   |
| <b>3- He reigns upon a tree</b>                                | <b>9 - 10</b>  |
| <b>4- Exultation of the heavenly and the earthly creatures</b> | <b>11 - 13</b> |

### **The title:**

A song of praise to God coming in judgment.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, the title of this psalm came as: 'A praise by David when the temple was rebuilt after the return from captivity.

And according to St. Jerome, the title of this psalm is an invitation to every believer to rebuild his house, destroyed by the enemies. This house in his heart is, in truth, the house of the Lord, built through the fear of the Lord through repentance.

In the book of Exodus, it is told about the two midwives in the days Moses was born, who refrained from killing the Hebrew newborns, according to the command of the evil Pharaoh, And "*Because they feared God, He provided households for them*" (Exodus 1: 21). God actually built houses for Himself in their depths.

After the Babylonians destroyed the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, the believers, returning from captivity rebuilt the temple destroyed by the enemies. This work should be done every day, as the devil would never cease to destroy the temple of the Lord in us through sin. We, should not cease to rebuild the house of the Lord or His temple in ourselves, through repentance and the fear of the Lord.

What we say, concerning every believer, applies to the church every day. The enemy keep on opposing her, and the fear of the Lord builds what is destroyed every day.

Let us then pray to the Lord, first, and before anything else, that our house will never be destroyed; that the Chaldeans and the Assyrians would not come and destroy the temple of Christ in us. But in case it

falls by necessity, we could be saved by a wooden board, after the collapse of our ship.

This house of Christ, as is clear from the words of the psalmist, is being rebuilt every day in the life of the repentant ... which applies, as well, to the church of Christ, after her eventual falling<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ We are committed to exert every effort, and use every knowledge, to keep away the complete destruction; so that, what is written in the book of Exodus: “*Because the two midwives feared God, He provided households for them*” (Exodus 1: 21), would be realized in us. ... Notice that, because they feared God, they were provided with households of their own. With no fear of God, no household would be provided. If, therefore, by the fear of God, households are built by those who commit sins, and being rebuilt would even become the subject of God’s pleasure, What should we, the captives of sin, do?... Listen, O sinner. We should truly fear God, and avoid sin. Yet, even after falling, there will be another (wooden board) by which we would be saved – repentance! ... As long as there is still time, the door is open wide for repentance. However long your life may be, as long as you still live, you may fall any time<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

## **1- A NEW BUILDING, AND A NEW SONG OF PRAISE:**

“*Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth*” (1)

Having enjoyed the new creation in Jesus Christ, we came to have a new spiritual tongue, to sing a new praise.

❖ “*Oh, sing to the Lord a new song*”. What a blessed repentance! For even, if you fall, in case you repent, you would definitely proclaim a new house for Christ ... And the new house requires a new song of praise!

“*Sing to the Lord, all the earth*”. This phrase nullifies what the Jews and the followers of Novatian claim! ... “*Sing to the Lord, all the earth*”; not just in Jerusalem. but all over the earth! ... According to Novatian, there are sins, which could be repented, like telling lies, swearing in vain, and stealing. There are, however, other sins, like adultery and murder, which would never be repented. ... Now, I beg you

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 23.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 72.

listen to the words of the psalm, saying: “*Sing to the Lord, all the earth*”. By saying: “*All the earth*”, this will include both the adulterer and the murderer, and every other sin on earth, all sins without exception, that carries the seal of the earth. Repent any sin you may commit, and you will certainly be saved<sup>1</sup>!

❖ “*Sing to the Lord a new song*”. As the old man would be destroyed, and a new man would be built, a new song should be joyfully said to the Lord by all the earth! The earth that faithfully return to the Lord, will continually sing to Him the praises of thanksgiving, with the sweet and strong voice of young men<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Through the presence of our Lord, all things are renewed, according to the words of the apostle: “*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). In us, as well, is consummated what is written in another psalm, that “*our youth is renewed like an eagle*”; having cast away from ourselves the old man, concerning the early corrupt behavior; our minds are renewed by the Spirit; we have put on the new man, regaining the image of his Creator; and we acquired a new covenant. That is why, at the birth of our Lord, the angels praised Him with a new song, saying: “*Glory to Him in the Highest ...*”. We, as well, should sing this new praise, for Him who built the new house; namely, His body, which He took from the perpetual virgin.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

According to **St. Augustine**, the building of the house of the Lord is realized by building the church all over the earth; namely, by spreading faith in the Lord Christ in all nations. This building is to be realized by the new commandment of Christ; namely, love through the cross, to have a new praise, and a new building. This building grows and increase among the nations, by the work of the fiery Holy Spirit.

❖ If the whole earth sings a new praise, this is the building realized by singing praise. The work of praise is the building; but only if it is not an old praise, sung by the lusts of the body, but a new praise, sung by love. ... Now hear why it is called a new praise. The Lord says: “*A new commandment I give to you; to love one another*” The whole

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 23.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 72.

earth, therefore, sings a new praise, when the house of the Lord is built<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day” (2)*

❖ *“Bless His name”*. The name of the Lord is *“the Savior”*; for the sake of His work of salvation in us.

What does he mean by saying: *“Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day”*? The righteous understands it in the following way: Sing to the Lord every day; a day after day; Or sing to Him today, and sing to Him tomorrow. This interpretation is obvious. Yet, there is a deeper meaning behind the words: *“Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day”*. If the psalmists say: ‘Sing to the Lord day and night’, if we take the words literally. We would face a problem: Can we also praise the Lord at night, if we praise Him during the day? .... Now, you should know what he means: **When you praise the Lord, praise Him always in the light of virtues; not in the darkness of sins.** I wish the sun of Christ always shines in your souls, that a new light perpetually shines in you.

*“Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day”*. Now, let us study this phrase from a different angle. There are only two days, not three, four, or five days: **The Old and the New Covenants**, during which Christ shines. Do not praise Him just in the Old Covenant, lest you will be a Jew; And do not praise Him just in the New Covenant, lest you will be a follower of ‘Mani’. ... Praise Him from day to day; namely, in both the Old and the New Covenants, for those two days emit one and the same light; Hence it is written in the book of Leviticus: *“Among the beasts, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, and chewing the cud – that you may eat”* (Leviticus 11: 3), otherwise it is not clean ... A man of the church *“divides the hoof, and chews the cud”*; namely, he believes in both the Old and the New Covenants, and mostly contemplates in both. Whatever is buried in the letter, will rise up in the Spirit<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ As to saying: *“Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day” (2)*, it is as though said by our Lord Himself, who commanded His disciples to *“go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 23.

*them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 28: 19); And so they did according to His command, went to all the nations, and “*proclaimed the good news of His salvation*” (2), and spoke of His glory, and of His wonders.

Saying: “*from day to day*”, He teaches us that He wants them to do that all the time.

Those who give the good news of the salvation of the Lord, have the knowledge of the ‘first’ day, namely, the Old Covenant; And from that day, they get the inspiration of the ‘second’ day, namely, the New Covenant. Those two days, therefore, are enlightened by the light of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, and the ray of the glory of God the Father.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

## **2- A BUILDING IN EVERY NATION:**

*“Declare His glory among the nations; His wonders among the peoples”* (3)

According to **St. Augustine**, the house built, keeps on growing “*from day to day*” among all the nations, through preaching, or the proclamation of the good news, not for the glory of the preachers who build, but for the glory of the Lord Himself. For he who seeks his own glory, does not present a new praise to the Lord.

❖ “*Declare His glory among the nations*” (3); His glory, and not yours!

If you choose, O preachers, to declare your own glory, you would fall. But if you choose to declare His glory, you, yourselves would be built, while building. Those who choose to declare their own glory, refuse to dwell in that building, and hence, they do not sing a new praise among all the nations<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ In the prophecy of Isaiah, it came: “*O Lord, You are my God, I will exalt You, I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things; Your counsel of old are faithfulness and truth*” (Isaiah 25: 1). Our Lord and God Jesus Christ has done wonderful things; namely, raising the dead. healing the sick, and all the other good deeds, told by the evangelists to the nations; to prove the old and faithful counsel of God; which is that man is created according to the image of God;

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

an image renewed by our Lord, when He created man anew by His own incarnation.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods” (4)***

- ❖ “For the Lord is great, and He could never be praised as would befit Him”. Who is He, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who could not be praised as would befit Him?... You certainly know how He appeared as Man; conceived in the womb of a woman; born, suckled, carried on arms, circumcised, and an offering was presented on His behalf to the temple of God.... You certainly know How He grew up, to be smitten, spat on, crowned with thorns, crucified, stabbed by a spear, and died. ... You certainly know how He endured all those things! “He is great indeed, and was never praised as would befit Him”. ... Let us now, praise Him; preach Him; proclaim His glory; and build His house<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

***“For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (5)***

Saying: “*He is feared by all gods; And, “For all the gods of the peoples are idols”* (or demons); he intends to make it clear that he does not mean that they are true gods, but he means to rebuke those who count the idols or demons as gods, and for worshipping them.

- ❖ Such words, namely, calling idols gods, are used, not as though they are true gods, but to teach us that the true God is the Creator of all, the Only Lord above all those who were vainly called gods. To convince us of it, the Holy Spirit says on the tongue of David: “*For all the gods of the peoples are idols(demons, and not gods)*. And brought a curse over all those who worship them<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Justin the martyr)**

- ❖ All the nations used to have demons as gods as is more clearly declared by the apostle, saying: “*The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God*” (1 Corinthians 10: 20); they were, therefore captivated by the devil; and the whole earth was worshippers of wooden images. After saying: “*He is to be feared by all gods*” (4), he added: “*for all the gods of the peoples are idols*”

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

<sup>2</sup> Dialogue with Trypho, 55.

...But, if that was all the commendation that God gets, it would not be befitting enough for Him... But listen to what to follow: “*But the Lord made the heavens: (5) ... See the glory given to God! See the difference between the heavens and the Maker of heavens! If God is the Maker of heavens, He is also the Maker of angels, and of the apostles, to whom the demons submitted, who were, themselves heavens, that carried the Lord, and preached His glory to the nations!*”<sup>1</sup>

(St. Augustine)

**“Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary” (6)**

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “Confession and splendor are before Him; Purity and great majesty are in His sanctuary”.

In some detail, **St. Augustine** talks to us about how every man desires to have the splendor and beauty of the angels; when the way to their splendor is the confession of our sins; and the way to their beauty is their righteousness and purity. Let us therefore, start by confessing our sins, to enjoy the splendor and beauty of angels; and follow up by seeking righteousness, to get greatness and authority.

❖ Do you love splendor? Do you wish to be beautiful? Confess. He did not say: “Beauty and confession”, but said: “*Confession and beauty*”; You were corrupt; “*Confess*” to become beautiful! ... You sinned; “*Confess*” to become righteous. ... You distorted yourself; and cannot make yourself beautiful! ... Of what kind is the One who betroths us; It is He, who loves the corrupt, to make her beautiful? It is He, who said: “*I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*” (Matthew 9: 13). ... Is He calling the sinners to remain sinners? ... No, “*Confession and beauty are before Him*”. They honor Him by confessing their sins; by vomiting the evils they have greedily devoured; but not to return to their vomit, like an unclean dog (2 Peter 2: 22). There, would then be confession and beauty!

If we love beauty, let us then first choose confession, for beauty will certainly follow.

Again, there is he, who loves honor and majesty; and intends to be as great as the angels. Angels have a certain kind of honor and majesty, which if they practice up to the end, they would be irresistible ... Everyone seeks the honor of angels, but not everyone seeks their

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

righteousness... You have first to love their righteousness, for their honor will certainly follow<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ Instead of seeking honor first, start by seeking righteousness; for once you become righteous, you will also be honorable! If you, in a way contrary to logic, seek first to be honorable, you will probably fall, and will not be able to stand aright. You will stand in a better way, if He, who sets you up, is the One who never falls; He, who came down to you, who have fallen; who came down, stretched His hands to you. Being unable to stand again on your own, hold fast to the strong hand stretched to help you<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the nations; Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength ” (7)*

- ❖ If the psalm refers to the temple of Jerusalem, what would be the meaning behind the word: *“Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the nations; Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength”*? ... Families of the nations and peoples. are those constituting the church<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

How would we ascribe to the Lord glory and strength? The Holy Book refers to the passions of the Lord Christ as being His glory; As by His cross He has torn the statement of our sins, destroyed the authority of the devil and his hosts, and made a spectacle of them.. When we suffer and be crucified together with the Lord Christ; and the devil and his works would have no more authority over us, we will be counted as ascribing glory to the Lord; for He would then be glorified in us. As to ascribing strength to Him, He, who has no need for more strength, as He is the Almighty; We, being the children of God, carrying His strength in us, according to the words of the apostle John: *“I have written to you, young men, because you are strong”* (1 John 1: 14); We shall be as though have ascribed strength to the Lord.

- ❖ Now, the psalm calls the families of the nations, to ascribe *“glory”* to the Lord; to glorify Him by what befit Him, by doing good deeds, to be seen by men, who would glorify God.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 23.

“and honor”... Namely, they would honor Him as a Father, for He has qualified them to be His children by adoption; and to shout loudly to Him in their prayers, saying: “*Our Father, who are in heaven*”.

The glory of our Lord is also the cross; As those who crucify their “self”; namely, put to death the lusts of their bodies, are ascribing glory to His name.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

**“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; Bring an offering and come into His courts” (8)**

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “*Carry the sacrifices, and set forth; Enter into His courts; Praise the Lord in His holy sanctuary*”.

The psalmist calls on us to bring offerings, saying: “**Bring an offering and come into His courts**”. He seeks from us to offer works of love and mercy; according to the words of the Lord: “*I desire mercy and not sacrifice*” (Hosea 6: 6).

Notice that the word “His courts and sanctuary” in the Septuagint version, came, once in plural, and then in singular tense; which apply, not to the Jewish, but to the Christian worship; as the Jews had only one temple in Jerusalem where sacrifice were offered; Whereas in the church of the New Covenant, the sacrifice of the Eucharist is offered in all the churches of the world; considered as one court, being the one body of the Lord Christ.

❖ By saying: “**Bring or (Raise) an offering**”. He means to say: Lift yourselves up by offering sacrifices of high caliber; namely, good, and heavenly works; and do not lower them down by offering to Him sacrifices of beasts! ... As to saying “*His courts*”, in the plural tense, it refers to the multitude of churches all over the world, where the Gentiles offer their sacrifices, contrary to the one single temple of the Jews in Jerusalem, where the Jews used to offer theirs. As to saying: “*His sanctuary*” in the singular tense, it refers to the gathering together of the churches of the New Covenant, and their unity on one creed in Christ. They are called “*His sanctuary*”, being His one holy body.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Notice that it is not possible to enter into a multitude of courts through a single one. If you wish to understand this secret somewhere else in the gospel; read about the merchant who, finding one pearl of great price, went and sold all the beautiful pearls he had, and bought

it (See Matthew 13: 46); And the words of the prophet, saying: “*Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths where the good way lies, and walk in it*” (Jeremiah 6: 16). What would we understand in the many pearls, and the many paths, through which we may find the one pearl of great price, and the one good way? ... Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the twelve minor prophets, David, and Solomon, are all the “courts”, “our courts”, through which we first enter, and from which we can ultimately reach the “court” of the gospel, where we can find the Lord Christ<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ The confession is a gift (an offering) presented to God. In case, O atheist, you intend to enter into His courts, do not come empty-handed; Bring a gift with you. ...

What kind of gift should we bring forth with us? The “broken heart”; as “*A broken and a contrite heart – these O God, You will not despise*” (Psalm 51: 17).

When you enter into the court of God with a humble and a contrite heart, you are bringing forth a gift to Him<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### 3- HE REIGNS ON A TREE:

*“Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth” (9)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “*Let the whole earth tremble before His face*”

The “*face of the Lord*” refers to His presence, and His appearance to men. Whereas “*the earth*” refers to mankind who inhabit it. With the coming of our Lord, incarnate, men were disturbed, and stood in awe before His wonders; and the earth trembled, and turned from denial to faith. ... When faith in Christ the Lord was proclaimed, all the earthly creatures were disturbed.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ “*Tremble before Him, all the earth*” (9). Listen to the words of the psalmist. Heaven does not tremble in the presence of God; Whereas man, in his earthly thought, looks at the Lord with anxiety, greatly confused, and terrified<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 23.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 23.

(St. Jerome)

*“Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns, the world also is firmly established, it shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously’” (10)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: *“Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns on a tree’; He also established the universe, it shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously”*.

By the incarnation of the Word of God, and His appearance among mankind, the earthly creatures trembled, and were disturbed. Whereas those who believed in Him, set forth among the nations, proclaiming the king who was rejected by the Jews. And as Paul and Barnabas said in Antioch in Pisidia: *“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. For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the end of the earth’. Now, when the Gentiles heard this they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord”* (Acts 13: 46-48).

As the call for faith has been presented to all nations, In His second coming, the Lord will judge the peoples righteously. He will proclaim Himself the Judge of the whole universe; will condemn those who stabbed Him, denied Him, and persecuted His church; and will crown the believers who were crucified together with Him, and endured sufferings for His sake.

❖ *“Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns’”*. Unless the earth trembles, and turns back from temporal preoccupations, the Lord will not reign among the nations<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ (The tree) which is yours, makes you wooden; Whereas (the tree) of Christ will help you cross over the sea<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ David said: *“The Lord reigns (on a tree)”* (10). And, prophesying about the fruit of this tree, he says: *“The earth shall yield her increase”* (Psalm 67: 6); ... the tree shall bear her fruit; not that tree

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 23.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

in paradise, which brought death to early men, but the tree of the passion of Christ, which gave them life<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Tertullian)

❖ By His cross, He conquered kings, and put it a seal on their foreheads ... They were glorified in Him; As in Him, their salvation is realized. That is the work that is fulfilled; that is the building that grows<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“The world also is firmly established; it shall not be moved”* (10). Christ truly came, and made mankind firmly established, not to be moved all along eternity. His cross is the pillar of humanity; I do not mean its wooden material, but the passion associated with it. Now, this cross is everywhere, in Britain, in India, and all over the whole universe. Yet the gospel warns: “Unless you bear My cross and follow me every day ...”; Unless you enslave yourself to the cross, as I am to you, you will not be My disciple<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

#### **4- EXULTATION OF THE HEAVENLY AND THE EARTHLY CREATURES:**

*“Let the heaven rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness”* (11)

In the old, men could not bear to hear any mention of death, nor of the day of judgment. For them, death represented the utter destruction of man; and the day of judgment represented a serious confrontation of the weak human being before the wrath of the Almighty God over His creation. But now, with the proclamation of the evangelic truth, through the preaching of the word of God among the nations, death came to be a cross-over to paradise; and the day of judgment, came to be a heavenly wedding day, in which the believing humanity gets attached to her heavenly Groom.

The psalmist describes that day by the words we have in our hands (11-13); when the heavenly hosts become in awe before the grace given to mankind on that day; when they get attached as a heavenly bride to her heavenly Groom; and set forth from the clouds to the bosom of God the Father. Who can describe the glory that will dwell upon humanity?! Who can express the awe of the heavenly creatures before such a joyful event?!

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<sup>1</sup> Answer to the Jews 12.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 23.

The nations and peoples, who used to get terrified when they thought about that day, now tremble with exultation; as they turn into rivers flowing with living water, that bring pleasure to the city of God.

❖ “*Let the heaven rejoice, and let the earth be glad*” (11), for the sake of those who are purged and cleansed with a spiritual hyssop<sup>1</sup>; the power of Him<sup>2</sup>, who, in His passion, was offered to drink from a hyssop (John 19: 29), on a reed<sup>3</sup> (Matthew 27: 48).

As the heavenly hosts rejoice, I wish that the souls of men get ready to unite with the spiritual Groom; and hear “*the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord’*” (Isaiah 40: 3).

It is far from being a simple thing, nor a union according to the flesh, but it is the experience of faith by the Holy Spirit who “*searches all things*” (1 Corinthians 2: 10).

Where there is wealth or beauty, the groom quickly gives his consent; But here, the heavenly Groom does not seek the beauty of man, but the purity of the conscience of his soul; He does not seek his material wealth, but that of the goodness of his soul<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ The heavens, made by the Lord, which proclaim His glory, will rejoice; and the earth on which heaven rain will be glad. For the heavens are the preachers, and the earth are their listeners. “*Let the sea roar, and all its fullness*”; What sea? The world! ... The whole world roared against the church, as it stretched to cover the whole earth<sup>5</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ But, prepare yourself to give thanks for all those things; according to the words of the saintly apostle, saying: “*In everything give thanks*” (Thessalonians 5: 18); whether “*in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in infirmities, in reproaches, or in persecutions, for Christ’s sake*” (See 2 Corinthians 6: 4-5; 12: 10). In everything that come over you, give thanks to God, for I wish you, as well, will “*enter His rest*” (Hebrew 4: 1); for “*we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14: 22).

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<sup>1</sup> أو أشنان داود: نبات من الفصيلة الشفوية ذو أوراق عطرية حريفة المذاق

<sup>2</sup> الزوفا الروحي أو غير المنظور هو قوة الروح القدس المطهرة في المعمودية، كقول المرتل “اغسلني بزوفاك فأطهر” (مز 7: 51).

<sup>3</sup> يتحدث عن السيد المسيح في آلامه إذ قدم له ليشرّب من زوفا (يو 19: 29)، ومن قصبة (مت 27: 48) ر

<sup>4</sup> مقال 1: 3.

<sup>5</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

Do not ever have doubt within yourself, and do not let your heart fail in anything, but remember always the apostolic saying: “*Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*” (2 Corinthians 4: 16).

Unless you can bear the sufferings, you cannot come to the cross; But if you do, you will reach the haven of His rest; and from then on, you will live in peace, more liberated from preoccupations, will have your soul firmly established, and will get attached to the lord in everything; together with faith in your guardian angel, rejoicing in hope, glad in love, in the protection of the heavenly Holy Trinity; And in you, the saying will be realized: “*Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad*” (11). For this is the life of no worry for the man of God; for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, will rejoice for the salvation of your soul, O beloved brother!

**(St. Parsnovius)**

❖ Today, the heavenly hosts will sing the joyful tunes of praise; and the light of preaching Christ will shine, glittering over the believers!

Today, is our joyful spring, in which Christ, the Sun of Righteousness will shine with His rays on us, giving light to the minds of believers!

Today, Adam is healed. And will fly together with the chorus of angels toward heaven!

Today, the grace of God, and hope in the unseen, will shine through the exalted wonderful sceneries; and the secret, hidden since eternity, will be clearly revealed.

Today, the saying of David will be realized: “*Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord*” (Psalm 96: 11-13); referring to men as trees; as St. John the Baptist did, committed to bear fruits worthy of repentance (Matthew 3: 8). However, our Lord Jesus Christ, promising perpetual happiness to His believers, say: “*I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and your joy, no one will take from you*” (John 16: 22).

Today, the secret of Christians is clearly proclaimed ... who, by their own free will, they put their hope in Christ!

**(St. Gregory, the wonder-maker)**

*“Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord” (12)*

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, the fields or the valleys, where the Lord Christ used to preach, will rejoice, and the trees of the woods will become glad, for our Lord has honored them by the cross taken from them. The trees that were fruitless, will, through the cross, present to us the fruit of life, or the bread of life descending from heaven.

- ❖ The meek, the gentle, and the righteous, are the valleys of God ... And the trees of the woods are the idol-worshippers! Why are they glad? For they are cut from a wild olive tree, and grafted in a good one (Romans 11: 17) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The trees of the woods rejoice because our Lord honored them by His cross on which He was lifted up. The trees of the woods also refer to men who were before fruitless, and lack every good work; Then, by the coming of our Lord they became fruitful, and worthy of being planted in the paradise of joy, where they would rejoice forever.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*For the Lord is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth; He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth” (13)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “Before the face of the Lord, for He is coming. He is coming to judge the earth ...”.

- ❖ He first came, then He will come again. He first came to His church on the clouds; namely, on the apostles who preached Him; according to the words of St. Paul: “*We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making His appeal through us; we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God*” (2 Corinthians 5: 20).

I wish we do not resist His first coming, lest we become terrified on His second coming. You heard in the gospel: “*Woe to those who are pregnant, and to those with nursing babies in those days*” (Mark 13: 17); and, “*Beware, ... for you do not know when it will be*”.

He came, and He will come again to judge the earth. He will find those who believed in His first coming rejoicing “*For He came*” <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 96 (95).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 96  
A RENEWABLE TEMPLE, AND A NON-AGING PRAISE**

- ❖ You have built household for the two midwives;  
For they kept the infant Moses;  
I entreat You in fear and love:  
To set a household in me;  
Where to dwell, and proclaim Your kingdom;  
Make it a holy temple;  
And let Your Holy Spirit renew it forever.
- ❖ The devil complained to You;  
Together with all His hosts, he attempts to destroy Your temple in  
me;  
Let him destroy with his whole energies;  
For you, being greater, will perpetually rebuild it;  
Every day I cry out with the spirit of repentance, saying:  
“Forgive our trespasses”  
Forgive those sins that defile Your house.  
Grant me Your grace that presents Your righteousness to me;  
And sets Your kingdom in my depths.
- ❖ My sins mute my inner mouth;  
That I do not perceive how to praise You;  
But Your grace renews my depths  
And Your Spirit sings a new heavenly praise for the glory of Your  
holy name.
- ❖ No sin can corrupt my hope in You;  
For Your cross lifts me up to heaven;  
It destroys every sin whatever it may be.
- ❖ You are A God feared above all the gods of the nations;  
You are the Maker of heavens and all the heavenly hosts;  
Set Your kingdom in me;  
Let me challenge the devils;  
And let me be like Your angels.
- ❖ Confession and beauty are before You;  
I distorted Your image in me by my sins;  
And ugliness dwelt in my depths;  
Let me confess my sins to You;  
To enjoy the shining of Your splendor on me;

Let me seek Your righteousness, O Holy One!  
To enjoy the honor enjoyed by Your angels

- ❖ Who can set Your house in me, but you?  
Yet, by my own free will, I have fallen into sin  
I have distorted the image in which You created me;  
The building has fallen down, and the temple was corrupted  
Who can raise me up, but You, the Resurrection?  
For You are the Builder and the Sanctifier of the building;  
By my own free will, I destroyed Your temple inside me;  
And I am not able to rebuild it;  
You came down to me, O Holy One;  
And stretched Your hand on the cross to embrace me;  
Grant me to get hold of Your hand;  
To raise me up from my grave;  
To grant me the life and the resurrection;  
To let me carry Your splendor and beauty inside me.
- ❖ Grant me the humble and contrite heart;  
To enter by it into Your holy house;  
That You receive as an acceptable offering and gift before You.

## **PSALM 97**

### **THE EXULTATION AND THE RESURRECTED LIFE**

This psalm is a joyful praise, and a call to all humanity to exult in the Lord who reigns on it, and shines His light on it; to find rest, and cry out no more from the violence of the enemy, but conquer him. It is a song by the soul that enjoys the Lord as a King, Awesome, and a Victor over evil. It is a praise full of joy and exultation, when the soul enjoys her King, the Grantor of resurrection, the heavenly life, and the holiness.

<b>1- The exultation, and the resurrected life</b>	<b>1.</b>
<b>2- The exultation, and He, who sits on the clouds</b>	<b>2.</b>
<b>3- The exultation, and the abolition of animosity</b>	<b>3.</b>
<b>4- The exultation, and the holy lightning</b>	<b>4.</b>
<b>5- The exultation, and the spirit of conquest</b>	<b>5.</b>
<b>6- The exultation, and the heavenly life</b>	<b>6.</b>
<b>7- The exultation, and faith</b>	<b>7 – 9.</b>
<b>8- The exultation, and the holy life</b>	<b>10 – 12.</b>

#### **The title:**

A song of praise to the sovereign Lord.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “Of David, when his land (earth) was firmly established (Namely, when he reclaimed it).

❖ The land he reclaimed is the resurrection of the body. As, after the resurrection of Christ, all what is sung in this psalm was realized. I wish we hear a psalm filled with joy for the resurrection of the earth. I wish our Lord God gives us hope and pleasure, befitting of such a great thing. I wish He would guide our utterance, to befit our hearts; that we would feel every joy dwelling in our hearts, and lets us utter it with our tongue; and consequently brings it to your ears, then to your hearts, and your behavior<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

According to **St. Jerome**, the word ‘David’ means (the strength of hand); and David sang this psalm to the Lord when he reclaimed the peace to his land (earth); namely, to Judah, after defeating his enemies

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

by a strong hand. That is according to the historical aspect; but, according to the spiritual interpretation, he says:

❖ If the name ‘David’ means (the strength of hand), the strong hand is no one but the Conqueror of all the nations, our David, from whom the demons cried out, saying: “*What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of David? Have You come here to torment us before the time?*” (Matthew 8: 29). This praise was set by Him when He reclaimed His land (earth). Great is our honorable Priest, when He compares the reclaimed earth to our bodies. When peace return to our earth, it would truly be the right time to praise Him.

There was no peace in this earth before David realizes his conquest, but there has been chaos and confusion everywhere. One nation worshipped ‘Jova’, another worshipped ‘Mercury’, and a third worshipped ‘Juno’; every nation had her own god. But once the banner of the cross was lifted up, in it the whole earth reclaimed the sound system<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

## **1- THE EXULTATION AND THE RESURRECTED LIFE:**

*“The Lord reigns, Let the earth rejoice; Let the multitude of isles be glad” (1)*

On the cross, amid the non-endurable passion, and the bitter reproaches, the robber looked at the crucified Christ, and perceived that He is the King of kings who reigns on the hearts, sets in them His kingdom of joy; turns the earth into what is like heaven; and lets the body of dust exults and rejoices, in anticipation of the eternal glories. “*The Lord reigns, Let the earth rejoice*”,

Many fathers like **St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and the scholars Tertullian and Origen**, used to interpret ‘the earth’ as (the body), and ‘the heaven’ as (the soul). The Lord reigns, not only on the soul of the believer, but also on his body, making his whole being glad.

Somebody may wonder, how could the earth rejoice amid the unceasing and un-endurable tribulations and temptations? That is why the psalmist goes on to say: “*Let the multitude of isles be glad*”. According to **St. Jerome** those multitude of isles are the believers, attacked by temptations on every side, just like the isles, surrounded by water on all sides, and struck by the waves day and night.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 24.

According to **St. Augustine**, those isles are the local churches all over the world, in the midst of unceasing troubles.

❖ Symbolically, the isles are interpreted as all the churches all around which temptations are stirred up, like an isle struck, yet not destroyed by waves on every side; But, on the contrary, it stand firm before them. So are the churches of God all over the world, they suffer the persecutions of the wicked, but stand firm before them; and eventually the sea and its waves will calm down<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ The whole earth has been under the authority of the demons and the idols. But now, it rejoices under the reign of the Lord.

❖ “**The Lord reigns**”. The Creator who made you is, Himself, the King. You, who were before under the authority of the demons, are now under the authority of the Creator.

“**Let the multitude of isles be glad**”. The honorable Priest has applied that well on our souls, struck, and violently opposed by the scattered thoughts from here and there, like the waves of the sea<sup>2</sup>.

❖ “**The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice**”. The earth that was before under the reign of several kings, has now One King.

“**And let the multitude of isles be glad**”. Interpreting the multitude of isles as the countries or their individual churches of believers, Although they are scourged and struck on all sides by diverse tempests of temptations, yet they stand firm, and are never uprooted from their foundations<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ Now, as the devil, the tyrant over the whole world, is slain; we are not, O beloved brethren, approaching a mortal feast, but an everlasting heavenly feast.

We are not imagining the feast as shadows, but approaching it in truth.

In the old, after eating the flesh of a dumb lamb, they consummated the feast by painting their doorposts with its blood, and sought help against the angel of destruction. But now, eating the Word of the Father, with the doorposts of our hearts, sealed with the blood of the Covenant, He says: “*I give you the authority to trample on serpents*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 24.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

*and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy*” (Luke 10: 19). For death will no more have authority; but, from now on, instead of death, there will be life; For the Lord says: “*I am the Life*” (John 14: 6); And as it is written: “***The Lord reigns; Let the earth rejoice***” (1).

When death reigned, we wept while sitting by the rivers of Babylon; we wept, feeling the bitterness of captivity to death. But now, as death, and the kingdom of the devil are no more; everything is filled with joy and gladness.

We are committed to approach this feast, not clothed in filthy garments; having clothed our mind with pure thoughts, “*we put on the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 13: 14), to be worthy of celebrating the feast together with Him.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ I prefer to interpret the saying of David: “*The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice*”, that He grants the body a promise; meaning the bodies of the saints to enjoy the kingdom of God<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Tertullian)**

❖ Now, let the heavens rejoice, and the angels clap their hands!

Now, “*let the earth rejoice*” (Psalm 96: 11; 97: 1); and let men tremble with joy!

Let the air be filled with the songs of gladness; and let the night cast away its pitch darkness, and its mourning garment; Let it instead, glitter like the day with the rays of light.

Behold, the living city of the Lord of hosts is lifted up high, and to it the kings bring forth gifts beyond value, from the temple of the Lord, from the famed Zion, in the free Jerusalem above, which is the mother of all (Galatians 4: 26).

And there, those set by Christ, rulers over the whole earth; namely, the apostles, are in the company of the ever-virgin mother of God<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father John of Damascus)**

## **2- THE EXULTATION AND HE, WHO SITS ON THE CLOUDS:**

***“Clouds and darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne” (2)***

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<sup>1</sup> *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 26.

<sup>2</sup> عن دير سيدة حماطورة بكوسبا لبنان، عظات في ميلاد السيدة ورقادها للقديس يوحنا الدمشقي، 1997، ص 72.

If the fellowship with Him, who was crucified and risen from the dead, grants us the experience of the resurrected life, amid all those circumstances that seem tough; even though man likens a lifeless corpse in the midst of the dead inside the grave; the believer, on another aspect, should exult, for he would become like a lightened cloud that bears the Lord Christ, the fountain of joy. The psalmist says: “**Clouds and darkness surround Him**”. The believer would liken the Virgin Mary, prophesied by the prophet Isaiah, saying: “*Behold, the Lord rides on a swift (splendid) cloud*” (Isaiah 19: 1). She carried the infant Lord Christ, and set forth with Him to Egypt, “*and the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence*”.

In the moments of the transfiguration of the Lord Christ, there appeared such “*a bright cloud*” (Matthew 17: 5). Therefore, it is befitting of the believer to become like “*a bright cloud*” that reflects the splendor of the Lord Christ, who will come, on the day of judgment, on “*a bright cloud*”. In other words, the true believers will become bright clouds, carrying Christ, the true Light.

As to the darkness that surrounds Him, this does not mean that there is darkness in the Lord, but it is rather in the eyes of the wicked, like the scales that fell from the eyes of Saul of Tarsus when he received faith (Acts 9: 18).

The lack of faith, like evil, covers vision, and denies the non-believers seeing Christ the Light; they even cannot endure seeing Him, like the one with sick eyes who cannot endure seeing the sun.

“**Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne**”

(2). Nothing can make the believer like “*a bright cloud*”, like the Lord Christ, who is the Righteousness and the Truth.

❖ Glory to Him, who scattered His light over the darkness.

And was blamed for concealing His true identity from His creation; and for covering up His sanctuaries<sup>1</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian)

❖ The Lord Himself says: “*I have come to this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind*” (John 9: 39). Those who think that they can see; those who count themselves as being wise, and need no healing; will be made blind, and will not understand; Whereas those who do not see, will see; By confessing their blindness, they will gain enlightenment. “*Clouds and darkness surround Him*”, for those who do not understand Him; Whereas for

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<sup>1</sup> Hymns on Nativity, 2.

those who humbly confess, “*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne*”.

He calls those who believe in Him, “*His throne*”, on whom wisdom sits; because the Son of God is His Wisdom; which is further confirmed by another statement in the Holy Book, saying that the soul of the righteous is the throne of wisdom (see Proverbs 12; 1 Corinthians 1)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ On the Mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17: 5), the Father uttered His voice out of the cloud. Why out of the cloud? For as such, God appears: “*Clouds and darkness surround Him*” (2); He sits on a bright cloud, and “*makes the cloud His chariot*” (Psalm 104: 3). “*A cloud received Him out of their sight*” (Acts 1: 9) ... “*One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven*” (Daniel 7: 13) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ “*Clouds and darkness surround Him*”. The clouds and darkness that surround him are surely the body which the Lord and Savior has taken; although it is said: “*He was manifested to us*” (1 John 1: 2). Truly, He was manifested to the apostles, but was concealed from the Jews. To the formers, He was manifested on the Mount of transfiguration; but to the later in the low valley. To the formers He spoke beatitudes, and to the later in proverbs, for they were not able to see because of their stubbornness.

“*Clouds and darkness surround Him*”. He appeared when He intended to appear, yet not according to His divine nature. “*He made darkness His secret place*” (Psalm 18: 11). ... If God is Light, how could Light dwell in the darkness? In this phrase, the darkness refers to our incomplete knowledge, and our weakness, being unable to stir at His majesty. If the human eyes cannot look at the rays of the sun, the thing created, and our partner in servitude; how much more would it be for the Sun of Righteousness, whom we cannot perceive, not look at?! ... We read how the prophet Moses “*drew near the thick darkness where God was*” (Exodus 20: 21), to see God, whom he could not see outside it. And Isaiah says: “*Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt*” (Isaiah 19: 1); namely, on the Virgin St. Mary, “*the*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Matt., hom. 59: 5.

*swift cloud*”, on account of that she was not burdened with human seeds<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Two things surround the Lord: Clouds and darkness.

I assume that it is the same cloud mentioned in the gospel, when Christ transfigured, and His disciples fell on their faces before Him, then a bright cloud came and overshadowed them (Matthew 17: 5).

I also think that it is like the clouds about which it is said in another instance: “*Your faithfulness, O Lord, reaches to the clouds*” (Psalm 36: 5); the faithfulness of the Lord, who said about Himself in the gospel: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 14: 6). The faithfulness of God is Christ, reaches up, even to the clouds, namely, to the apostles and the prophets, who were like the clouds, commanded not to rain upon Israel (Isaiah 5: 6). This conforms with what came in the book of Judges, where the fleece of wool on the threshing floor was dry, while the rain was coming down on the ground around (Judges 6: 37); interpreted as: Israel became dry, while the rain of preaching faith was coming down on the whole world.

“***Clouds and darkness surround Him***”. “*Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt*” (Isaiah 19: 1). The Lord is coming; the Savior is coming into Egypt, where we live; is coming to the land of darkness reigned by Pharaoh; coming on a swift cloud; the Virgin St. Mary, who bore the Son without human seed; the swift cloud who came to the world, and with her the Creator of the world. According to the prophet Isaiah: “*Behold, the lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt. The idols of Egypt will totter at his presence*” (Isaiah 19: 1). The Lord is coming, and the idols of Egypt in their terror, will knock one another and be destroyed. The temple of Serapis in Alexandria, was destroyed, not by a war commander, but by that cloud, carrying the infant Christ.

Having known about the cloud, let us now discuss the darkness:

“***The Lord is in the darkness***”. He is in both the light and the darkness. He is in the light, concerning the beginners, to whom He speaks in a clear and direct way; whereas to the more advanced in knowledge, he used to speak mystically. He did not speak to the apostles the same way he did to the common people. Speaking mystically to the former, he said: “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*” (Luke 8: 8). That is the meaning of the expression saying: “*and darkness surrounds Him*” (2); namely, mysteries surround Him. Hence it is written in the

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

book of Exodus, that all the people were down below, but Moses alone, ascended Mount Sinai in the thick darkness of a cloud (Exodus 19); because the people were not able to recognize the mysteries, that Moses Alone could; hence, the psalm says: “*He made darkness His secret place*” (Psalm 18: 11) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ You are, O Good One, in all Your beloved, They find You in the non-describable glory of the splendor of Your beauty; in the power of Your nature; and in Your knowledge, that is higher than any other<sup>2</sup>!

You are found in Your wholeness, in all Your beloved ones, with all what is Yours.

In Your wholeness, You have complete perfection; although no one can completely possess You!

Glory be to Your non-limited perfection that controls all perfections<sup>3</sup>.

(The spiritual elder – John El-Deliaty)

### 3- THE EXULTATION AND THE ABOLITION OF ANIMOSITY:

*“A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about” (3)*

Since the fall of our early parents Adam and Eve, man lost the permanent and true life of exultation, because of his terror of the devil; according to the words of the book of the wisdom of Solomon: “*Through the devil’s envy, death entered the world*” (Wisdom 2: 24). But with the coming of the second Adam – the Lord Christ – the devil, assuming that he is capable of destroying Him, the fountain of joy, and the source of eternal peace, he entered into many battles against Him, and failed; And finally, he decided to get rid of Him by crucifixion; but that ended up to the loss of the devil’s authority altogether; according to the words of the apostle: “*Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it*” (Colossians 2: 15); which was already prophesied by the psalmist, saying: “*A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about*” (3). ...

Thus, bearing God inside us, the whole love, and even love itself, God’s Holy Spirit will go before us; and, “*will be a wall of fire all*

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<sup>1</sup> St. Jerome: on Psalms, hom 24.

<sup>2</sup> رسالة 51 :8 .

<sup>3</sup> رسالة 51 :10 .

around us” (Zechariah 2: 5). He will burn up the fiery darts of the devil; will take away the spirit of animosity from our hearts; namely that of the hosts of darkness, to plant instead, the spirit of divine friendship; for us to become an icon of Christ, and for our heart to become wide enough, with the heavenly love, to accommodate His heavenly ministers, and all humans, if possible.

It is the secret of our joy, and of the exultation of our hearts, that animosity no longer has the authority over us, but true love, heavenly peace, and perpetual joy.

❖ “**A fire goes before Him**” The Lord is pure, “*The Holy One, dwells in the high and holy place*” (Isaiah 57: 15). We cannot dedicate ourselves to Him, unless His fire consumes our iniquities. “*Fire will test each one’s work*” (1 Corinthians 3: 13); “*and burns up His enemies round about*” (3). Yet, God does not deal with His adversaries as enemies, but as friends; burning up their iniquities, **He turns them into friends**<sup>1</sup>.

❖ A holy man is in no need to fear this fire. Let the sinner fear it! This fire purifies the saints, and burns up the sinners.

“**A fire goes before Him**”. “*Who makes His angels spirits; His ministers flames of fire*” (Psalm 104: 4). I think that His angelic messengers are the fire that goes before Him. Who will the angels burn up with fire? Those who are wood and chaff; whereas those who are gold, silver, or precious stones, will go into the fire to come out more pure<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The Lord Himself says: “*I came to send fire on the earth*” (Luke 12: 49). Fire here has the same meaning as the sword in another instance, in which He says: “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*” (Matthew 10: 34). The sword is to divide; and the fire is to burn. Both are of benefit; as the sword of His word in wisdom, is of benefit to separate us from the evil habits. The Lord Christ brought a sword to separate every believer even from his non-believer father or mother ... His sword separates, but does not kill.

In a similar way, those who believe in Christ sit on fire; and receive the flame of love. Hence the Holy spirit, Himself, dwelt upon the apostles, “*appearing as divided tongues as of fire*” (Acts 2: 3). Enflamed

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 24.

with this fire, they set forth to burn up, and to set fire to His enemies on all sides<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ I know the purifying fire sent by the Lord Christ on earth. In a symbolic way, He, Himself, is called “Fire”,

I also know that there is a kind of fire, not purifying, but avenging fire, poured by God upon all evil-doers; that, prepared by Him for Satan and his angels (Matthew 25: 41); And the fire that “*goes before the Lord, and burns up His enemies round about*”<sup>2</sup> (3).

(St. Gregory, the Neizianzen)

#### 4- THE EXULTATION AND THE HOLY LIGHTNING:

**“His lightning light the world; the earth sees and trembles” (4)**

Out of us, He makes spiritual clouds. Through dealing with one another, we become like clouds that produce thunder and lightning; we proclaim the light of our Savior Jesus Christ, like the lightning that shines to give light to the world, to hear the divine voice, saying: “*You are the light of the world*”.

If the world became dust and earth; This earth, seeing the work of God in us will be terrified; While we, on the other hand, will exult for the sake of His light shining to scatter the darkness in us.

❖ This lightning shines to light the believers, but to burn up the non-believers<sup>3</sup>.

❖ **“His lightning light the world”** ... Now, saying: “*Your faithfulness, O Lord, reaches to the cloud*” (Psalm 36: 5); the clouds here, surely refer to the prophets and the apostles; who, like the clouds, rubbing against one another, they produce the thunder of common teachings, the splendor of their lightning will light the world.

To know how the believers are called “clouds” in the Holy Book; Read in the book of Isaiah: “*I will also command the clouds, that they rain no rain on it (on His vineyard)*” (Isaiah 5: 6). Having been called “a cloud”, he said: “*Let my teaching drop as the rain*” (Deuteronomy 32: 2). The epistles of the apostles are spiritual rain to us; according to the words of Paul: “*For the earth which drinks in the rain that often come upon it, ...*” (Hebrew 6: 7); and, “*I planted, Apollos watered*” (1 Corinthians 3: 6)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

<sup>2</sup> Oration on Holy Baptism, 40: 36.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 24.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

❖ *“The earth sees and trembles”* (4). Before receiving the word of God, and giving fruit, the earth, seeing the lightning of His words, trembled.... *“He (God) looks on the earth, and it trembles”* (Psalm 104: 32). ... *“On this one will I look; on him who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My words”* (Isaiah 66: 3) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ His enemies became on fire, and were burnt up; all their opposition was consumed; and His lightning lighted the whole world. How was it lighted? The whole world came to believe. From where did the lightning come? From the clouds. Who are the clouds of God? The preachers of the truth. The cloud may appear dark and vague in the sky, yet there is nothing vague about it. It may produce fearful sound of thunder, yet, it also produce the bright splendor of lightning.

The Lord Christ sent His apostles like clouds. As humans, they were despised and scoffed; yet they produced the shining splendor of preaching<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## 5- THE EXULTATION AND THE SPIRIT OF CONQUEST:

*“The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord; at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth”* (5)

Man often stand in awe before the authority of sins; and sees them like well-established mountains that could never be moved! But before the presence of the Lord of the whole earth our Christ, risen from the dead, these mountains melt like wax. Neither death, nor all the hosts of darkness can stand before Him.

Our new experience in Jesus Christ, and our enjoyment of the light of His resurrection, the conqueror of death, grant us an inner glorious joy.

❖ Who are the mountains? They are the proud! Everything that stands high before God; against the works of Christ, and against the Christians, will tremble and submit. I find no expression more eloquent than *“the mountains melt like wax”* <sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

❖ “*The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord*”. The great and mighty rulers are called mountains! Yet, those who previously stood high in their pride; and were violently cruel in vain haughtiness, will go down low at the coming of Christ; will turn soft before the intense heat of the divine wisdom<sup>1</sup>.

❖ I believe that those mountains are the hosts of the devil. Whether they are mountains or not, they are definitely proud. This fire will not consume the humble, but only the proud.

As a matter of fact, the lightning strike those on the high mountains, more often than those in the lower valleys<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Notice the incomparable majesty in the Lord Christ, the One surpassing all; who by an irresistible might, and with an indisputable authority, crushes Satan, whenever He intends to; He does not even allow him to utter a view contrary to His commands. His will is fire and flame, and according to the psalmist: “*The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord*” (5); and, “*He touches the hills, and they will smoke*” (Psalm 104: 32). He compares the high and haughty hosts of evil to mountains, which melt like wax before the might and authority of our Savior, and smoke at His touch. That is the destiny and portion of the unclean spirits<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great)

## 6- THE EXULTATION AND THE HEAVENLY LIFE:

“*The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory*” (6)

By the resurrection of our Christ and Savior, we sing together with the apostle Paul, with the spirit of exultation and conquest, saying:

“*We have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man*” (1 Corinthians 15: 49). We shall become like heaven; we shall declare the gospel of salvation, and the righteousness of Christ; We shall testify to the resurrected life before the peoples, to the joy of His resurrection. “*The heaven declare His righteousness, and the peoples see His glory*” (6).

❖ The whole church preaches Christ; and the heavens declares His righteousness; For all the believers who care for gaining the non-

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 24.

<sup>3</sup> مؤسسة القديس أنطونيوس: تفسير إنجيل لوقا للقديس كيرلس الكبير، عظة 44.

believers do that out of love. They are heavens! ... From them, God, thundering His wisdom, the non-believer trembles, and the believer becomes apprehensive. Through men, God reveals to non-believers the power of Christ in the world; and with companionship and debate, He guides them to the love of Christ<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples see His glory”*. This phrase present two teachings: Unless the heavens are some men, they would not be able to declare the righteousness of the Lord! ... Besides, if it is said to the sinner: *“You are dust, and to dust you shall return”* (Genesis 3: 19); Why would it not be said to the righteous: *“You are a heaven, and to heaven you shall return”*? ... *“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); For *“Our citizenship is in heavens”* (Philippians 3: 20).

Man, therefore, being a sojourner on earth while being in the body, but not according to the body, he declares the righteousness of the Lord. Now, in case someone, because of a lack of knowledge, wonders why the righteous live a life of need and are crushed under the burden of troubles, while the sinners live in prosperity; He should learn from the Holy Book how to prove the righteousness of God! If he meditates in the word of God day and night, he would be able to compare the short period of anguish in this world, with the everlasting rewards in the life to come. It would be better for man to endure the optional poverty, for the sake of the Lord, for a short time, to enjoy the coming life, than to enjoy pleasures here; then to endure torments and punishments later on.

*“All the peoples see His glory”*. Those who have been first offended in the cross of the Lord, not able to recognize its significance; Now, after the heavens declared His righteousness, they glorify Him<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Man, who is in heavens, does not fear the righteousness of God, nor to declare His righteousness. The holy man, who is from heaven, does not fear the God of righteousness; Whereas the sinner seeks the God of mercy<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Listen to the words of the Holy Scripture: *“The Lord our God; the Lord is One”* (Deuteronomy 6: 4); and, *“You shall fear the Lord your*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 24.

*God and serve Him; ... you shall not go after other gods”* (Deuteronomy 6: 13); *“You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth”* (Exodus 20: 4); and, *“Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, who boast of idols”* (Psalm 97: 7). That way, God spoke in the old to the fathers through His prophets. But now He spoke to us through His only-begotten Son, by Whom He made the times, saying: *“This is the eternal life, to know the true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He sent”*. Believe in one God, the Source of everything, with no beginning; un-created, immortal, eternal, perpetual, and non- perceivable<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John of Damascus)

## **7- THE EXULTATION AND FAITH:**

*“Let all be put to shame who serve carved images, who boast of idols. Worship Him, all you gods”* (7)

Deflecting from the true love, and loosing his joy and peace, man assumed that in worshipping the idols, and practicing their abominations, he would find joy and exultation of his heart. But faith in the Savior gave us back more than what we have lost:

a- We have got the exultant spiritual worship (7).

b- We came to be the new exultant spiritual Zion (8).

c- Our souls became the daughters of Judah; namely, the daughters of the confession of faith, who recognize the plan, the secrets, and the judgments of the Lord, and rejoice in them (8).

d- Having perceived the exaltation of God, we hold fast to Him alone, as the source of riches, peace, and joy (9).

According to **St. Augustine**, the worshippers of idols are put to shame, because they worship dead stones; whereas, as far as we are concerned, we worship Christ, the Cornerstone, who died for our sake, and is risen, to let us rise together with Him. An angel said to St John who fell at his feet to worship him: *“See that you do not do that. I am your fellow servant and of your brethren who have th testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”* (Revelation 19: 10).

❖ Those who worship the dead stone are put to shame; We, on the other hand, worship the living Rock! Those stone in truth never lived, but our Rock is alive, and perpetually live with the Father. If He died for

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<sup>1</sup> عن الصور المقدسة، الدفاع الأول، 4.

our sake, yet He is living, and “*death no longer has dominion over Him*” (Romans 6: 9) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ “*Let all be put to shame who serve carved images*” Being a blessed man, the prophet should not utter curses. He, therefore, is not praying against them, but for their sake, not to be put to shame by their deeds, but to turn to the true God, the only Creator<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ When Peter saw the glory of the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus; he, wishing not to come down from the Mount, said: “*Lord, it is good for us to be here*” (Matthew 17: 4). How much more, and beyond any comparison, will be the glory of Divinity, and of the unapproachable Light, compared to anything else, seen and coveted?! There are no beatitudes for having temporal Kingdoms, riches, honors, glory, or authority; Whereas enjoying those exalted goods is indeed worthy of blessing. Bearing such a beautiful icon, man enters into the depths, and does not care for the outer appearances<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

***“Zion hears and is glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of Your judgments, O Lord” (8)***

‘Zion’ refers to the church of the New Covenant; And ‘the daughters of Judah’ to the souls who confess and believe in the Savior Messiah.

If the non-believers are put to shame; the believers would rejoice, because, in the judgments of God they find pleasure and gladness.

- ❖ What did Zion hear? That all His angels worship Him ... For the church at that time was not yet among the Gentiles. In Judah, the Jews, who believed, assumed that they alone belong to Christ. Then the apostles were sent to the Gentiles, Cornelius believed and, together with those who were with him were baptized (Acts 10: 47).

***“And the daughters of Judah rejoice because of Your judgments, O Lord” (8)***. What does he mean by saying: “*because of Your judgments*”? Because, in every nation, and every people, those who serve Him are acceptable to Him; “*For He is not the God of the Jews only, but He is also the God of the Gentiles*” (Romans 3: 29) <sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac or the Soul, 8: 78.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“And the daughters of Judah rejoice because of Your judgments, O Lord”.***

Does this mean that only the daughters of Judah rejoice, and not its sons?

Let us first see what the name “Judah” means; to perceive the interpretation of the word “daughters”

“Judah”, referring to the proclamation of faith, Every soul that knows God is a *“daughter of Judah”*. We may therefore say that *“the daughters of Judah”* are the souls of believers that rejoice because of the judgments of God. For, unless man has faith, he cannot rejoice because of the judgments of God.

Job’s soul was a *“daughter of Judah”*. Loosing his possessions, he found comfort in saying: *“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord”* (Job 1: 21). From being a very rich man, he become penniless, homeless, and with no children. He was crushed under the weight of need, and was struck by painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head; un-healable by man, but healable by God<sup>1</sup>.

❖ If you find no clothes to cover your nakedness, put the lilies before your eyes! ... Are you hungry? Remember the words by which the Lord blessed the poor and the hungry! ... Do you suffer from pain? Read the words: *“I take pleasure in infirmities”*; and, *“lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure”* (2 Corinthians 12: 7). Rejoice, therefore, because of the judgments of the Lord<sup>2</sup> (8).

We are told that *“the daughters of Judah”* rejoice because of the judgments of the Lord. Therefore, as the word “Judah” means (confession), and as every believing soul confesses her faith; he, who claims to believe in Christ is committed to rejoice because of all His judgments<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“For You Lord, are most high above all the earth; You are exalted far above all gods” (9)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 22 to Eustachium, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Epistle 39: 2.

According to **St. Augustine**, “Zion” became glad, and “*the daughters of Judah*” rejoiced; For, although the Gentiles did not enjoy prophecies, yet they perceived that the Lord Christ is exalted, One with, and equal to the Father; That He is not only high above the idols, but also above the righteous; and even far above the angels.

## **8- THE EXULTATION AND THE HOLY LIFE:**

***“You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints. He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked” (10)***

Sin corrupted our life; evil turned our depths to unbearable hell; and we became slaves to evil. Then the Savior came to make sin so bitter in our mouths, to let us hate it. He came to shine with his light in us, to let us rejoice and exult; He came to set His sanctuary in us, to turn our life into unceasing thanksgiving.

❖ Christ does not deserve from us to love greed beside loving Him. If you love Christ, hate what He hates.

Listen; You love Christ; and greed is an enemy of Christ. So why do you converse with greed; Or let me ask you: Why do you minister to greed? Christ commands you to do many things, which you do not do; Whereas when greed commands you to do something, you hasten to do it<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ ***“You who love the Lord, hate evil”***. Two contradictory kinds of love could never be found in one man. *“As righteousness would have no fellowship with lawlessness; and Christ would have no accord with Belial”* (2 Corinthians 6: 14-15); It would be equally impossible for one soul to love both good and evil. Therefore, You who love the Lord, hate evil; hate Satan! ... The Lord Christ says: *“He who has my commandments and keep them, it is he who loves Me”* (John 14: 21). And on another aspect, it is written: *“Through the devil’s envy, death entered the world; and those who belong to His company experience it”* (Wisdom 2: 24). To put it simply; You who love good things, hate evil things; For you cannot love the former, unless you hate the later<sup>2</sup>!

❖ ***“He preserves the souls of His saints”***. What a magnificent result! Those, who love goodness and hate evil, deserve to become preserved by the Lord; ***“He delivers them out of the hand of he wicked”***.... Here, someone may ask: If the Lord preserves the souls of His saints;

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

and delivers them out of the hand of the wicked; How does He allow for the martyrdom of His saints? How did He allow the Tyrant Neron to kill both Peter and Paul in one day?... Now, listen carefully. The Lord preserves **the souls**, and not the bodies of His saints. For He Himself said: *“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10: 28). The blood of the martyrs is shed, to save their soul from temptations; to forsake the short duration of life on earth, and enter into eternity; to leave the persecution behind, and hasten to be crowned by our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ It would seem strange to find hate included among the list of virtues. But it is put here by the apostle (Romans 12: 9) out of necessity. Nobody doubts that the soul has got some kind of feeling of hate inside it, by which it hates sin (Psalm 97: 10; Proverbs 8: 13; Amos 5: 15). Unless man hates evil, he cannot love or acquire virtues. For instance, nobody can acquire purity, and keep it secure, unless he hates and despise corruption<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ An elder said: A good monk should acquire: Obedience; meditation; no judgment; no slander of the reputation of others; no murmuring; no looking at what is evil; no interfering in any thing that does not concern him; no listening to what is unbecoming; no stealing, but rather giving; no haughtiness of heart; no unclean thoughts; no greed; no full stomach; and doing everything with discernment. Putting the following command before his eyes: *“You who love the Lord, hate evil”* (Psalm 97: 10), and keeping all these virtues, a good monk is known.

**(The paradise of monks)**

***“Light is sown for the righteous; and gladness for the upright in heart” (11)***

The wicked assume that in practicing evil, they would enjoy a happy life, gladness, and joy; and as though they acquire light; They do not perceive that, through evil, they actually lose the true light and the happiness.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 73.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Rom. 12: 9.

- ❖ What kind of light, you fear to lose through practicing a holy life?! Do not you fear to lose the true light and become in darkness<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name” (12)***

- ❖ It would be befitting of us to rejoice only with those who practice such work, worthy of being written in heaven; whether of righteousness, of love, or of mercy.

We should rejoice with him who returns from evil, forsakes the darkness of ignorance behind him, and comes to the light of the truth, and the forgiveness of sins (Psalm 13: 5-6; 40: 16; 18: 3) ... In the same way, we should not partake of the sorrow of him who grieves on the death of someone, or on some worldly loss; We should not mix our tears with his. We should rather weep with him who weeps on his sins; or with him who, after doing something wrong, returns with repentance, and cleanses his sin with his tears; We should weep together with him who grieves for being in the wrong situation, and with tears, seeks to return to Christ<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

Finally, the psalmist calls on us to rejoice and exult, not in the pleasures of this world, but in the Lord, and to praise Him.

According to St. Augustine, those who rejoice in the things of this world, rejoice in the season of spring, with its plentiful fruition, and in the pleasures of this world; Whereas he who rejoices in the Lord, knows no particular season, but will always rejoice.

- ❖ The joy according to the world is not a genuine joy. Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah: *“There is no peace’, Says the Lord, ‘for the wicked’”* (Isaiah 57: 21) <sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Rom. 12: 15.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 97 (96).

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 97**

### **MY BODY AND SOUL PRAISE YOU, O, KING OF KINGS**

- ❖ Reign, O Lord, on my depths, as well as on my body;  
By Your resurrection, You proclaimed Your kingdom;  
You liberated my body, captivated by the king of darkness;  
Let me return with my whole being to Your kingdom;  
For my body and my soul exult in You.
- ❖ I came to be like an isle, struck on all sides by the waves of afflictions;  
Yet, as long as You dwell in me;  
No temptations could force themselves on me;  
And no enemy would be able to destroy me;
- ❖ By Your resurrection, Your righteousness dwelt in my body and in my soul;  
You put to death, the death which put my life to death;  
You took away the blindness that came on my insight;  
You, O Wisdom of the Father, dwelt in me;  
And made out of me a throne for Yourself;  
Clouds and darkness are no longer able to hide You from my insight;  
Glory be to You, who opened my eyes; to see You, and exult in Your majesty  
You set out of me a bright and swift cloud;  
To bear You, as did Your mother to the land of Egypt!  
To bear You, O light of the world, to my brethren; to get enlightened by You together with me.
- ❖ I do not fear the fire that goes before You;  
As it burns up my evil and iniquities, to sanctify me for Yourself;  
By Your amazing fire of love, You draw the hearts to You;  
It completely purifies and sanctifies.
- ❖ Enflame my heart by the fire of Your Holy Spirit;  
My soul would never find rest, until everyone finds rest in You;  
And everyone enjoys the fire of Your love.
- ❖ You sent Your apostles like clouds that may look powerless;  
You chose the illiterate of the world, and those with no human wisdom;  
But, out of them, came splendid lightning; which enlightened the whole universe;  
They were the ridicule of the world;

But they became bright stars in the midst of a dark and distorted world.

Here I am in Your hands;

I confess to You my ignorance and my weakness;

Tell me, O Lord, what you want me to do!

- ❖ Behold, Your true church became another heaven;  
It declares Your righteousness, and proclaims Your glory;  
When will the whole world be a holy heaven?!  
Give thunder and lightning, O Lord through Your prophets, apostles,  
and believers;  
To let the non-believers experience Your divine light, and the riches  
of Your exalted grace.
- ❖ Zion rejoices when it hears about the Gentiles, joyfully receiving  
faith,  
And the daughters of Judah, become glad when they perceive your  
judgments for the salvation of the world;  
Grant me the spirit of gladness, when I hear that all have received  
You;  
And that all have enjoyed Your salvation

## PSALM 98

### A NEW PRAISE FOR THE SALVATION AND THE JUDGMENT

According to **St. Jerome**, this psalm is a call to present a new praise, because the story of the crucified Son of God is a new praise, previously unheard of, or not perceived the way it should. This psalm is close to psalm 96, not only in its spirit and concepts, but in some of its words as well.

This psalm, like the two ones before it, shouts to the Lord as the King of the universe. It is in its wholeness, a thanksgiving to God, flowing with joy and gladness.

Some scholars believe that it concerns the return from captivity; But it is a psalm concerning the salvation works, and all the amazing works of God for the sake of His church beloved by Him.

- 1- An instigation to give thanks to the Lord 1 - 3**
- 2- The whole earth shouts to the Lord 4 - 6**
- 3- Nature partakes of the shouting to the Lord 7 - 9**

#### **The title:**

A song of praise to the Lord for His salvation and judgment.

#### **1- AN INSTIGATION TO THANK THE LORD:**

*“Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory”*

(1)

It is befitting of us to enjoy the salvation work of Christ, which will never get old; to present a new praise, by a new heart, and a renewed mind.

The perpetually amazing works of God bring an inner joy into us, as though new; and a continuous gladness, to say together with the prophet Jeremiah: *“Because His compassions fail not; They are new every morning”* (Lamentations 3: 22, 23).

❖ *“Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!”* The new name is worthy of a new song. This thought conforms with what is written: *“You shall be called by a new name”* (Isaiah 62: 2). A new name warrants a new song. In the book of Revelation it came: *“To him who overcomes. ... I*

*will give a white stone, and on the stone a new name written*” (Revelation 2: 17; 3: 12). The new name concerns the Christians.

Why is He worthy of a new song? *“For He has done marvelous things”*. He has done marvelous things among the Jews: He healed the paralytics, purified the lepers, and raised the dead to life ... Whatever new He does is worthy of a new song. ... Do you wish to know what new has the Lord also done? He died like a man to let men live; the Son of God was crucified, to lift us up high to heaven ... Although He was in the form of God, before taking the form of man, He did that to decrease, for us to increase!

*“His right hand has gained Him victory”*, or as it came in another version: *“have worked salvation for Him”*. This means that He saved humanity, His own work, and not of any one else. In other words, What He made Himself, He saved by Himself. He made man for eternal life; he who perished through his own iniquity. Yet He died, so that, by His right hand, He would keep man for Himself.

*“His right hand”* in this phrase, refers to Christ’s authority; and *“His holy arm”* is a symbol of His power<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ *“Sing to the Lord a new song”*. The new man knows this, but the old man does not. The new man is the new life, and the old man is the old life. The old life goes back to Adam; but the new life is conformed in Christ<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ What is the holy arm of God? It is our Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to the prophet Isaiah say: *“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”* (Isaiah 53: 1). Our Lord Jesus Christ is the right hand and the holy arm of God<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ This same right hand, this same holy arm, this same salvation, is our Lord Jesus Christ, about whom is said: *“All flesh shall see the salvation of the Lord”* (Luke 3: 6). About Him, Simon the elder, carrying the infant Jesus, said: *“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation”* (Luke 2: 29-30). ... To whom has He revealed His salvation? to a part, or to all? Not to a particular part. ... I wish no one would be deceived! I wish no one would say: *“Look, here is the Christ, or there He is! Do not believe it”* (Matthew 24: 23) ...

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

Listen to what follows: “*His righteousness He has openly shown in the sight of the nations*” (Psalm 98: 2) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“*The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has openly shown in the sight of the nations*” (2)**

God, the Judge of the whole earth is Just and Righteous; Being the Philanthropic, He seeks the salvation, and not the perdition of humanity; Hence “*He made known His salvation, and His righteousness He has openly shown in the sight of the nations*”.

❖ “*The Lord has made known His salvation*”. The psalmist did not say, “*showed*”, but said “*made known*”. The point here is: As the human race knew God, but because of their iniquity they forgot that they knew Him, God came by His own free will, and made known to man what he has lost. The phrase here says: What Adam knew, what Seth knew, whom Noah called, and for whom he hoped, was known by Noah, but was later forgotten by mankind; So God came to make it known anew<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**“*He has remembered His mercy and his faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God*” (3)**

God is faithful in His promises, and merciful, not only to the house of Israel, but to all mankind.

❖ Who is Israel? If you think that God thinks only of one nation – the Jews? Listen to what follows: “*All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our Lord*” He did not say “the whole earth”, but “*All the ends of the earth*”, from end to end. I wish no one would distort, or doubt this. Great is the unity of Christ! He, who paid such a great price to purchase all: “*all the ends of the earth*”<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all*” (Romans 11: 32). ... “***And His faithfulness to the house of Israel***”. Remembering His promise of mercy, He stays faithful. “*He has remembered His mercy*” toward all the peoples of

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

the nations. By so doing, He realized His promise to the early Patriarchs.

***“All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our Lord”;***

Not only Israel and Judah, but all the ends of the earth.

The expression *“all the ends of the earth”* bears a secret meaning. As long as we are in the midst of this world, we cannot see God; but when we leave the world, to go up high, then we shall become qualified to see God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

## **2- THE WHOLE EARTH SHOUTS TO THE LORD:**

***“Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praise”*** (4)

❖ ***“Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth”***. Not only Judah, but all the earth; shout to the Lord; Bring all the slogans of victory ... Sing with your whole being; I wish your hands sing by giving; and your feet by hastening to do the good work<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“Sing to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of a psalm”*** (5)

According to **St. Jerome**, the believer is like a harp or a guitar that plays a tune to praise God. If one string of the harp becomes weak or is broken, the harp would not give a good tune.

❖ ***“Sing to the Lord with the harp”***. Let all the strings give a tune; for if one does not, it would not be a harp. ... What would be your profit if you are pure, yet, at the same time, you are greedy? ... Or if you are pure and generous in giving, yet, at the same time, you are envious?... What would be your profit, if, as a harp, you have six good strings, and one broken string? If one string is broken, the harp would not give a good tune<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Give God thanks, not only by your voice, but by your works as well. Praise Him and work. Sing with the harp and the guitar<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

***“With the trumpets and the sound of the horn; Shout joyfully before the Lord, the King” (6)***

**St. Ambrose** binds between singing praise to God using the trumpets (6), made of the horns of animals, and the clean animals with horns (Deuteronomy 14: 4); For the pure man uses the trumpets as though he, himself, has got horns, to declare the conquest in his battle against the devil, and his liberation from the servitude of the enemy, and his heavy yoke<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“With the trumpets and the sound of the horn”***. In the book of Numbers (chapter 10) we read about two kinds of trumpets: one of drawn silver, and the other of the horns of animals; both of which are mentioned in the present verse ... Now listen to what each of them symbolize: The drawn silver trumpet refers to the word of God: *“The words of the Lord are pure word, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times”* (Psalm 12: 6). The sound of the horn, in the Holy Book, on the other hand refers to the man of God with all his authority and power; according to the prophet Zechariah’s prophecy: *“The Lord has raised up a horn of salvation for us”* (Luke 1: 69) ... The psalmist here, (6) means to say to us: ‘You should have the two kinds of trumpets: the silver for words, and the horn for power<sup>2</sup>’.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ The trumpets are made of bronze or silver drawn by being hammered ... The righteous ‘Job’ has been a drawn trumpet, when he was tempted by such heavy calamities like the loss of his children and possessions; and his response was to say: *“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”* (Job 1: 21)... What a trumpet with a brave and sweet sound, by which he fearlessly fought his battle against Satan, not by his own strength, but by that of Him, by whom he was justified.

I would dare to say, O brethren, that the apostle Paul was hammered by the same hammer, saying: *“A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness’”* (2 Corinthians 12: 7-9).

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Ambrose: *The Patriarchs*, 11: 56.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

The horn, being raised up above the body, is capable of producing a strong sound. He, who intends to be a horn, should prevail upon the body, overcome its lusts, and seek nothings of the flesh<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The voice of such people is “*with trumpets and the sound of a horn*”. When we endure the persecution of the wicked, with **perseverance, and with no murmur against the judgment of God**, we would be drawn trumpets that praise God. The righteous ‘Job’ was such a trumpet when he did not murmur against the Lord, although he was hammered by a multitude of strikes by Satan<sup>2</sup>.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

### 3- NATURE PARTAKES OF THE SHOUTING TO THE LORD:

“*Let the sea roar, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it*” (7)

If we, as believers, are called upon to become a chorus to praise the Lord, together with the heavenly hosts; Nature itself, with the seas, rivers, mountains, etc. are also called upon to join the chorus to praise our Creator. He started by Israel (1-3), then by all the world (4-6), and finally he called upon all creation (7-8) to partake of that praise.

- ❖ “*Let the sea roar*”; and let the salty water turn sweet; as it happened with the bitter water of ‘Marah’ which was made sweet by casting the tree (of the cross) into it (Exodus 15: 25)<sup>3</sup>. Receiving the tree of the cross, that bitter water of the Old Covenant became sweet.
- ❖ “*Let the sea roar*”. The sea refers to the Mosaic law; “*Let the rivers clap their hands*”; referring to the prophets; *Let the hills be joyful together before the Lord*”; referring to the apostles<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Brethren, When the apostles preached like drawn trumpets and horns, the sea roared, the waves were stirred-up, the temptations increased, and the persecutions found a place for themselves in the church. ... Why did the sea roar? When it heard the joyful shouts of the psalms

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 132:1.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

of thanksgiving, that brought pleasure to the Lord. ... “*Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it*”<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“*Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord: (8)*”**

Commenting on the saying of the apostle Paul: “*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God*” (Romans 8: 19), **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Paul was more convincing in personalizing the creation, than the way the early prophets did, imagining the rivers clapping their hands<sup>2</sup>].

❖ The rivers drew their waters from the divine Fountain – Jesus, who said: “*My people have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living water*” (Jeremiah 2: 13). He is the Fountain, and we are the rivers, assuming that we are truly worthy of being so called. He is the Fountain, and the saints are the rivers; those of less holiness are riverlets; and then there are the little drains. ... There is not just one river, but several, as there are many saints ... I wish they clap their hands; for the work of the saints is to praise God. Yet, Christ is not praised by words alone, but also by work; He does not seek just a sound, but He seeks work as well<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Those rivers clapped their hands; they rejoiced in the works, and blessed God<sup>4</sup>.

❖ By the hills he means the elites. When the Lord comes to judge the earth, some of the elites rejoice. but there are others who become terrified. There are good hills, as there are wicked hills. The good hills refer to the spiritual greatness, whereas the wicked hills refer to arrogance of pride<sup>5</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ We should not praise by words alone, but should work with our hands. By combining praise and work, man sings, accompanied by the sound of a musical instrument like a harp or a guitar. He sings divine words from heaven; and offers human works by his hands ... Therefore, beloved brethren, stretch your hands and give the poor;

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Rom. Hom. 14.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

<sup>5</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

clothe the naked, and give hospitality to the stranger. By so doing, you praise God with piety and joy<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius bishop of Arle)**

- ❖ A great crowd will gather together to watch you fighting, being called to martyrdom (like those gathered together to watch a game between champions of great reputation).

Going through such battle, let us say, together with the apostle Paul: “*We have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men*” (1 Corinthians 4: 9). The whole world, all the angels on the right and the left, and all men, including those on God’s side (Deuteronomy 32: 29; Colossians 1: 12); and all the others; They will all watch us fight for the sake of our Christianity.

So it will be: either the angels will rejoice in heaven, the rivers, and all the trees of the valley clap their hands, the mountains rejoice (Psalm 98: 8; Isaiah 55: 12 LXX) for our conquest; Or, God forbids, the lower world will be overwhelmed with evil joy, on our fall<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

***“For He is coming to judge the earth. With righteousness He shall judge the world; and the people with equity” (9)***

- ❖ Notice how he put righteousness first before equity ... He comes to judge by His righteousness to turn the chaos into good ordinance<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Put your ways in order, and rejoice. It is within your authority to choose the way by which you wait for the coming of Christ. That is why He delays His coming; so that when He comes, He would not have to judge anyone. ... He still has not come; He is still in heaven, and you are on earth. He is delaying His coming. So do not postpone the wisdom. For His coming will be cruel for those of cruel hearts, and gentle for the pious<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 132:1.

<sup>2</sup> Exhortation to Martyrdom, 18 (ACW).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 25.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 98 (97).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 98**  
**LET ME JOIN THE CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS**

- ❖ Amazing You are, O the Creator who loves all His creation;  
You call all to become one chorus to sing praise;  
You are in no need for our praise, nor for our ministry;  
But You are the Fountain of joy and gladness;  
You long for all the earth to join the heavenlies;  
For all to become one chorus of praise; joyfully shouting.  
Grant me to join the chorus of the singers of praise;  
To know nothing but shouting, and clapping the hands;  
I praise You with my heart, mind, and all my emotions;  
My mouth utters the words of exultation;  
My lips would be sanctified by praising You;  
My hands practice the work of goodness;  
I praise You, not just by emotions and words,  
But also by my behavior and deeds;  
My whole being exults to You.
- ❖ Let Your Holy Spirit work in me like on a harp;  
Let Him strike on all my strings;  
Let my emotions be sanctified, together with my heart and mind;  
Let my words be sanctified, together with my works;  
Let me present in truth, a symphony of love, the work of Your fiery Spirit!
- ❖ Let the sea roar praising You;  
Let its salty water become sweet;  
When the tree of Your cross works in it;  
As it will turn the salinity of the literality of the law into the sweetness of the Spirit;  
Let the rivers clap their hands;  
As our works praise you together with our tongues;  
Let the mountains sing;  
As they rise up high, and testify to Your splendor.  
Grant me, with my weakness, a portion in praising You with my whole being.
- ❖ Grant me, O Lord, to sing to You with the trumpets and the sound of horns;  
You set out of the righteous 'Job', a drawn trumpet;  
You allowed for him to be hammered by temptations;

To praise You with a sweet song, saying:

*“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord”;*

You made him a trumpet in the old Covenant;

Let us also listen to the trumpet of the New Covenant – our teacher Paul;

Whom You hammered with a thorn in the flesh;

By crying out to You, and receiving the temptation well,

He became a loud trumpet, whose sound is still heard by the ears of our hearts.

❖ Grant me, as well, to become a horn;

Let me have a horn above my body;

So as not to bow under the lusts of the flesh;

Nor to seek them;

By the spirit of strength,

Grant me to walk according to the Spirit, and not according to the body;

Let me live by the Spirit of strength;

And enjoy the conquest by the work of Your fiery Spirit in me.

## PSALM 99

# GOD'S ROYAL EXALTATION AND HOLINESS

This psalm bears a short description of the reign, exaltation, and conquest of God.

Three psalms started with the words: "*The Lord reigns*". although different in what follow:

In psalm 96, it came as: "*The Lord reigns; He is clothed with majesty*".

In psalm 97, it came as: *The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice*".

In psalm 99, it came as: "*The Lord reigns, let the people tremble*".

**In psalm 96, it came as:** "*The Lord reigns, He is clothed in majesty*". According to **St. Jerome**, Majesty here refers to the exaltation of the early father Patriarchs, and the prophets, and the faith of the people; who are all the garment by which Christ is girded, full of splendor (Jeremiah 13: 11).

❖ Do not you know that the saints are the girdle and the garment of God, who Himself says in Jeremiah: "*For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me*" (Jeremiah 13: 11).

But now, this exalted girdle, by which the Lord was clothed, has been cast on the other side of the river Euphrates; hidden in the hole of a rock, and got corrupted and ruined (Jeremiah 13: 4-12); taken into captivity by the Babylonians. ... What will God do?

He would not stay naked without a girdle, without a cover! ... Having lost His old garment -- His first people, Israel, he made for Himself a new garment of the Gentiles<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**In Psalm 97, it came as:** "*The Lord reigns; let the earth rejoice*".

❖ Let the earth, the whole world, rejoice for those who believe. Do you need to hear a confirmation from the Holy Book that the Gentiles, likewise, are like a girdle to God? It is written: "*The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad*" (Psalm 97: 1);

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 26.

Not just one isle – Judah, but a multitude of isles; or in other words, the whole world<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Now, our plan is complete. Whenever you hear a psalm written by a prophet, or the law, before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh; You will see Christ, and understand Him in it,

Let us now listen together to this psalm, and search for Christ, who appeared first to those who did not look for Him, and who saved those who disregarded Him.

Consider the psalm that starts saying about Christ: “*The Lord reigns, let the peoples rage*”<sup>2</sup> (1).

(St. Augustine)

1- The Lord reigns	1 - 4
2- Worshipping God	5 - 6
3- His holiness and His love	7 – 9

### The title:

A praise to the Lord for His faithfulness.

### 1- THE LORD REIGNS:

*“The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; Let the earth be moved”* (1)

When the Lord reigns, the peoples tremble before Him, who presides over the cherubim to judge; Whereas those who became the children of God, will rejoice in His coming,

Haughtily, some believe that they are like great mountains or deep oceans; Yet, before the Lord, they tremble; not to be destroyed, but to have the old man in them destroyed, and the new man exult.

The word ‘cherub’ in Hebrew means (knowledge).

The Lord, therefore, sits on His throne, or the cherubim. And we, if we wish to become a throne for God, we are committed to have our souls filled with the true spiritual knowledge, or the heavenly wisdom. According to **St. Augustine**, if there is love in the heart, God will dwell in it. As “*love is the fulfillment of the law*” (Romans 13: 10),

❖ Our Lord Jesus Christ started to reign, and preaching Him started to spread, after His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven, and after

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 26.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

He filled His disciples with confidence in the Holy Spirit, not to fear death, which He has already put to death in Him.

Preaching Jesus Christ started; and those who intending to be saved, had to believe in Him. The idol-worshippers raged.

They raged against the Lord to the account of their idols; Although those who rage against their servants to the account of their idols are condemned; for their servants are better than their idols; for the former are created by God, while the later are made by man<sup>1</sup>.

❖ According to the Holy Book, the cherubim are the heavenly throne of God, who, although we cannot see, yet they are recognized by the Word of God as His throne.

The Word and the Spirit of God appear to minister to God wherever God sits; Not that God literally sits like men; but, in case you wish, God will sit in you. If you are good, you may become the throne of God; as it is written: *“The soul of the righteous is the chair of wisdom”*. As in our language, the throne is called a chair<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Do not get disturbed. You are now told in short, that in case you intend to acquire the perfection of knowledge, and to become a throne for God; According to the apostle: *“Love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Romans 13: 10).

Ask your heart if there is love in it; for if this is the case, In it there will be the fulfillment of the law, God will dwell in it, and you will be a throne of God; ... a heaven for God, ...

This heaven which we see by our eyes, is not of value before God.

The holy souls, the minds of the angels, and the minds of His ministers are God’s heaven<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ As the cherubim means (the treasure of knowledge), he, who acquires such a treasure is the throne of God. This treasure of knowledge is not just bare knowledge, but is also (a treasure of works); as the true knowledge is established by works<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

<sup>4</sup> On Psalms, homily 26.

❖ Seeing the might of Him who sits on the cherubim, men were moved; namely, turned from sorrow to joy, for the Lord King reigned; He, who is joy for the righteous, and sorrow for the wicked.

The Jews, hearing that Christ is called their king (by Pilate), protested indignantly, and cried out: “We have no other king except Caesar” (John 19: 15).

Let the earth tremble, for its inhabitants, once they saw the weakness of the demons, and perceived the vanity of their works, they were moved; and, before the wisdom of Christ, and His great might, they turned back from the vanity of their fathers, and called Christ a King and a Lord.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“The Lord is great in Zion, and He is high above all the peoples” (2)***

The great God dwells among His people, His church, the spiritual Zion, embraces and sanctifies them. Whereas, to the other peoples, who feel haughty before Him, He is High above them, and they will never encounter Him, unless they humble themselves. Now, about Him who is said to sit on the cherubim, and is great in Zion; I ask you, ‘What is Zion?’ We know that ‘Zion’ is the city of God, another name for Jerusalem; And according to a sure interpretation, ‘**Zion**’ means (watching), namely, (vision) and (meditation).

To watch, is to look at something, and concentrate your eyes on it. Now, every soul is ‘Zion’ if it attempts to concentrate on that seen Light.

In case it concentrates her eyes on her own light, it gets darkened; but if it concentrates on the light of God, it is enlightened.

This city of God is called ‘Zion’; hence the church is ‘Zion’, for God is great in her<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Let them praise Your great and awesome name – He is holy”***  
**(3)**

He, who is great in His church, namely, in the spiritual ‘Zion’, and is high above all the peoples, is preached as being crucified for the sake of the world. He came in weakness for the sake of His love for us, and for our salvation. Whoever gives Him thanks, and confesses Him as a Savior, would perceive that He is the great, awesome, and the holy Judge, who comes to judge.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

❖ In the present time, God forgives those who blaspheme Him; because His longsuffering leads to repentance (Romans 2: 4). Yet He, who forgives now, will not perpetually forgive; nor He, who is preached now, that He will be fearful, will not come to judge. He, O brethren, will certainly come. Let us, therefore, fear Him, and live as is befitting, so that when he comes to judge, we would be at his right side<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The name of our Lord is great; according to what the apostle has written to the Philippians, saying: *“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and those of earth”* (Philippians 2: 9-10). To the name of Jesus, then, all peoples confess, as its meaning is ‘salvation’. He is “fearful” to the non-believers, as well as to the demons; for at hearing it, they flee; and he is “holy” to those who believe in him.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“The king is mighty; He loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob”* (4)

❖ We, whom He created to work in us, should, as well, have the truth and the righteousness; ... How would we have the truth and the righteousness? We shall have “the truth” when we discern between evil and goodness. And we shall have “the righteousness”, if we walk with goodness, and avoid evil. Through discerning between them, we shall have the truth; and by working them, we shall have the righteousness<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Every sinner fears the justice of God; he does not wish to get to know God as “the Judge”; but wishes to encounter Him as “the Merciful”. Watching God, a holy man glorifies Him in his body; He does not fear the Judge, but loves Him ... So does a faithful minister; Then, what is written: *“The king is mighty, He loves the truth (the justice)”* (4), would be realized<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

<sup>3</sup> On Psalms, homily 26.

❖ The authority of the king is established, if he rules with justice. ... Saying: “*You have established equity*”, means that God whom we worship is not new. He means to say that: You, O God, have already established equity, righteousness, and justice in Jacob, namely, in Israel; when You gave them the law at the hand of Moses. Now, You fulfilled Your promise, and realized Your justice, for You took away the darkness from us, and saved us from the servitude to shame and reproach, by Your incarnation.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ In case we do everything right, not looking at what other people think of the purity of our hearts, but searching our own consciences, this period of rest will not lessen our firmness and self-control. That would be, as I already said, if our mind thinks within the limits of reason, concerning what we should or should not eat; if we refrain from being extreme on either aspect; and have the true discernment, that would keep us from going too far, in the enjoyment of pleasure, or in fasting; which would be a burden on our spirit in either case. God would not be pleased if we do things for the sake of His glory, without sound discernment, which He loves (4). Hence, we find Solomon, the wisest of men, exhort us not to deflect toward either side, counseling us to honor the Lord by labors, filled with righteousness, and to offer Him the fruits of righteousness<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Theonas)**

## **2- WORSHIPPING GOD:**

*“Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool, for He is holy”* (5)

The Lord called the cross ‘glory’; Proclaiming His love for humanity, He lifts them up to His heavens, sanctifies them, and is glorified in them.

According to **St. Gregory of Nyssa**, man, even if he raises his mind, as far up as he can, would not be able to perceive the exaltation of Divinity; but would stay low at the Lord’s footstool.

According to **St. Jerome**, the literal interpretation of this phrase is that we should worship at the locations where Jesus Christ was born, was crucified, and risen from the dead. Whereas the spiritual interpretation is that our Lord Jesus Christ treads with His feet in the soul that sanctifies Him, for He is holy. He is her Groom, who attaches Himself to her, as long as she is sanctified to Him; Whereas, if she gets

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<sup>1</sup> *Cassian, Conferences 21: 22.*

attached to evil, He would forsake her; For there is no fellowship between the Holy One and evil.

❖ They worship His Divinity, at His footstool; according to what is written: “*Worship at His footstool, for He is holy*” (5). And in case they deny that in Christ, as well, there are secrets of His incarnation to be worshipped, the way we are aware of, Let them read how the apostles, themselves, worshipped Him, when He resurrected in the glory of His body (Matthew 28: 17) <sup>1</sup>

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ Let us give Him thanks, and glorify Him, He who made the righteousness that is ours; who made it in us by Himself. ... Who is He, but who justifies us, and makes the righteousness in us? ... About Christ, it is said: “*He justifies the ungodly*” (Romans 4: 5) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The footstool of Jesus is the soul of the believer. Blessed is he, in whose heart Jesus treads with His feet! ... How I wish to have His footstool attached to my heart forever!... Then I would “*hold Him, and would not let Him go*” (Song 3: 4). ... Yet, the Groom who loves perpetual purity, would be offended, and instantly withdraw, if He sees any defilement in the soul<sup>3</sup>.

❖ We should take into consideration that the term ‘worship’, as far as man is concerned, may be also an act of greeting or showing respect between men; as when Sarah worshipped before her man Abraham; or when the prophet Elijah worshipped before the all-evil king Ahab<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Abraham worshipped with his knees to the ground, before the non-believer Hittites, who sold him the cave to bury his deceased wife Sarah; in an act of honoring and an expression of gratitude, and not of worshipping them like God.

Jacob worshipped before his brother Esau; and blessed Pharaoh, a heathen and non-pious man; yet he did not bless him as a God.

Hasn’t God commanded us to worship before the earth and the mountains, when He said on the tongue of His prophet: “*Exalt the Lord our God, and worship (in the mountain of His holiness), at His footstool.*”

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<sup>1</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit, 3: 76.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 99 (98).*

<sup>3</sup> *On Psalms, homily 26.*

<sup>4</sup> *On Psalms, homily 26.*

*For He is holy*" (5); The earth is His footstool, for He says: "*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is My footstool*".

Who can say that Moses worshipped Jethro, his father-in-law, who was an idol-worshipper (Exodus 18: 7)?

How could you blame me, if I honor those who honor and worship God?

Tell me, what would be more appropriate; to honor the saints, or to cut them to pieces, and cast them to the mire?

If you love God, you would love to honor His ministers, as well! And if the bones of the righteous were unclean, why then were the bones of Jacob and Joseph, carried with honor from Egypt? (Genesis 50: 5).

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***"Moses and Aaron were among His priests, and Samuel was among those who called upon His name. They called upon the Lord, and He answered them"* (6)**

According to **St. Augustine**, the Word of God talked to His prophets and priests, yet through a pillar of cloud; namely, through the shadows of the law, the symbols, and the prophecies. But, as far as we are concerned, He descended to us through His incarnation, to let us perceive the secrets of His exalted love.

❖ It was not said about Moses, that he was a priest. If he was not, what was he? Was he greater than a priest?

This psalm proclaims that he was a priest.

Those men were mentioned, for God talked to them through a pillar of cloud; which means that He talked to them in a symbolic way.

He who talked through a pillar of cloud, came in Person to talk to us, when He was incarnated, at His footstool, namely, on the ground, That is why, we worship Him at His footstool, for He is holy.

He who used to talk through a pillar of cloud, and His words were sometimes beyond understanding, when he talked at His footstool, I came to understand the words He said through the cloud<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ ***"Moses and Aaron were among His priests"* (6).**

He who is nominated for priesthood, is committed to be like Moses ... that, if the horrible death happens to be poured on his people, because of some disobedience, he would come forward to place himself between death and life, to keep his congregation from perdition.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

He who has the spirit and mind of priesthood, being a good shepherd, should proceed with a pious spirit, to die for the sake of the herd of God; And would then, like Moses, break the thorn of death, hold its power back, and take it away.

Love should be the support that justifies him, in case he offers himself to death for the sake of his opponents.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ Many have wrongly assumed that the blessed Samuel has been a priest. He was not a priest, but a Levite, not like the first two were priests. Yet, before God, it is not a question of a title or of honor, but of work ... Although Moses and Aaron carried different titles, yet they both practiced similar mighty works<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

### 3- HIS HOLINESS AND HIS LOVE:

*“He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; They kept His testimony and the ordinance that He gave them” (7)*

If the pillar of cloud refers to the descent of the Word of God, and His incarnation, to let us encounter Him in His first coming in His humility, and in the second in His glory; He talks to us by the pillar of cloud. As the pillar gives strength to a building, and pours on it a kind of beauty, It is as though our Christ talks to us in a pillar of cloud, to grant us His strength, and to pour on us His splendor.

*“You answered them, O Lord our God; You were to them God who forgives, though You took vengeance on their deeds” (8)*

The Lord, whole in His love and mercy, responding to His prophets and priests, forgave their sins, and punished them on their deeds to gain forgiveness; His punishment therefore, in essence, is an act of love.

❖ God is not just the Forgiver of sins. He forgives when He forgets the sin; And when He punishes, He is forgiving a page of it?! Whether He forgets man’s sins, or punishes him for them, He forgives<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

*“Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy” (9)*

According to both Isaiah and Micah, the prophets, at the end of days, the holy Mount of God will be apparent; namely, we shall have

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 26.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

knowledge of His exaltation, and the faith in His divinity; So will be the Mount of His cross.

The Lord says: “*For I am God, and not man, the holy One in your midst, And I will not come with terror*” (Hosea 11: 9). The name “*The holy One*” is God’s alone; not just to show the vast difference between His purity, and that of His heavenly and earthly creation, but to proclaim Him as the Eternal Creator, and all are the product of His hands. That Holy One, amazing in His love, condescended and became Man for the sake of mankind; came to dwell among us, counts us as His children, and even refers Himself to us. He is the Holy One, who became to us, righteousness, redemption, and holiness.

❖ We exalt Him, who is merciful, even when He strikes; How could He be fittingly praised and exalted? Do you perceive this, even in your dealing with your children, and cannot perceive it with God? ... Do you perceive that, whether you care for your child or strike him, you are his father. You care for him to hold him up; and strike him to save him from perdition<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The other kind of (relative) worship, is to give reverence to the created things, and the locations, used by the Lord to consummate our salvation; whether they are before or after His incarnation; like for instance: Mount Sinai; the manger in Bethlehem; the holy Mount of Calvary; the wood of the cross; the nails; the sponge; the hyssop; the spear; the robe; the holy Sepulcher, which is the fountain of our salvation; the stone; that was on the tomb, the holy Mount of Israel; the holy Mount of Olives; the pool at Bethesda; the Garden of Gethsemane; and all the similar locations.

I revere and honor all those holy locations, and wherever the name of God is called; not for their own sake, but because they are vessels for the power of God, in, and through which, it was God’s pleasure to consummate the salvation.

I revere and honor the angels, man, and even the matter that partook of the divine power; because through those things God worked my salvation.

But I do not honor the Jews , on account of that they refused to partake of the divine power; did not wish for my salvation; crucified the Lord of glory; were stirred up, with envy and hate, against the Lord, who did them good,.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 99 (98).

David says: “*Lord, I have loved the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells*” (Psalm 26: 8); And, “*Let us go into His tabernacle; Let us worship at His footstool*” (Psalm 132: 7); And, “*The mountains skipped like rams; the little hills like lambs*” (Psalm 114: 4) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. John of Damascus)

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 99  
GLORY BE TO YOU, O MY KING AND MY HOLY GOD**

- ❖ Glory be to You, O who came;  
To make my soul Your dwelling place;  
Zion, beloved to You;  
To possess and dwell in me.
- ❖ You, who sits on the cherubim;  
Grant me Your true knowledge;  
And fill my heart with Your divine love;  
That my depths be qualified for Your presence.
- ❖ Let the peoples stir-up; and let the earth move;  
For, even if the whole world stir-up against You,  
You are the Great in Zion;  
You are the Exalted and Holy One;  
What could the hosts of darkness do against You?
- ❖ Grant me the spirit of thanksgiving;  
To give you thanks, and faithfully confess to You;  
To enjoy uniting with You;  
To be sanctified by Your grace;  
Run in me the truth and the righteousness;  
For I am the work of Your hands;  
Grant me Your truth;  
To bear the spirit of discernment;  
That in me, truth and vanity will not mix;  
Nor goodness with evil;  
Grant me Your righteousness, to love Your goodness;  
And walk according to Your Holy Spirit;

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<sup>1</sup> عن الصورة المقدسة، الدفاع الثاني، 34.

The Spirit of truth and equity.

- ❖ You came down to us, emptying Yourself;  
You took over Yourself the form of a servant, and was crucified for our sake;  
Grant us to exalt Your name, and glorify You;  
For You are the Savior of the world, and the Judge of the universe;  
Come, O my Savior, and let me encounter You;  
Let me have a portion on Your right side;  
And do not let me be denied seeing the splendor of Your glory.
- ❖ You, O Lord, used to talk to Your pious men: Moses, Aaron, and Samuel;  
Talking to them through the cloud;  
They could not clearly perceive the secret of Your salvation;  
Then You came down to us, on our earth;  
Let us worship at Your footstool;  
And perceive clearly what came through the shadows and symbols.

## **PSALM 100**

### **THE PROCESSION OF THE THANKFUL**

This liturgical psalm is a praise of thanksgiving, presented by those coming into the temple and the courts of the Lord. It was most probably presented together with the sacrifices of thanksgiving to God. It is an ‘antiphonal’ psalm, presented by the people or the congregation in response to the chorus of the singers of praise. It is a short poem, yet filled with vitality, used by the pure heart.

The key of his psalm is that rejoicing in the Lord is the true motive for faith and worship; through which the hearts of men are lifted up to God.

This psalm is Messianic, calling humanity to experience the joy in the gospel of Christ, to enjoy the life of conquest, and to enter with daring into the temple of the Lord with the spirit of exultation and shouting.

❖ Its phrases may be few, yet they are huge with their great topics. I wish its seeds are planted in your hearts; and the storehouses are prepared to receive the crop of the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**1- A call on humanity to make a joyful shout to the Lord      1 - 3**

**2- A call on humanity to enjoy the divine presence              4 – 5**

#### **The title:**

A song of praise for the Lord’s faithfulness to His people. A psalm of thanksgiving.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: ‘Of David about confession’. And according to St. Augustine: ‘A psalm of Confession’.

#### **1- A CALL ON HUMANITY TO MAKE A JOYFUL SHOUT TO THE LORD:**

*“Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands!” (1)*

Although this psalm concerns worship in the temple during the service of the sacrifices of thanksgiving, but the true worshipper, thanking God for His multitude of gifts, will have his heart open on all mankind, and will desire that all the lands turn into one exultant chorus, shouting with all might, and worshipping God with an unutterable joy.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 100 (99).

The psalmist says. “*Blessed are the people who know how to shout*” . Here he calls upon all the lands to make a joyful shout to the Lord. It is as though God created all mankind, so that none of them would be denied, not only of rejoicing, but also of a un-expressible shouting.

The creation of heaven and earth, and of man himself, call upon us to shout unceasingly to the Lord. For being promised to see the

Creator Himself, this would surpasses any other gift, As that cost Him a salvation of non-measurable extent.

❖ This psalm instigates us to shout to the Lord; a call not confined to a particular corner of the earth, or to a particular group of people; but let us perceive that it plants blessing on all sides, and a great gladness everywhere.

Can the whole earth hear His voice? Yes, it actually does, and strongly exults in the Lord ... For the blessing covers all sides, as the church started to extend from Jerusalem to all the corners of the earth.

Wherever preaching goes, you will find the pious mixed with the wicked; Every location is filled with the murmur and groans of the wicked, mixed with the joyful exultation of the righteous.

What does shouting together with confession, which we find in the title of this psalm, mean? It is clearly expressed in another psalm, saying: “*Blessed is the people who know how to shout*”..

Shouting is not uttering bare words; but is an expression by a kind of mind filled with an abundance of joy, and feelings of gladness with no limit.

When do we shout? When we thank for what we cannot utter by words!

In the whole creation, the earth and the sea with what they contain, we notice that everything has its origin and cause, that bear the power of production, the system of birth, and a limit for existence... Generations follow one another without confusion; stars and celestial bodies move according to a certain system ... I watch the whole creation as far as I can perceive... When shall I be able to perceive what is inside me? How can I perceive what is above my limitations?!

Yet, the human heart was promised to see God, according to its purity. That is the counsel of the Holy Scripture!

Look into yourself, and see what are you! ... What do you see? ... A human being who sees God!

I know for sure that this is not for the worthiness of man, but according to the mercy of God. Let us give God thanks for His mercy<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

❖ I do not dare to set limits on the whole might of God, or to confine it to a narrow part of the earth; He, whom the heaven and earth do not accommodate. Every believer is judged, not according to his dwelling place here or there, but according to the extent of the (wilderness) of his faith! ... The true worshippers worship the Father, neither in Jerusalem, nor on Mount Gerzim<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

❖ By saying: “*all you land*” the psalmist means all the inhabitants of the earth. He calls on them to shout to God with the song of conquest, for He has conquered our enemy; and to worship the Lord with joy.

For His authority is gentle, and His yoke is light, let us then not work with boredom and depression, for He is the One who made us, and brought us from nothing to existence; It is not us who created each other, nor our parents are the cause of our birth; but it is God who command the fetus to form in the womb.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before His presence with singing*” (2)

God calls upon humanity to worship Him, not as a duty, we are committed to do, but to enjoy His presence, with our hearts exultant with joy;

That we rejoice in Him, and He rejoices in our joy and gladness.

❖ “*Serve the Lord with gladness*”. Although servitude is usually bitter, and all slaves are far from being happy; Yet do not fear the servitude to the Lord; in which there will be no sighs, no feeling of vengeance; and no selling to another master. It is a sweet servitude, for we are all saved.

It is, O brethren, a great happiness to be a slave in that great household; even if you are in chains! ... Do not fear, O chained slaves; Refer these chains to your worthiness; Confess to the Lord in your chains, and they will turn into jewelry ...

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 100 (99).

<sup>2</sup> Letter 58: 3.

You are both a slave and free: You are a slave, because as such you are created, and free, because you are beloved by God who created you. Yes, you are free, because you love Him, who created you.

So do not serve Him with despair, for that would not set you free of service, but would rather make you a bad slave.

You are a slave to the Lord, and free in the Lord.

Do not seek to be liberated; Do not forsake Him who set you free<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Whenever you lie in bed, remember the blessings of God, and His care for you, and give Him thanks. Being filled with these thoughts, you will rejoice in the spirit; Then, in the sleep of the body, there will be an exultation of your soul; and the closing of your eyes would be a true knowledge of God. With your silence, while being filled with good feelings, you would be glorifying the mighty God from the whole heart, and from all strength, and offering God a praise that is lifted up high. For, when there is no evil in man, thanksgiving alone will please God more than any valuable offering to Him; to whom is the glory, to the age of ages. Amen.

(St. Anthony the Great)

❖ “*Come before His presence with singing*”. Do not rejoice only with your tongues; Your consciences should partake of your joy<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

“*Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people, and the sheep of his pasture*” (3)

❖ Here he talks about the Lord Jesus, whom the Jews assumed not to be God. “*Know that the Lord, He is God*”.

Do not let the Lord be despised in your sight!

You scourged Him, spat on Him, crowned Him with thorns, clothed Him with ridicule, nailed Him to the cross, crucified Him, stabbed Him with a spear, and put guards on His tomb.

“*It is God who has made us, and not we ourselves.*”

You lifted yourselves up, and glorified yourselves, as though you created yourselves.

It would be better for you, to let Him, who created you, make you perfect.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 100 (99).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 100 (99).

*“We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture” ...He forsook the ninety-nine, and went to search for the one lost. And when He found him, He put him on His shoulders, and saved him with His blood.*

That Shepherd fearlessly died for the sake of His flock; He, by whose resurrection, He acquired His flock<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ We beseech You Lord, Be our helper and keeper;

Save those with sorrow;

Have mercy on the humble;

Lift up the fallen;

Proclaim Yourself to the needy;

Heal the sick;

Bring back the lost of Your people;

Satisfy the hungry;

Liberate the captives;

Give strength to the weak;

Comfort the faint in heart

*“That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God”*

(1 Kings 8: 60); that Jesus Christ is Your Son, and that *“we are the sheep of Your pasture<sup>2</sup>”* (3).

**(St. Clement the Roman)**

## **2- A CALL ON HUMANITY TO ENJOY THE DIVINE PRESENCE:**

*“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name”* (4)

❖ *“Enter into His gates with confession”*. At His gates, start with confession.

Confess that it was not you who created yourselves. Therefore, give thanks to Him who created you. Let your goodness come from Him, For if He forsakes you, your evil will come upon you.

*“Enter His gates with confession”*. Let the flock enter through the gates, and not stay outside, lest they would be devoured by wolves.

Let your start be “confession”; as it is written in another psalm: *“Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving (confession)”* (Psalm 147: 7).

Even after your entrance into His courts, Confess!

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 100 (99).

<sup>2</sup> Epistle, 56; 4.

Once there is no more need for confession on your sins, In such comfort, you will be like angels.

Notice that I say, that there will be no confession of sins; but I do not say that there will be no confession altogether. As there will be confession of thanksgiving; You will forever confess that He is God, that you are His creatures, protected by Him.

(St. Augustine)

❖ His gates are the works of repentance that bring us to Him. For this, the prophet says: “*Enter into His gates with (confession)*”; Whereas, into His “courts”, which are His holy temples, enter with praise. Namely, our way will be first to purify ourselves with confession and the works of repentance; Then, we shall dare to enter into His courts, and practice praise.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth (faithfulness) endures to all generations*” (5)

❖ Do not think that you will get bored of praising Him.

Your praise to Him is like food; the more you praise Him, the stronger you will be; And He, whom you praise, will be sweeter to you.

“*His mercy is everlasting*” He will not stop being merciful after liberating you.

Being merciful, He will protect you even in the everlasting life; “*His mercy is everlasting, and His truth (Faithfulness) endures to all generations*”. Whether in the earthly generation, which produces mortals, or the heavenly generation, that produces immortals, His faithfulness is here and there<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### **A Cry-out to the Holy Trinity for the enjoyment of praise:**

We end our commentary on this psalm, which calls upon us to praise the Lord in this world, as well as in the eternal life, with a cry-out from the depth of heart of St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi, seeking from the Holy Trinity to grant him the enjoyment of praise.

❖ O merciful **Father**, who saved us by the blood of His only-begotten Son; From You I draw the strength to describe Your Son.

O the true **Son**, who came down to liberate us; By, and for Your sake, I talk about Your transfiguration;

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 100 (99).

O **Holy Spirit**, the Instructor of the ignorant and the simple; By You I understand, and compose an amazing poem;

O holy **Father**, Grant me a word, for Your Son's sake, to talk with experience and with abundance.

O begotten **Son**, Proclaim in me Your beauty for Your Father's sake, that my mouth would sing loudly a new praise.

O **Holy Spirit**, the Intercessor, by whom all preaching is proclaimed; By You my weak tongue would be capable of Your praise;

O holy **Father**, who sent His beloved Son to become a Brother to us; Open my lips to talk about Your only-begotten Son.

O the only-begotten **Son**, who gave us all the wealth of His Father, Let my word move with the riches of Your secrets to the listeners.

O **Holy Spirit**, who came down, and paved the way before the disciples; Pave the way before this poem, which stirred-up to shine from my heart.

O **Holy Father**, from whom all are, and all what came to be, was for His sake; From You I draw support for my limitless poem.

O **Holy Son**, in whose hand all are, and without whom nothing would be (John 1: 3); By You I offer to Your Father a praise, filled with discernment.

O **Holy Spirit**, the treasure of prophecy and apostles, Grant me riches from Your storehouses to distribute.

O **Holy Father**, who, by His love He delivered His Son for the sake of the sinners, Speak on my behalf to the listeners for the sake of Your Son.

O **Holy Son**, who condescended to become one of us, when He is our Lord; Shine in me, that Your light would shine in my words.

O **Holy Spirit**, who brought down all the vain haughtiness, Pave a way for my weak words<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> الميمر 19 على سؤال ربنا وعلى التجلي الذي قبله سمعان من الآب (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهن ام سوني).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 100  
LET MY DEPTHS SHOUT TO YOU!**

- ❖ You created me like all men;  
For my depths to shout, exultant by You;  
When I meditate in Your creation, I get lost before Your wisdom,  
care, and love!  
All creation testify to Your greatness and care.
- ❖ I confess to You that I stand in awe;  
For I do not know, even the secrets of my own body, soul, and all my  
depths!  
If I get amazed before my own secrets, which are the works of Your  
hands,  
How could I express my amazement before Your greatness and  
wisdom?!
- ❖ I confess to You, that I do not recognize even my soul, which is in my  
body;  
It is a secret, that I, myself, do not know;  
But You promised me to see You;  
You provided me with a pious heart;  
To be worthy of seeing You, O Creator of all;  
You presented to me Your blood, an atonement for my sins;  
To cleanse my inner insight;  
To enjoy seeing Your splendor.
- ❖ You call on me to worship You;  
When You are in no need for the ministry of the heavenlies and the  
earthlies;  
You do not give a command, as a commitment we should fulfill;  
But with Your amazing love for us;  
You intend for us to enjoy Your presence, the source of joy and  
gladness;  
I will worship You, to encounter You;  
My depths will sing, and my depths will exult;  
My emotions will be overwhelmed with love;  
My tongue will utter praise;  
I shall become like a trumpet that never cease to give its sound;  
And a harp on whose strings, Your Holy Spirit plays;  
To produce an amazing tune, the work of Your Holy Spirit.

- ❖ With Your own free will, You forsook the heavenlies to search for the lost sheep;  
You emptied Yourself, and took the form of a servant;  
You received reproach and disgrace to bring me back to glory;  
You endured the sufferings even to crucifixion;  
To liberate me, and to lift me up to heaven;  
I confess to You, that You are God;  
You are the Gate;  
Without You, how can I enter into Your heaven?  
I confess to You that You are my Creator;  
Without You, I would have no existence;  
You are my Savior;  
Only You can grant me the perfection;  
Without You, I would never enjoy goodness;  
But my evil would attach to me;
- ❖ Your praise is a support to my soul;  
It is its food in eternity;  
By which it strengthens and grows;  
The more it tastes it, the sweeter it will be!

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## **PSALM 101**

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King David wrote this psalm at the beginning of his reign, presenting to God a serious vow; Namely, to have the holy will in the Lord. But, through our study of the life of king David, as we do not find in his personality, the perfect image, he intended to give here, We would rather consider this psalm, as concerning the Lord Christ, the wholly perfect King of kings.

This psalm was most probably recited in every anniversary of David's reign, to perpetually remind him of his vow to the Lord.

Its language reveals that its author was one of a royal status, who feels a commitment to walk according to a holy befitting spiritual royal way.

In the old, some used to call this psalm "**Psalm of the head of the household**", in his capacity as a king and a leader, committed to a spiritual royal line of faith.

And since the seventeenth century, and even before that, some in the West, used to listen to a sermon on this psalm, whenever they celebrate a new family, or consecrating a new dwelling place.

According to some, this psalm bears two integral lines:

A- The leader, whether a king, or the head of a household, presents his heart a dwelling place to the King of kings, who is within his depths.

B- The true or royal leadership should bear the compassionate spirit of fatherhood.

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#### **1- AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PSALM:**

*"A psalm of David. I will sing of mercy and justice; To You, O Lord, I will sing praises" (1)*

The psalmist often says the expression: “*mercy and justice*”. As mercy precedes justice, by revealing His mercy, God opens before us the door of hope, and takes away from us the despair. Yet, in our hope, we should not, slothfully and loosely, anticipate God’s mercy, and forget about His justice. But, by God’s mercy, we should exultantly cast ourselves into His bosoms; And by His justice we should commit ourselves to walk as is befitting of the children of God. ... Through this mercy and this justice, the psalmist dares to praise God, who seeks the salvation of his soul, and supports him to walk as a son of God.

According to **St. Augustine**, through the mercy of God, the believer, in this world, enjoys the first resurrection, namely, that of the soul; by which he would be qualified for the eternal glory, with his whole spiritual and physical being; and in the great day of the Lord, he would enjoy the resurrected and glorified body. ... Whereas through the justice or judgment, all mankind will be resurrected; yet those who have got the first resurrection will be glorified, while those who disregarded it, will fall under the judgment without mercy.

❖ We could reach the first resurrection now; As no one will partake of this first resurrection, but those who will have the grace forever.

Whereas, all people will partake of the second resurrection, as we shall see: the righteous and the wicked; the former, will partake of the resurrection of mercy, and the later, will partake of the resurrection of judgment. Hence it is written in the psalm: “*I will sing of mercy and justice (judgment), to You, O Lord, I will sing praises*” (1)<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Mercy is sought first, to be followed later on by justice, when the righteous will be separated from the wicked ... I wish we can cross over from being like fishermen, in whom rejoicing is mixed with tears: rejoicing for the good fish they catch; and tears on the bad ones..

❖ I wish no one would deceive himself, that, through the mercy of God, he will not be punished; as there is, His judgment (justice) as well. And I wish that no one would be terrified by the judgment of God, as long as it turns into what is better, on account of that God’s mercy precedes His judgment<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *City of God, book 20.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon 250: 2.*

- ❖ God does not lose the firmness of His judgment through the flow of His mercy; nor lose the flow of His mercy when He judges with firmness<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Unless God works first through mercy, He will find no one to crown through judgment.
- ❖ There is time for mercy, when the longsuffering of God calls the sinners to repent.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ *“I will sing mercy and justice to You, O Lord”*. I wish the sinners who despair of having salvation; those humble, and contrite, because of their sins, listen to the “song of mercy”. And I wish the arrogant who say: [God is merciful; Let us commit sin, for He will eventually forgive us], listen to the “song of justice judgment<sup>2</sup>”.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Responding to a question:: [How could the soul get to know that God has forgiven her?], **St. Maximus** said: [If she see that she is at the level of him who says: *“I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law”* (Psalm 119: 163); for he also says: *“I will sing mercy and justice to You, O Lord”* (Psalm 101: 1). Let us then do the works of repentance, to reveal the just judgment of God, and have Him consummate His mercy on us; when He forgives our sins].

(Paradise of the fathers)

- ❖ Make me worthy, O Lord, of praising You, for Your mercy on us, and for Your judgment and revenge against our enemies. For, when I get such a grace, I shall sing thanksgiving to Your goodness; and I shall abide to a pure, and blameless behavior.
- ❖ I praise You, O Lord, and I shall sing mercy and justice to You; for You do not deal with men according to their sins; but Your mercy and compassion precede Your justice.

In the present time, You deal with us by Your mercy; Whereas in the time to come, You will deal with us by Your justice.

According to **St. Cyril**, By saying: *“I will sing mercy and justice to You, O Lord”*, the psalmist means to say: [For, having mercy on us, You have sent Your Son to the world, have forgiven our sins by His mercy, and have avenged our enemy (the devil) by a just judgment.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 101 (100).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 27 on Ps. 100 (101).

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

## 2- THE BEFITTING ROYAL BEHAVIOR:

### a- Behaving wisely, through the dwelling of the wisdom of God in his depths:

*“I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart” (2)*

If the mercy of God grants the soul an inner joy, the believer will not cease praising God. On another aspect, he would enjoy the divine wisdom, discernment, and reason, to walk by grace in the way of perfection. The psalmist cries out to God to send His grace down on him, to sanctify his heart, and set out of it a temple for Himself.

Perfection would never lead the believer to haughtiness, but to feel God’s favor on him; to walk with a perfect heart, with the spirit of meekness within his house, namely, within the holy congregation.

According to **St. Ambrose**, it is the Lord Christ, who walks within His house with a perfect heart, as He walks within the chest of the wise and the reasonable man. [The house of the Lord is within us; We have halls, courts, and rooms; as it is written: *“Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?”* (See proverbs 5: 16). Open up, therefore, the court of your heart to the Word of God, to Him who says to you: *“Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it”* (See psalm 81: 10)<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Nothing brings pleasure to God, like the simple and pure heart, which He sees in the simple dove among the birds; and in the meek lamb among the quadrupeds<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The wickedness goes hand in hand with narrowness; whereas the righteousness of heart, alone, grants enough width to walk in. *“I will walk within my house with a perfect heart”*.... By *“within my house”*, he means within the church; for Christ walks within it; or he probably means within the heart; for our inner house is our heart<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ If you long to have the light of the spiritual knowledge; not that of the wrong kind of knowledge, for the sake of vain pride, to become vain men, You should first long fervently to that kind of blessing, uttered

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<sup>1</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit, 3: 12.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homily 27 on Ps. 100 (101).*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 101 (100).*

by the Lord Himself, saying: “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Matthew 5: 8); by which you will get what the angel said to Daniel: “*Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever*” (Daniel 12: 3); And what another prophet said: “*Sow for yourselves righteousness (for it is time to seek the Lord)*” (Hosea 10: 12).

We are committed to persist on reading -- which, as I see, you are already doing -- together, first, with longing to gain the practical experimental knowledge, namely, the behavioral knowledge; without which, you cannot acquire the theoretical purity. By so doing, you would not be uttering, and teaching the words of others, but through the exaltation of work and execution. ... After such effort and labor, you would get the spiritual knowledge as a reward; ... And through acquiring it, and not just through mere meditation in the law, but as a fruit of your labor, you would say together with the psalmist: “*Through Your precepts, I get understanding*” (Psalm 119: 104); ... And through overcoming all your lusts, you can say with confidence: “*I will sing to You, O Lord; I will behave wisely in a perfect way*” (Psalm 101: 1-2). For, whoever strives in a perfect way, with a pure heart, will sing this psalm, and would comprehend the words with which he praises.

In case you intend to set your hearts a temple for the spiritual knowledge, you will have to purify your souls of all traces of sins, and to get rid of the worries of this world; For, it would be impossible for the soul which is preoccupied with the worries of the world – even to a limited extent – to acquire the gift of knowledge, or to become a source of the spiritual interpretation, and to strive on reading the holy Scriptures<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Nestor)**

- ❖ “*Oh, When will You come to Me?*”, When will You grant me what I desire?; For I am still walking according to my own heart among my congregation!
- ❖ As to saying: “*within my house*”, according to **Eusabius**: [Many people hide their craftiness, among the crowd in the streets and marketplaces, and in their dealings with others; While within their own households, their real intentions would be revealed. ... He, who ‘*walks within his house with a perfect heart*’ , would be truly a good man].

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, Conference 14: 9.

And according to **St. Dedymus the blind**: [He, who is fond of things contrary to the law of God, would be called “*outside his house*”; For the house of a good man is his virtue; and he, who abides to it, would be “*within his house*”].

In the book of Genesis, it came that “*Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents*”. Whereas his older brother Esau was “*a hunter, man of the field*” (Genesis 25: 27). And about the man who was possessed by unclean spirits, the gospel says: “*he had his dwelling among the tombs*” (Mark 5: 3).

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

### **b- Setting nothing wicked before his eyes:**

***“I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me” (3)***

How could the psalmist say: “*I shall set nothing wicked before my eyes*”, while he says somewhere else: “*Who will be justified before You?*”; and, “*They have all gone out of the way, for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God*” Romans 3: 12, 23).

It is only the Lord who is Righteous, and without sin; whereas man is a sinner. Yet, there is a difference between him who finds pleasure in sin, looks for it, seeks it, and submits himself to it; and him, who resists it, and tries his best to flee from it; And in case he falls into it, he hastens to seek God’s grace to lift him up, and to keep him from finding pleasure in it.

This verse and the one preceding it, reveal the situation in which the prophet David found himself in the royal palace of king Saul; as well as that of the true believer, living in the midst of an evil, dark, and pervert generation. There, in the royal palace, David, in his youth, has gone through a bitter experience. While many wicked and corrupt men attached themselves to the king and sought his favor; David, on the other hand, “*set nothing wicked before his eyes*”, even if it was the only way to reach to the king’s heart and friendship. He loved righteousness, hated perversion, and preferred getting attached to the Holy God, whatever it costs him, to getting attached to king Saul, through deception.

❖ ***“I hate the work of those who fall away” (3 LXX)***, whether it is my own father, mother, brother, sister, or a friend. ... I hate the work of anyone who retreats from the fear of God; I shall not cling to him; I shall not set family relationships, nor friendship above my love for God<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 27 on Ps. 100 (101).

(St. Jerome)

❖ What the prophet David says, does not mean that he never fell into something against the law, but it means that he did not intend, nor sought to do it; and “*he even hates the work of those who fall away*”. ... And if it so happens that he did fall into what is unbecoming, it would be because of something beyond his will. Saying: “*I set nothing wicked before my eyes*”; means that I did not ponder nor looked intensively to anything that is against the law.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

**1- “A perverse heart shall depart from me”:**

“*A perverse heart shall depart from me, I will not know wickedness*” (4)

If David has become a king, Yet, in his depths he feels that he has got this position, not for the sake of any personal gifts on his part, for any self-righteousness, or for being better than others; But, it was a free gift from God. Hence, it is befitting of him to walk with a pure heart, and to depart from men with perverse heart; not out of hatred toward them, but out of an intention to keep away from perverting from the uprightness, granted to him by God.

That is what is befitting of every believer who got attached to the King of kings, his Savior Jesus Christ; to live together with Him in a royal life with non-perversion; following the example of the prophet Daniel and the three young men, who were captivated to a land prevailed by the defilement of idol-worship; and yet, cherishing their faith and their attachment to the true Holy God, they refused to recognize the evil king, through not partaking of his corruption. In short, together with our love of all mankind, and our commitment of obedience to rulers and princes, it is befitting of us to perceive that the children of God should be manifest; different from the children of the devil.

According to **St. Augustine**, [he who talks here, talks in the name of God. As the one with a perverse heart, would be unworthy of being known by God. Saying: “*I will not know wickedness*”, means I do not want to know him, who does wickedness].

❖ Whoever he is, a friend, a relative, a bishop, or a priest; and whatever is his position or rank; if he corrupts himself in any way, I shall depart from him, and will never remember him<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 27 on Ps. 100 (101).

❖ The uprightness of mind is like that of a way with no diversions; ... Such was the personality of the blessed psalmist, he who moans, saying: “*A pervert heart shall depart from me*” (3). ... Joshua, the son of Nun, exhorted the people, saying: “*Let your hearts be upright toward God of Israel*”; while St. John the Baptist cries out, saying: “*Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight*” (Mark 1: 3); which means that the soul of man is committed to be the way it was created: completely straight and beautiful; and in case it perverts from its nature; that would be called evil and perversion<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

❖ In the book of Ecclesiastes, it came: “*God made man upright*” (Ecclesiastes 7: 29). He who walks contrary to the instinct in which he was created, and perverts from his uprightness; About him the prophet says: “*A pervert heart shall depart from me*”;... If he is a friend of mine, I shall not even care to admonish him; knowing that the bad relationship corrupts the good habits.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ The Babylonian king issued a decree that the Israelites taken into captivity, have to forsake the law of their God, and the celebration of the feasts of their fathers, and should follow instead the rites of the Chaldeans. But, Daniel decided in his heart to keep himself from being defiled with the food served on the table of the king (See Daniel 1: 8-16). ... The king issued a decree that the young Hebrew men have to worship the golden image of the king; But they addressed him, saying: “*Let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up*” (Daniel 3: 18). ... Concerning the Son of God, we read that “*He knew no sin*” (2 Corinthians 5: 21).

In another text, you will find: “*He who keeps His command, will experience nothing harmful*” (Ecclesiastes 8: 5). Namely, the knowledge of evil is not to be blamed; but to be attached to evil is. And David himself says: “*A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness*” (4).

And when the adversaries attempt to set up their signs, he cries out, saying: It is as though on the way, on the high summit, “*Your foes, ... have set up their banners for signs, they seem like men who lift up axes among the thick trees. And now they break down its carved work, all at once, with axes and hammers*” (Psalm 74: 5, 6 LXX). This means

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<sup>1</sup> Comm.. on Luke, Homily 6.

that our faith should not be “*on the way*”, the Words of God should not be sowed by the wayside, lest the birds of the air would devour it (See Luke 8: 5)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

***“Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy. The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not tolerate” (5)***

According to the Jews, he who slanders his neighbor, would harm three parties: himself first, the one who listens to him, and the one whom he secretly slanders.

In case man hears something about his neighbor, being pure in heart, loving his friend, and desiring his salvation, should first seek a convenient chance to talk to him directly, with a true intention for his edification, and without hurting his feeling. And in case he finds out that talking to him is futile, he should seek the help of a wise intercessor, like his friend’s father or his father of confession; Yet, all that should be with reason and wisdom, without undue excitement, nor judgment, and with the spirit of humility,

According to St. Augustine, departing from, or not eating together with someone, would be a way to rebuke him, to let him feel shame, and to motivate him to repent.

Yet, this does not mean to depart from all strangers; as the Lord Christ, Himself ate together with sinners, tax-collectors, and even with some Pharisees. But the psalmist means here, those who are within; namely, members of the church, who may happen to walk in a way not befitting to the children of God. That was the way adopted by the apostle Paul, who counsels us not to isolate the perverts within the congregation, but as to those outside (the nonbelievers), we have no authority over them. But even those within, we should not count them as enemies, but admonish them as brothers (2 Thessalonians 3: 14).

❖ I not only counsel those who speak evil, but also those who listen to others speak evil. I exhort them to shut up their ears, and to follow the lead of the prophet who says: “*Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy*” (5). Say to your friend: [Is it up to you to commend or to glorify?; ... I open up my ears only to receive the talk, full of sweet fragrance; But if you happen to have some evil talk

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer of David 4: 7: 27.

to say, I shall close shut them up, for I shall not allow dirt to enter into my ears<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ It is befitting of men, not to believe what they hear, except after elaborate search and investigation; and to take the sound decision in the light of facts; which is why God says in a scripture oracle: “*Do not believe everything you hear*” (Sirach 19: 15). There is nothing more destructive to the life of man, like hastening to make decisions according to what he hears from people<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ By telling lies, they kill me; for the mouth which lies kills the soul<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

- ❖ He who slanders his fellow men, intends to harm their reputation, and not to reform them; which is the worse of all evil; And by which he would be like the scoundrel devil, who deceived Eve by slandering God.

As to “*The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart*”, the prophet says: “*him I will not tolerate*”; As their company would be a great harm to the soul.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Responding to a question: [What is the sin of slander?], Abba Isaiah said: [The sin of slander keeps man away from the presence of God; according to what is written: “*Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy*” (5)

**(Paradise of the fathers)**

- ❖ We should guard our tongues and ears against uttering, or listening to such talk; for it is written: “*You shall not circulate false report*” (Exodus 23: 1); and, “*Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy*” (5); and, “*Concerning the works of me, I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress*” (Psalm 17: 4, 3).... We should not believe everything we hear, nor judge those who say them; but should act and talk according to what is written in the Holy Book: “*But, like a deaf man, I do not hear; and, like a mute who does not open his mouth*” (Psalm 38: 13).

**(Mother St. Sankletiky)**

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning the Statues, 3: 14.

<sup>2</sup> On the Incomprehensible Nature of God, hom 9: 8.

<sup>3</sup> Defense before Constantius, 5.

❖ Satan, who was once high and mighty, fell like lightening from heaven, crawled on earth, and became trampled by the earthlies (Luke 10: 19); Whereas man who was weak on earth, became exalted by his humility, and trampled him who was once high and mighty ... According to the Holy Scripture: “*God resists the proud*” (James 4: 6); and “*gives grace to the humble*” (Proverbs 4: 34); and God says: “*On this one will I look, on him who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word*” (Isaiah 66: 2) ... The proud will be punished together with Satan.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 2- GETTING ATTACHED TO THE SAINTS:

*“My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me. He who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me”* (6)

Our Holy Christ used to find rest in the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And the apostle Paul used to find rest in working, debating, and worshipping together with Aquila, Prescilla, and his close followers like Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Onesimus. For the company with the believers who are faithful in their life, supports the soul, and brings joy to the heart.

❖ The psalmist did not say: ‘My eyes shall be on the rich, emperors, bishops, priests, or deacons; but “*on the faithful, that they may dwell with me*”. A holy bishop has the right to utter such words: [I shall not ordain a priest, him who is close to me, or a relative of mine; but the faithful]<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The prophet calls them “*the faithful of the land*”, the righteous and the blameless, in whose company and counsel he finds pleasure, and who shall serve him.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

❖ The Holy Book bears a testimony against Satan, that “*he went out of the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with painful boils*” (Job 2: 7). For such are those who go out of the presence of the Lord, they strike, and do harm to men. So are the heretics who go against faith, (like the followers of Arius); they persecute and harm the true believers.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 27 on Ps. 100 (101).

On the contrary, we find the saints, when approached by the men of God, they look at them as friends, the way David did, saying: “*My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me*” (6)<sup>1</sup>.

**(Pope Abba Athanasius the apostolic)**

### **1- HIS HOUSEHOLD TO BE AS A HOLY CHURCH:**

*“He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house. He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence” (7)*

We should not marvel to see our father Abraham dwell together with his believer wife Sarah; and in the company of 318 men who carried his same spirit, the spirit of uprightness.

An evil person, with his craftiness, may be able to crawl into David’s house, but he cannot dwell within it; for the darkness cannot unite with the light. He would not find a common ground to talk to such a man like David, who cares for every word that comes out of his mouth; And finally, he would never continue to establish himself before the eyes of the righteous David; for he would find no place in his heart to practice his wickedness.

Let us then be aware against keeping company with the wicked, who set snares for us, using the following serious ways:

1- They would attempt **to crawl into our inner houses**, namely, our hearts, to dwell within them as members of the household.

2- In case we allow them to enter, they would start to debate, telling lies, the way the serpent did with Eve.

3- If we take part of this debate, they would attempt to establish themselves before our eyes, to make us think there is light in their darkness, and there is wisdom in their deceit. By doing that, they would manage to have authority over our hearts, as masters who have the right to lead us to wherever they intend for us to go.

❖ The prophet David would not let the proud dwell within the house of his heart and mind; and he hated the slanderers and the oppressors.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

### **A CONCLUSION:**

*“Early, I will destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the Lord” (8)*

The prophet David was preoccupied with two issues:

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<sup>1</sup> *Paschal Letters, 10.*

1- The first, that his life is extremely precious; and that every moment of his life has its value. That was the reason behind his early endeavor to destroy any wickedness that may attempt to crawl into his heart, to keep evil from having deep roots within him.

2- The second is, believing that his heart is the holy city of the Lord, he decided not to allow any defilement to crawl into it. The way the Lord Christ told us: “*The kingdom of God is within you*”; and, “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven*” (Luke 10; 18).

According to St. Jerome, it is not befitting of us to be slothful with the evildoers within the church – the house of the Lord – but we are committed to exhort and rebuke them, for the sake of their repentance.

❖ The “city” is the soul; and the wicked thoughts are the “evildoers” (8). By destroying them, our good intentions would flourish<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

❖ On the day all the enemies (the sins) are destroyed, God will be glorified like in a day of feast; Before the failure of our enemies, we would greatly rejoice. That is probably what the prophet means by saying: “*Early, I shall destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the Lord*” (8). Namely, he would cut off Satan who provokes mankind to commit iniquity.

Hearing the expression “*the city of the Lord*”, we look at the soul of each of us, being: “*living stones*” (1 Peter 2: 5); built by virtues of every kind<sup>2</sup>.

❖ In case you see him who persecutes you, in a state of extreme anger; be sure that he is driven by a devil to be so violent and cruel.

“*You will chase your enemies*” (Leviticus 26: 7). Who are those enemies but the devil himself, together with all his evil hosts, and the unclean demons (Luke 4: 33).

We shall chase them away, not just from ourselves, but from the others as well, of their victims; according to the commandment, saying: “*You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword*” (Leviticus 26: 7). For, when “*The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly*” (Romans 16: 5), “*Our enemies will fall before us*”.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ According to **St. Basil the Great**, the “*city of the Lord*” is man, whom God created in His image and likeness; whereas the “*wicked of*

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<sup>1</sup> *Comm. on Cant., Sermon 12.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Josh 8: 8.*

*the land*” and the *”evildoers”* are the evil thoughts which come out of the heart, like murder, fornication, adultery, robbery, false witness, blasphemy, etc.; all of which we should early destroy from the city of the Lord, namely, in our youth; and not to let them grow in us.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Virtue would be severely stricken, when evil overcomes. That is why we should follow the counsel of the prophet, and early destroy all the evildoers of the land (the soul) (8); so that the good activity would flourish in our souls; And so as to live after death. In the light of the words of God, saying: *“I kill, and I make alive”* (Deuteronomy 32: 39), the apostle Paul lived after he died, became strong in weakness, continued his strife while bound in chains, had wealth in poverty, was rich when he possessed nothing, and *“carried about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Corinthians 4: 10)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

In short, the psalmist started by the positive edifying work, and ended up by the negative aspect. He started by proclaiming that his heart is the house of the Lord, full of singing and praise; and ended up by cutting off every trace of evil from himself, for he is a sanctuary of the Lord..

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 12 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 101**  
**REIGN, O LORD IN MY DEPTHS**

- ❖ How can I call You to dwell in my heart;  
When it is the work of Your hand?  
You set it as a holy place for Yourself;  
Where the sound of singing and praise is heard;  
Out of it, You set a heaven;  
Which the devil with all his hosts could not invade.
- ❖ What shall I call my heart?  
It is Your exultant holy house;  
It is Your exalted heavens, led by Your Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Pour Your mercy in my depths;  
Let the water of Your love flow over by Your abundant grace.  
I shall sing to You all the days of my life;  
And I will anticipate Your coming on the clouds with the spirit of  
exultation.
- ❖ Walk along in me;  
Not as in Solomon's court,  
But as in Your heavens  
Pour Your righteousness on me;  
That I may hide in You; O Righteous One.
- ❖ No perversion will forcibly crawl in me;  
For Your Holy Spirit dwells in me;  
No wicked and evildoers will get attached to me;  
Unless they return to You in repentance.
- ❖ My soul will not find comfort in hearing slanders;  
Nor shall I find pleasure in the company of the proud and haughty.
- ❖ I find exalted pleasure in the company of Your children;  
Where You Yourself find comfort.
- ❖ By Your Word, You cut off, as though with a sword, every evil that  
crawls in me;  
You destroy every corruption in my depths;  
You truly set out of me a city You call after Your Holy name.

## **PSALM 102**

### **A PRAYER OF SOMEONE POOR, SUFFERING FROM ISOLATION**

This psalm, **representing a prayer** coming out of the heart of someone moaning, with a feeling of loneliness, or a pain of illness (5, 23), suits the believer in his spiritual strife, seeking the divine help. Whereas, according to others, it is a Messianic psalm, prophesying the suffering Lord Christ, and His church, bearing the cross in this world. The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews (1: 10-12), quoted what came in verses 25-27.

The author of this psalm, most probably bears a personal feeling of pain, although he moves from the personal aspect to the collective one; as he moves from moaning to prophesying with the spirit of hope.

It is seen as a psalm rich in the traditional aspect, concerning: prayers (1 – 6), praises (12, 25-27), prophetic hope (13, 22, 28), and wisdom (28).

#### **When was it written? <sup>1</sup>**

a- According to some scholars, this psalm was written after **the return of the scribe Ezra** from captivity with a mandate to rebuild the temple of the Lord (Nehemiah 1: 3-11). In that case, the author could be either Ezra, Nehemiah, or someone contemporary of them.

b- This prayer **was written at the end of the Babylonian captivity**, and represents the cry-outs of the captives, who, almost losing hope in going back home, seek from the Lord to fulfill His promise.

c- **It is a prayer by the prophet David**, not connected to a particular occasion, but said with the spirit of prophecy. Traditionally, this psalm is seen as being the fifth of the seven psalms of repentance; although it includes no reference to a particular sin, because of which he was suffering from affliction... It represents a cry-out coming out of the heart of someone going through bitterness in his life, seeking from God to proclaim His kingdom to him, and to save him.

<b>1- A personal wail</b>	<b>1 - 11</b>
<b>2- A collective wail</b>	<b>12 - 22</b>
<b>3- More personal wail</b>	<b>23 - 24</b>
<b>4- A conclusive praise</b>	<b>25 – 28</b>

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<sup>1</sup> W. S. Pumer: *Psalms, Ps. 102.*

## The Title:

**The Lord's eternal love. A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the Lord.**

Who is this poor man, but someone falling in anguish, and feeling that those closest to him cannot support him, and cannot even share his feelings?

Seeing the extent of misery and labor reached by man, the Word of God, for the sake of His love for mankind, consented to incarnate and dwell among us a poor man; so as, by His poverty He would grant us the multitude of His blessings, comfort, and heavenly riches. For He alone, could embrace every soul, to lift it up to His glories, instead of the humiliation and anguish.

According to **St. Augustine**, this prayer is presented by the Lord Christ, together with His church, His body. The St. says: [Let us listen to Christ, the poor inside us, with us, and for our sake].

❖ The poor man prays; and does not pray in secret. Let us listen to him, and see who he is. ... Is he not, about whom the apostle says: *“Though He was rich, yet, for your sakes, he became poor, that through His poverty might become rich”* (2 Corinthians 8: 9)?

If He is, How could He be poor?... He, through whom all riches were made; by whom we have got all those riches, capabilities, memory, personality, good health, senses, etc., all of which, when sound, even the poor becomes rich. ... By whom, as well, all the greater riches are made, including: faith, piety, justice, love, purity, good behavior, etc. which no one could have except through Him; ... He who justifies the ungodly ... See. How rich He may be! ... To make sure that He is that poor man; read the words of St. John the Evangelist: *“The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us”* (John 1: 14) ... **He took upon Himself the form of a slave; and by clothing Himself by our poverty, He made Himself poor, and made us rich<sup>1</sup>.**

(St. Augustine)

❖ The psalm talks about that “poor man”, not the one who possesses nothing in this world, but about whom it is written: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit”* (Matthew 5: 3); he who, when remembering his past and present sins, pours his pain from his heart, and not by his lips. ... Who is that man who could pour his pain in the presence of the Lord<sup>2</sup>? ...

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps 102 (101).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ He who, even though a king, or the richest of the rich, is said to be “poor”, on account of that he is poor to God; and has nothing not given to him by God.

(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

## 1- A PERSONAL WAIL:

*“Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come to You” (1)*

God is called “He who hears the prayers”, He inclines His ear to hear the secret whispers of the heart of man; and responds to them, if they conform to what is befitting to grant humanity.

The psalmist supplicates to God, his Savior, to hear his prayer, and to let his cries enter into the throne of His grace. The two terms: “prayer” and “cries” consummate one another; and together reveal the extent of the seriousness and urgency that the believer’s condition has become. This condition is actually the portion of every true believer, who is crucified together with the crucified Christ. It is not connected to a particular era, nor particular situation, or even is a new thing in the life of saints.

- ❖ God hears the prayer of him who asks for something befitting of what He would grant His children praying to Him. The cry here, it is not raising the volume of voice, but refers to persistence, intensity, and strong will.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

*“Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble; Incline Your ear to me; In the day that I call, answer me speedily” (2)*

The expressions that came in this verse, came often in other psalms: 17: 6; 31: 2; 45: 10; 71: 2; 86: 1; 88: 2; 69: 17; and 79: 8.

- ❖ *“Do not hide Your face from me”*: This prayer could only be uttered by him who prays with a pure heart and a blameless conscience; For a sinner would not dare say: *“Do not hide Your face from me”*, but would rather say: *“Hide Your face from my sins”* (Psalm 51: 9) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ He who has a pure conscience, would dare to say in his prayer: *“Do not hide Your face from me”*.... As to saying: *“Incline Your ear to me”*, he means to say that, because of my grief, my voice became low; But, being so high up, O Lord, Condescend with Your mercy on

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

me, and listen to my supplication. ... Saying: “*Answer me speedily*”, he means, before I die.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

***“For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned like a hearth” (3)***

Man, in the time of affliction, often feels that his days have passed away quickly and without benefit, like smoke that harms the eyes, and

scattered with no use; ... he feels that his bones no more support him, but rather increase the heat in his heart, to put an end to his life. Here, the psalmist feels that his bones have become like fuel cast in the fire of a hearth, that will soon be consumed.... If the bones form the skeleton that supports the rest of the body; By its destruction, the whole body will collapse.

Bones, being a symbol of strength, if the strong part of my body becomes frail and dry, how much more would my naturally frail body be<sup>1</sup>?!

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Such a lesson we learn from the Holy Book, saying: “*All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field; the grass wither, the flower fades*” (Isaiah 40: 6); and: “*They will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb*” (Psalm 37: 2); and: “*My days are consumed like smoke*” (Psalm 102: 3) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ According to **St. Athanasius**: [This oracle is a prophecy about the loss of the privileges that were the Hebrews', by which they undertook the worship of the old law; namel, their priesthood and sacrifices; all of which, have long supported them like bones to the body, then were lost, and consumed like smoke.

The bones refer, as well, to the thoughts and dogmas in God by the soul; white and hidden like bones; support the soul; and kindle when the heart burns with longing.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

***“My heart is stricken and withered like grass, so that I forgot to eat my bread” (4)***

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

<sup>2</sup> In Matt. Hom 2: 9.

The psalmist sees his heart like grass cut off and left to dry under the heat of the sun. ... If man forgot to eat his bread, the Lord Christ came as the “Bread of Life” for us to eat.

❖ Such is the life of man: today he is strong and active, and tomorrow he withers and become dry. The psalmist did not say: I lost my appetite, or I despise food, No, he means to say, that I am so overwhelmed by the memory of my great sin, that I am so broken by remorse, to forget to eat my bread. My only longing now is for God; I am utterly absorbed by meditation in Him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ You forgot to eat your bread. But, after His crucifixion, “*all the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord*” (Psalm 22: 27). Forgetfulness is to be followed by remembrance. I wish we are not like those who ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead (John 6: 49); but the bread we eat is that about which is written: “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*” (Matthew 5: 6) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ As the body feeds upon the earthly bread, the soul feeds upon the bread that came down from heaven, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to seek in our prayers the bread that would strengthen our essence; saying: “*Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures*” (John 6: 27). The way the land would dry for lack of rain, and would not give fruit; the heart of every Israelite has become dry, and produces no more fruit of virtue, because of being deprived of the rain of the divine words.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

❖ If the body relaxes after having its daily need of food, it is the work of Satan; unless he is ill and not feeling well. Normally, a monk, according to the counsel of the elders to the beginners, should follow moderation, and gets up from the table just before being satisfied; Once he reaches the stature of the words of the apostle: “*for we are not ignorant of his (Satan’s) devices*” (2 Corinthians 2: 11). he would become well-trained on this virtue.... I wish God of our fathers leads you to such a virtue, for its light is glittering and sweet beyond description. ... I wish, when you say, together with the psalmist: “*I forgot to eat my bread*”, you mean that your Spirit, being somewhere

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<sup>1</sup> عظمتان عن أتروبيوس.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

else, you only search for, thinks about, and meditates in the heavenly things.

**(St. Prsnovius)**

- ❖ Responding to another question by the same brother, saying: [How could it happen, that whenever I wish to control my belly, and limit my food to the necessary limit, I fail to do it? If I manage to do that for a few days, I usually insensibly go back to my usual greed]; Father John responds by saying: [All what you tell me, O brother, I have gone through myself. Nobody is exempted, except him who has reached the stature of the psalmist who says: “*I forgot to eat my bread; Because of the sound of my groaning, my bones cling to my skin*” (Psalm 102: 4, 5). He reached to a lesser level of food and drink; for his tears became his bread; and he started to feed on the (Holy) Spirit. ... Believe me, O brother, I know someone, known also to God, who had such a level, who was so captivated by the spiritual food, that its sweetness made him forget the material food; and whenever it was the time for eating, he used to feel so satisfied and so disgusted, to desire to eat.

**(Paradise of the fathers)**

**“*Because of the sound of my groaning, my bones cling to my skin*” (5)**

The psalmist because of anxiety or insomnia, became so frail and utterly worn out, that his bones clang to his skin

Many people groan; And I groan as well. But I groan because they groan for the wrong reasons ... I wish to reform them; and when I fail, I groan; and when I groan, I do not separate myself from them<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“*I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert*” (6)**

According to some, the ‘pelican’ here is a bird that never stops producing disturbing and painful cries.

- ❖ There are two kinds of pelicans: one kind lives in the lakes, and feed on fish, and another kind lives in the wilderness, and in desolate places, and feed on poisonous creatures like serpents and lizards, and called by the Latin name “onocrotali”. The psalmist says that his food, becoming for him like poison, he is like a pelican of the wilderness, or of the desolate areas, that feed on live poisonous

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps 102 (101).

creatures. *“I am like an owl of the desert”*. If the owl looks black in the daylight, how would it be by night? ... [That is how I see myself in my own eyes, because of the multitude of my sins<sup>1</sup>].

(St. Jerome)

*“I lie awake, and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop” (7)*

In his affliction, he came to lie awake by night because of pain and anxiety. Like a lone sparrow on housetops; he seeks seclusion, not wishing to encounter anyone, for feeling that on one is ready to partake of his sufferings.

According to **St. Augustine**, these three kinds of birds: the pelican, the owl, and the sparrow, mentioned by the psalmist, refer to the care of the Lord Christ for three categories of men:

a- Those who are like the pelicans of the wilderness; are the non-believers, who live away from the house of the Lord.

b- Those who are like owls that live among the ruins; are the apostates who live in the darkness.

c- Those who are like sparrows, are Christians only by name, without enjoying the good life of faith.

The Lord Christ stands like a sparrow alone on the housetop, calling them to the good holy life....The ambassadors of Christ, should follow His lead, and search for everyone, wherever, and whatever his condition is, whether a non-believer, an apostate, or a Christian only by name.

❖ God, the Creator and Healer of all, who, knowing that pride is the cause, and the source of all evil, cares to heal the opposite with the opposite; namely, to heal the things, destroyed by pride, through humility (See Isaiah 14: 13).

Contrary to him who said: *“All the kingdoms of the world and their glory are mine, for this has been delivered to me, and I will give it to whoever I wish”* (Luke 4: 6); It was said about the Lord: *“Though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor, that, through His poverty, we might become rich”* (2 Corinthians 8: 9).

For the sake of him ( king of Assyria) who said: *“As one gathers eggs that are left, I have gathered all the earth; and there was no one who moved his wing, nor opened his mouth with even a peep”* (Isaiah 10: 14); The other (the psalmist) said: *“I am like an owl of the desert; I*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps 102 (101).

*lie awake, and am like a sparrow alone on the housetop” (Psalm 102: 6, 7) <sup>1</sup>.*

**(St. John Cassian)**

❖ Truly, the goal of the collective monastery way of life, is that the monk crucifies all his desires, seeking perfection, and never to care for the morrow. It is obvious that such perfection would not be reached by everyone, except by the monk of the ‘koinonia’ (the monastic fellowship)... The perfection would be reached by the secluded hermit through emptying his mind of all the earthly things, and binding it, as much as possible to the Lord Christ, as far as the weakness of man would allow. About such a man the prophet Jeremiah says: *“It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him”* (Lamentations 3: 27, 28); And David also says: *“I lie awake, and am like a sparrow on the rooftops”* (7) <sup>2</sup>.

**(Father John)**

***“My enemies reproach me all day long, and those who deride me swear an oath against me”* (8)**

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: ***“My enemies reproach me all day long; and those who commend me, join forces against me”***

The enemies always find their chance to deride him whom they hate, to add affliction to his affliction.

❖ While commending me by their mouth, they set snares for me by their hearts.... Just listen to them 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 men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”* (Matthew 22: 16-17) <sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping”* (9)**

According to old customs, as a sign of grief on the death of a close relative or friend, man used to refrain from eating his food, and to put on sackcloth. Here, David, showing extreme grief, not only refrains

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

<sup>2</sup> Cassian: Institutions 12: 8.

<sup>3</sup> Cassian: Conferences 19: 8.

from eating and drinking, but felt as though feeding on ashes; and tears flow abundantly from his eyes, that they got into his mouth to mingle with his drink.

While the mourners used to scatter ashes over their heads and clothes, which mingled with their food and drink; the psalmist ate ashes itself.

According to **father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem**, the calamities mentioned in this psalm, refer to what happened to the Jews after they crucified the Lord Christ. Their life turned to be like the ashes left over from burning their sacrifices; their drink mingled with their tears; their days became like shadow; on account of that they literally followed the Mosaic law, which is the shadow of the evangelic law; and they dried up like grass, and became food for the beasts, and fuel for the fire.

❖ Eat the ashes like bread; and mingle your drink with weeping; for by such a meal you may reach the banquet of God<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ If the prophet says that he has eaten ashes like bread, and mingled his drink with weeping, What would it be for us?... Nothing is sweet anymore to my taste, neither bread, nor drink; I only long for the heavenly bread, namely for Christ<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ After so much contrition of heart, fervent prayers, and abundant flow of tears, by day and by night, saying: “*All night I make my bed swim, I drench my couch with my tears*” (Psalm 6: 6 LXX); the psalmist says again: “*I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping*” (9)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Feeling miserably after his shameful fall in adultery, David’s repentance was so genuine and true, to say: “*I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping*” (9); and: “*My knees are weak through fasting*” (Psalm 109: 24); although he heard from the prophet Nathan the words: “*The Lord has put away your sin*” (2 Samuel 12: 13)<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps 102 (101).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps 102 (101).

<sup>3</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

<sup>4</sup> Homilies on Hebr., Hom 9: 8.

❖ Although he heard such comforting words from the prophet Nathan, that “*The Lord has put away his sin*”, yet the blessed David did not stop repenting; And although he was a king, he put on sackcloth instead of the royal attire, and sat in ashes instead on his royal throne ... And he even made ashes his food, saying: “*I have eaten ashes like bread*” (9); And cleansed his lusty eyes with tears, to say: “*All night I make my bed swim, I drench my couch with my tears*” (Psalm 6: 6).

And when his servants asked him to eat bread, he did not listen to them, but stayed fasting a whole week.

If such was how a king repented, how much more is befitting of the regular person<sup>1</sup>!?

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ Not all tears come from similar feelings, nor emerge from one virtue.

a- **Tears of weeping caused by stings of our sins in our hearts**; as it is written: “*All night I make my bed swim, I drench my couch with my tears*” (Psalm 6: 6); and: “*Let tears run down like a river day and night; Give yourself no relief; Give your eyes no rest*” (Lamentations 2: 18).

b- Tears that **come together with the meditation in good things**, and the longing for the glory to come; when tears run down like a river, caused by joy that could not be suppressed, and an exultation without limit. When our souls thirst for the mighty living God, they say: “*When shall I come and appear before God; My tears have been my food day and night*” (Psalm 42: 2-3); proclaiming that with daily weeping and wailing, saying: “*Woe is me, my soul has sojourned too long*” (Psalm 120: 5).

c- Tears that run, not out of feeling of the destructive sin, **but out of fear of the coming of the horrible day of judgment** ; like when the psalmist says: “*Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous*” (Psalm 143: 2).

d- Tears that run, not because of man’s knowledge of himself, **but because of the sins and the cruelty of others**; As when the prophet Samuel wept for the sake of king Saul; ... As it came that the Lord Jesus wept for the sake of the city of Jerusalem; ... And as the prophet Jeremiah said: “*Oh, that my head is waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people*” (Jeremiah 9: 1).

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<sup>1</sup> *Against Jovinianus, Book 2: 15.*

e- The tears mentioned in psalm 102: 9: “*I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping*”, surely come out of feelings different from those mentioned in the sixth psalm, concerning a repentant man; for the later are caused by the troubles, afflictions, and looses of this life, that weighs upon the righteous in the world<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Isaac)**

***“Because of Your indignation and Your wrath; for You have lifted me up and cast me away: (10)***

A serious portrait of the feelings of someone suffering; that God has lifted him up, not to help him, and to exalt him above the temptation, but to cast him away from the height down to earth to destroy him.

❖ Man was created with honor, in the image of God; he was lifted up from the dust of the earth, got a rational soul, “*to rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the livestock over all the earth*” (Genesis 1: 26); none of which are rational, and none have been created in the image of God ; ... was given the free will; then punished by being cast away<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Let this be the cry-out of those who were once saints, then fell out of holiness; After being lifted up in virtues, they fell down from faith.... But the prayer of the labored soul is: “Lifting me up, I pray, hold me fast”<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“My days are like a shadow that lengthens; and I wither away like grass” (11)***

By sunset, the shadow becomes longer; and once the night falls, the shadow scatters, and completely comes to an end. So the psalmist feels as though the sun has set on him; and his life, like the shadow, has come to an end.

❖ If the days are like shadow, how much more would be the nights?!... If this is how the light will be, how about the darkness<sup>4</sup>?!

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ All the present facts are nothing but shadows (Wisdom 5: 9). Although they draw their origin from the goods of heavens; yet they

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<sup>1</sup> مقال :2 .12

<sup>2</sup> Cassian, Conferences 9: 29.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps 102 (101).

<sup>4</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

stay like shadows; with just a resemblance of the high things. But once the night passes by, and the dawn shines, only the high things are clearly seen; and the people would realize that “*Our days on earth are a shadow*” (Job 8: 9); and would say: “My days are like a shadow that lengthens” (11); referring to the frailty and vanity of the temporal success<sup>1</sup>.

(Nilus, bishop of Ancyra)

## 2- A COLLECTIVE WAIL:

***“But You, O Lord, shall endure forever, and the remembrance of Your name to all generations” (12)***

Together with his feeling that his life has become like a shadow that will soon disappear, the psalmist proclaims the everlasting nature of God, and that He will endure forever, worthy to be perpetually remembered by the heavenly and the earthly creatures.

❖ You are, O Lord, although You have become man, yet You endure forever; because You exalted above the sin that brings over corruption. And being God, the remembrance of Your name will endure to all generations.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

***“You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for the time to favor her, yes, the set time has come” (13)***

Some believe that, as captivity became too long, and its darkness became too dense, It was the time to realize the divine promise of return... for God used to appear in the final night-watch, when all the human arms fail, to proclaim His love, mercy, and compassion on His creation. The prophet Daniel, while still in the land of captivity, said: “*I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord, given through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolation of Jerusalem*” (Daniel 9: 2).

According to father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem, although the Word of God incarnated, suffered, and crucified; yet, having risen from the dead, He made compassion on Zion, namely on the congregation of believers.

❖ “***For the time to favor her, yes, the set time has come***”. Whether it is because of repentance, it is time for mercy, or because this verse refers to the second coming of the Savior; I wish he, who repents,

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

would have confidence, that the time for salvation has come, and that the Lord is merciful and compassionate<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“For Your servants hold her stones dear, and have pity on her dust” (14)***

Some of the captives longed for the day of their return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city of God and the holy temple. It is the cry-out of every heart, burning with the love of God, as he sees the hearts of men destroyed, longing for the coming of the kingdom of God in every man by the living and practical faith.

According to **father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem**, ‘Zion’ is the church of Christ, namely, the congregation of believers; .... Her stones are the blessed apostles and teachers, who have built her; .... Her dust are those whose behavior is downward and dust-like;.... While the servants of God who “*hold her stones dear*”, are the prophets who find pleasure in the apostles who came, bearing their same views, and bowed down to the dust-like men, for the sake of their salvation; the way a mother bows with compassion down to her children,

❖ I believe that the stones of Zion refer to all the prophets, who started the voice of preaching; followed by the service of the gospel by the apostles, through which Christ was known<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The stones are the saints; and the dust are the sinners who are in need of the mercy of the compassionate Lord<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“So the nations shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Your glory” (15)***

If the hosts of darkness assume that they are able to destroy the church of God; and even to swallow her as a torrent river; the prophet Isaiah cries out, saying: “*According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay, so shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy comes like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him*” (Isaiah 59: 18, 19).

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<sup>1</sup> Nilus of Ancyra (disciple of St. John Chrysostom): commentary on the Song of Songs 64-65.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps 102 (101).

He will truly destroy their animosity, and proclaim His fear in them; so that they will believe in Him, and will become members of His holy church.

For *“God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2: 4).

The time for compassion has come by the coming of the Lord Christ, Savior of the world, when the prophecies were revealed and realized by His coming and His salvation work. Then, the servants of the Lord rejoiced in the living stones, namely, the apostles.

As Adam was created out of dust, the creation was renewed by the coming of the Savior, and by establishing the church of the new covenant, as though out of dust. *“They had pity on her dust”* (14); A wall was built in the house of the Lord, as the dust became living stones in the house of the Lord.... Now, as the Gentiles have been drawn to faith, and had in them the fear of God, they formed a new wall joined to the first wall through the chief cornerstone (See Ephesians 2: 20).

❖ The Gentles nations that had no fear of the true God, and had no knowledge of His might; Through the preaching of the apostles, they came to know Him, were baptized, and have come to fear the Lord the fear of salvation, which is the beginning of wisdom.

All the kings of the earth; who had authority over the kingdoms; .... And also those who came to have authority over the body lusts, and the feelings of the souls, and controlled them, all came to know the glory of God. ... And in case there are some who still do not know the glory of our God, Once He comes at the end of time, there will be no one who will not behold His glory

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

*“For the Lord shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory”* (16)

The talk here came as something that has already taken place. In the midst of the sufferings, the believer proclaims that salvation is realized, the animosity came to an end, and the wicked have received faith, and have become saints.

❖ As the Hebrews, taken captives by the Babylonians, longed for their homeland, and to see the ruins that were left after the desolation of Jerusalem, supplicating to God to let them return to rebuild them and to raise His glory in them; So the human nature, taken captive by the deceiver, who destroyed its protective walls, of God’s law, and statutes, presented through His prophets, supplicated by growing

longing, seeking from God to return to what it used to be ... Our Lord, through His presence in the world in flesh, gave it back its resurrection, lifted its building, established its corners, adorned it, revealed His glory, and realized all what His friends have sought from Him for its sake, and of what He has previously promised concerning it.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ *“For the Lord shall build up Zion”* (16). This is now realized.

Oh, you living stones, hasten to build and not to destroy. ... Zion is being rebuilt; beware of the fallen down walls; ... the tower is being rebuilt in Zion; ... What is going on? *“God shall appear in His glory”* (16).... To build up Zion, and to lay down its foundation, He will appear in Zion; yet not in His glory. *“He has no form or comeliness; When we see Him, there is no beauty”* (Isaiah 53: 2). ... But *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him”*, to judge (Matthew 25: 31); those who stabbed Him will look at Him; but it will be too late for them, they will be in confusion, those who have rejected repentance<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

*“He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and shall not despise their prayer”* (17)

Here, the psalmist says with surety; that God has already regarded the destitute, who suffers from deprivation; and He has responded to his prayer.

There is great difference between the feelings of the psalmist at the beginning of his prayer, and his feelings in the middle of it. At the beginning, feeling that God hid His face from him, he cried out to Him to incline His ear to listen to the cry-outs of his heart. But now, he feels that he is resting his head on the chest of God, who responded to his prayers.

❖ I mean to say that God has granted the world salvation through the supplication of His godly men, who say: *“Hasten, O Lord, and visit the Gentiles with Your mercy”*

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

*“This will be written for the generation to come; that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord”* (18)

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 28 on Ps 101 (102).

Instead of crying out to God, he now proclaims that, what he wishes for is not to enjoy salvation from affliction, but that the generations to come would praise Him, remembering His previous dealings with His church along the eras.

❖ I mean to say that this psalm, and the rest of the prophecies of the prophets, are kept in record to be told to the generation to come, the generation that will believe in Christ, according to the words of the apostle Peter in His first epistle, saying: *“Of this salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you; searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven”* (1 Peter 1: 10-12)... Namely, the generation of believers, those circumcised and the Gentiles, whose creation has been renewed by Christ.

By saying: *“the people yet to be created”*, refers to our re-creation through the holy baptism, and moving from the earthly creation to the higher spiritual creation.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

***“For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary. From heaven, the Lord viewed the earth”* (19)**

What preoccupies God’s mind in His heavens is the suffering and humble: *“For on this one will I look; on him who is poor, and of contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word”* (Isaiah 66: 2).

***“To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those appointed to death”* (20)**

Having created man with a holy free will, God wishes to keep granting him the freedom, even after man has corrupted it through his own will. He hears the groaning of every captive, chained by anxiety, sin, the captivity of the devil, or the eternal death.. In Isaiah it came: *“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand; 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). And, *“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, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages; that You may say to the prisoners: 'Go forth', to those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves' (Isaiah 49: 8-9).*

He heard, namely, He responded to the sighs and the groaning of those shackled by the chains of the captivity of the devil, saying: *"To loose those appointed to death"*; namely, mankind on whom death prevailed; For those who believed in Christ, and were loosed of their captivity, were the children of those who died while still in non-belief.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

***"To declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem" (21)***

Preaching in the name of the Lord, is to the account of humanity, to exult and rejoice in Him, singing *"His praise in Jerusalem"*.

***"When the peoples are gathered together, and the kingdoms to serve the Lord" (22)***

The psalmist started by crying out to the Lord to save him from affliction; but as the Lord heard his prayer, he now presents to Him his heart's desire, that the nations and the peoples would receive faith in the Savior. He supplicates, not only to liberate the people from the Babylonian captivity, but to liberate all humanity from the captivity of the devil.

### **3- MORE PERSONAL WAIL:**

***"He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days" (23)***

Men of the old covenant have longed so fervently for the coming of the Savior of the world, that they became frail; or as expressed by the bride of the song, saying: *"I am lovesick"* (Song 2: 5; 5: 8).

***"I said, 'O my God, do not take me away in the midst of my days; Your years are throughout all generations" (24)***

These are the groaning of the church, not because of persecution, but for the sake of her longing for the Lord Christ to come to find the whole world sanctified, to enjoy the eternal life.

According to **the scholar Origen**, this request by the psalmist does not bear a wish for a long life in the world, but bears an exalted spiritual concept. He seeks from God to let His grace work in him to fulfill the mission He entrusted him with; for by that he would consummate his days.... The children of Bethlehem, although killed at an early age, yet they are counted as have consummated their time in peace; Whereas some elders, like the two high priests 'Annas', and

‘Caiaphas’, despite their exalted position, and their advanced age, yet they did not consummate their days.

❖ Because the ‘consummation of days’ is counted as the fulfillment of the mission, and the realization of virtues, the psalmist says: “***Do not take me away in the midst of my days***” (24). ... The Holy Book testifies to ‘Abraham’, the great father of fathers, that “*he died full of years*” (Genesis 25: 8); ... And the apostle Paul says: “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race*” (2 Timothy 4: 7). And finally he is called from this world, to the blessing to come, to the perfection of the eternal life, to the crown of righteousness, prepared by the Lord for those who love Him (2 Timothy 4: 8; James 1: 12) <sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ Promising those who serve Him in truth, God says to them: “*I will fulfill the number of your days*” (Exodus 23: 26). “*Abraham died full of years*”; ... David sought from the Lord, “*Do not take me away in the midst of my days*” (24); ... Aliphaz, one of Job’s friends, being sure of this fact, says: “*You shall come to the grave at full age, as a sheaf of grain ripens in its season*” (Job 5: 26); ... And confirming these words, Solomon says: “*The years of the wicked will be shortened*” (Proverb 10: 26); and. “*Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish; why should you die before your time?*” (Ecclesiastes 7: 17) <sup>2</sup>.

**(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)**

#### **4- A CONCLUSION PRAISE:**

***“Of old, You laid foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands” (25)***

The apostle Paul perceived that these words (25-27) concern the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ (See Hebrews 1: 10-12).

❖ He talks about the Son, as the Creator, which is usually said about the Father. Anyway it concerns any of the Two<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ God Himself says: “*All those things my hand has made*” (Isaiah 66: 2); ... David sings: “***Of old, You laid the foundation of the earth***” (25); and he also says: “*I remember the old days, I meditate in all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands*” (Psalm 143: 5). ... Now, if it is the hand of God that made all those works; according to

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps 102 (101).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Genesis, 15: 6.

<sup>3</sup> Defense of His Flight, 14.

what is written: “*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*” (John 1: 3); and: “*There is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things*” (1 Corinthians 8: 6); and also: “*In Him all things consist*” (Colossians 1: 17), It is therefore obvious that the Son is not “work” but He, Himself, is God and His Wisdom<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

***“They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, all of them will grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them” (26)***

- ❖ Quoting the words of David in Psalm 102: 25-27, Paul also said: “*They will perish, but You will remain*” (Hebrew 1: 11). ... But if all the works of creation will completely perish, the non-perishable paradise will therefore perish as well. It is clear, according to some, that all the works of creation will be renewed for our sake, and will not perish as others say<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)**

- ❖ Listen to the prophet David say: “*Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; They will perish, but You will endure*” (25), 26). To realize the meaning of saying “*they will perish*”, he adds: “*All of them will grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them*”<sup>3</sup> (26).

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ He probably intends to talk to us about the resurrection, when we shall change, yet to the better; to a spiritual body; as it is said: “*It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body*” (1 Corinthians 15: 43, 44).

All the physical creation will also change together with us, for “*Heaven will perish, but You will endure; Yes, all of them will grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will change them*” (26). In that day, the light of the sun will be doubled seven times, according to the words of Isaiah: “*The light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days*” (Isaiah 30: 26)

**(St. Basil the Great)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies in St. John* 5: 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Four Discourses against the Arians*, 2: 21 (71).

<sup>3</sup> مقال 15: 3.

- ❖ Jesus has washed His garment, not of stains belonging to Him, but of stains that belong to us; ... Jacob says: “*He washes His garment in wine, and His robe in the blood of grapes*” (Genesis 49: 11); Namely, in His passion, He washed the nations by His blood. Yes, the garment here, represents the nations; according to what is written: “*You shall surely clothe Yourself with them all as a cloak*” (Isaiah 49: 18); and David said: “*Like a cloak You will change them, and they will be changed*” (26) <sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ The cloak truly refers to the nations; as it is written: “*As I live, says the Lord, You shall surely clothe Yourself with them all as a cloak*” (Isaiah 49: 18); and also: “*Like a garment You will change and wash them; not because of sins on Your part, as You are without sin, but because our own iniquities*”<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

***“But You are the same, and Your years will have no end” (27)***

- ❖ The divine essence exalts above all changes; for there is nothing better to reach; ... No, I shall not say ‘nothing equal, or even close... if He may change, it has to be to what is less (for if there is anything more exalted, He would not, therefore, be God) <sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“The children of Your servants will continue; and their descendants will be established before You” (28)***

About that holy seed: “*His seed shall endure forever, and His throne as the sun before Me*” (Psalm 89: 36).

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<sup>1</sup>*The Patriarchs, 4: 24.*

<sup>2</sup>*The Patriarchs, 4: 24.*

<sup>3</sup>*Homilies in St. John 11: 2.*

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 102

### I AM POOR, I HAVE NO SUPPORT, BUT FROM YOU

- ❖ My depths groan within me;  
I am poor, I have no one to support me but You;  
For my sake, O Rich, You have become poor;  
So that, by Your poverty, You make me rich; and need nothing.
- ❖ Incline Your ear to me, and hear my prayers;  
You alone, hear the cries of my heart;  
The smoke of my sins has blinded my eyes, corrupted my life; and dried my bones.
- ❖ Amid my sufferings, my heart has completely dried up;  
I forgot to eat even my necessary bread;  
I got so frail that my bones cling to my skin;  
You are the living bread who restore my health;  
You are both the Physician and the medication;  
Grant me to enjoy Your presence and Your dwelling in me.
- ❖ Being deserted by all, I became like a pelican in the wilderness;  
And am disturbed by the voice of the owl inside me;  
I became like a lone sparrow on the rooftop;  
Let them all desert me; but Your presence will fill up every void in me;  
Let the enemies reproach me; Your grace is enough for me.
- ❖ Take Your indignation and Your wrath away from me, for I wither away like grass;  
Have compassion on me, to restore me to life.
- ❖ Look at Your church;  
I confess that I, and all the household of my father, have sinned;  
Rise up, O heavenly Groom;  
Take away from us our sins, and the defilements of our hearts;  
And, by Your Holy Spirit, restore us to You.
- ❖ Look at the vine, planted by Your right hand;  
Look down from heaven; for she anticipates Your coming;  
Hear her hidden groaning;  
Turn her lamentations into joyful praises;  
Adorn her with Your Holy Spirit, to testify to You;  
To draw a multitude to the sweetness of Your gospel;

So that the earth would become a heaven that testifies to You;  
When shall I see all mankind attached to You?!

## ***PSALM 103***

### **BLESSED ARE YOU, O MERCIFUL LORD**

The prophet David wrote this psalm while (swimming) in a (wave) of exalted love, and great mercy of God. Here He provides us with his joyful experience with God, the Forgiver of sins, who crowns His believers with mercy and compassion.

This psalm is seen by some as an incomparable praise for God, among all the literature of the world; and many believe that it is a magnificent piece of poetry, packed with flaring feelings of faith; and reveals a heart filled with faith, that touches the exalted mercies of God, which concern both our temporal life and our eternal destiny.

This psalm is a praise of thanksgiving, presented by the believer who is faithful in his life in every era, who experiences the sweetness of salvation.

This psalm calls on us to offer the sacrifice of praise to the Lord, being the Creator, and the merciful Savior; and presents certain causes that motivate us to praise; some of which are personal experience of the author himself, namely, the prophet David; some concern the dealings of God with His people; and some others concern the mercies of God on all creation.... The psalmist believes that God is worthy of praise by all creation, for He pours His mercies over all.

The Jews used to sing this psalm in all their worships; and the Orthodox Jews still use it in their feasts and special occasions.

#### **The occasion of writing this psalm:**

According to the **Syrian version**, David wrote this psalm in His old age; presenting it as a fatherly commandment to believers as his children, to practice the life of praise for God. And according to the **Chaldean version**, this psalm is prophetic, as it exhorts us to get in touch with the salvation work of Christ, long prophesied by prophets, and desired with joy and exultation.

<b>1- “Bless the Lord, O my soul”</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2- An exalted salvation</b>	<b>3 - 7</b>
<b>3- God, the wholly Merciful</b>	<b>8 - 18</b>
<b>4- The divine throne</b>	<b>19 – 22</b>

#### **1- “BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL”:**

Although It is a personal praise and a thanksgiving sacrifice, yet it is not a private one; as the psalmist desires it to be presented by every believer, to enjoy the life of praise, which fills the soul with gladness.

Praise for the Lord's mercies.

**A psalm of David.**

***“Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless His wholly name” (1)***

The word ***“Bless”***, and its derivatives, came six times in this psalm.

According to **St. Augustine**, the expression ***“All that is within me”***, is a repetition of his saying ***“my soul”***. The psalmist does not mean his internal body organs like the liver or the lungs, etc. but what is inside his soul.

❖ When you come to the church, your voice would recite praises to God, and sing as much as you can....Leaving the church, your soul will not cease reciting praises for God.... Getting preoccupied with Your daily work, let your soul praise God. ... Even while eating your food; remember the words of the apostle, saying: ***“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”*** (1 Corinthians 10: 31). ...I even dare to say, when you sleep, let your soul praise God. Do not let the thoughts of foolishness stir up in you; but let the voice of your soul, even while sleeping, be righteousness<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” (2)***

The dealing of God with man, even in the moments of chastisement, flow with mercies and benefits. It would be difficult for man to present a list of all God's benefits on him, or on humanity as a whole.

❖ God's benefits would not be before your eyes, unless your sins are. ... Do not allow the pleasure of a previous sin to be before your eyes, but rather let its condemnation be ... Let the condemnation be from your side, so that the forgiveness be on God's side. For by that, God will reward you, then you will say: ***“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?”*** (Psalm 116: 12) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

❖ How great are all what we see! ... God created us, Conformed us to be born, to live, to move, and to recognize our Creator... He privileged us over the beasts of burden, created with their heads bowed toward the ground; Whereas He created us upright, with our heads looking up toward heaven.... How great are all that! ... But what is greater is that, for our sake He was born! ... How?! ... He, *“Being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2: 6-8).... Having been submitted to death because of our sins, He intended to die on behalf of us, the mortals, so that we would have life back through Him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

### 1- AN EXALTED SALVATION:

The salvation work starts by the forgiveness of sins, the believer would enjoy the healing of the soul from its wounds, would not stumble on the way, and would not fall into the hidden snares set by the enemy; but would enjoy the work of the Holy Spirit who perpetually renews his depths; and would be supported by the Lord in the midst of the oppression and the opposition of the wicked.

*“Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases”*

(3)

God’s benefits start by His longsuffering as the Forgiver of sins and transgressions; And together with the forgiveness, He heals the wounds caused by sins in the life of man, especially in his depths. God intends to keep on renewing our inner life, to pour non-corruption on us, instead of the corruption that has dwelt upon us. Being the Physician of souls and bodies, He works for the sake of our enjoyment of the glorified eternal life, body and soul.

❖ Now, listen to His benefits: *“Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases”*... What does the sinner deserve, except to be punished?! ... What does the blasphemer deserve, except to go hell?! ... He grants you these benefits, so that you do not get terrified, and fear Him without love ... Being a sinner, return again, and receive His benefits. *“He forgives all your iniquities”* ... Yet, after forgiving

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 29 on ps. 102 (103).

your iniquities, your soul may be shaken by certain lusts, and would still be in danger of temptation, Yet “*He heals all your diseases*”; He heals all your weaknesses; Do not then, get terrified!... Yes, they are great weaknesses; but the Physician is greater. No weakness put before the able Physician that is un-healable! ... You have just to allow yourself to get healed; Do not resist His hands; for He knows how to deal with you!. ... Do not be pleased only when He spoils you, but endure Him when He holds the knife! ... Endure the pain of treatment; for it has to do with your future<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*Who heals all your diseases*”. Our souls are infected by several diseases; as many as our sins. It is for the sake of teaching us, what came in the gospel concerning the woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, was bent over, and could in no way raise herself up (Luke 13: 11)

Perceive the significance of what the gospel says: When someone has a disease caused by a spirit of infirmity, he would be, bent over and would look downward to the ground, and would in no way raise himself up to look at heaven<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ We should remember, and never forget five things:

1- **God has forgiven our sins** (3); ... According to what is written by the apostle: “*Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God passed over the sins that were previously committed*” (Romans 3: 24, 25).

2- **God healed our spiritual and physical ailments** (3).

1- **God saved us from corruption** (4); by His resurrection from the dead. That does not mean, that He saved us from death, which is the departure of the soul from the body, but our Lord, Glory be to Him, has granted us the way to be healed from another death, entailing the departure of the soul from the eternal life, namely, from going down to perdition and hell

4- **God crowned us by a great gift**; to be the children of God through adoption; a crown described by the apostle, saying: “*I have*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 29 on ps. 102 (103).

*fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge will give to me on that day, and not to me only, but to all who have loved His appearance” (2 Timothy 4: 7, 8).* Such a crown is woven with God’s mercy and compassion.

5- **God filled us with the spiritual goods**, desired by the righteous (5), which is to become gods; a lust by which the deceiver has seduced Adam to eat from the fruit He forbade him to eat.. Therefore, God has granted us deity, and made us His partners through the holy grace of baptism, by which the nature of man is renewed, his ancient worn-out man is taken away, and he is clothed by the new man. Like the eagle, that gets rid of the old feathers, and develops new ones, the soul will be granted to become a queen, reigning upon the desires of the body, to fly high toward the high heaven.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ Our Lord and Savior is the true and perfect Physician, who grants healing to the body, and gives back health to the soul<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Khromatius)**

❖ Let us hasten to receive the heavenly Manna, that gives every mouth the taste it desires. Let us listen to what the Lord Himself says to whoever approaches Him: *“As you have believed, so let it be done to you”* (Matthew 8: 13)... If you receive the Word of God you hear in the church with complete faith and piety, these word said by the Lord will be yours. As an example:

If you are sad, He will comfort you by saying: *“A broken and a contrite heart, these, O God, You will not despise”* (psalm 51: 17)

If you hope with joy for the future, He will increase your joy, when you hear the words: *“Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous”* (Psalm 32: 11).

If you are angry, you will calm down when you hear: *“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath”* (Psalm 37: 8).

If you suffer from an ailment, you will be healed when you hear: *“He will heal all your diseases”* (3).

If you are crushed by poverty, you will have comfort when you hear: *“The Lord who lifts the poor from the dust, and lifts the miserable from the trash”*.(Psalm 103).

Therefore, the Manna given to you by the Word of God, will be in your mouth, with the taste you choose.

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<sup>1</sup> Tractate of Matthew 16: 4.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ In such a struggle, the conquest will be great, not just for a limited time, but forever; for the disease will not only come to an end, but will never come again (there in eternity). The righteous will hear himself saying: ***“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases”*** (Psalm 103: 2-3).

He is the forgiver of our iniquities; and the Healer of our diseases, through controlling our evil lusts. He forgives our iniquities through the gift of forgiveness, and heals our diseases through chastity. The former is enjoyed by the catechumens through baptism; and the later is executed through the struggle of those who strive, who conquer through His grace. One happens when God hears our supplication: ***“Lead us not into temptation”***; as, according to the apostle James, ***“Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed”***. Against such a thing we ask God for a cure, for He is capable of healing from every disease. Therefore, all who hear this should cry out to God, saying: ***“I said, Lord, be merciful to me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against You”*** (Psalm 41: 4). For, there would not be a need for healing of the soul, unless it is corrupted by the commitment of sin<sup>1</sup>.

❖ In every sin, no doubt, there is some work of lust against Christ; but when He ***“who heals all our diseases”***, leads His church to the promised healing, then there would be no wrinkle nor defilement in any of our body members.

Then, because the body will never desire against the spirit, there will be no need for the spirit to desire against the body. That kind of controversy will come to an end, and there will be harmony between the two elements (the spirit and the body) on the highest level. There will be no one carnal; to the extent that the body itself will be spiritual

What he does, concerning his body, he who lives according to Christ, is that he desires against the evil lust itself, he resists it to be healed. Although he may not be healed yet, for the lust is still in him, yet he will be dealing gently and flirting with the good nature of the body; ***“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church”*** (Ephesians 5: 29). He applies the pressure of rebuke against her, to keep her from becoming proud through exaltation; and He lifts her up by comforts, lest she would fall down to the pit through weaknesses, according to the words of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Contenance, 16.*

apostle: *“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world”* (1 Corinthians 11: 31-32); the way it also came in the psalm, saying: *“In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul”* (Psalm 94: 19) <sup>1</sup>.

❖ Surely, **the renewal of the inner man would not be realized in a single moment**, once he receives faith. It is not the same like the renewal by the spiritual baptism, which happens at the very instant of receiving the forgiveness of our sins, when everything against us is taken away; and no transgression remains without forgiveness (Psalm 103: 12).

Healing from fever is one thing, and restoration of health after suffering so much weakness is something else.

**Taking the spear out of the body is one thing, and healing from the deadly wound by long treatment and intensive care is something else.**

Taking the cause out is just the first step of treatment. This first step by which you care to heal yourself, is the moment you are forgiven your sins.

Besides, there is need for healing from the spiritual illness itself, which is realized gradually day after day.; **through wiping out the image of the fallen man within, and its renewal according to the image of God.**

Both processes are included in the same verse (Psalm 103: 3), in which the psalmist refers:

1- To Him who **forgives your sins**; This is realized in baptism through the mercy of God.

2- We read that He **Himself heals your diseases**; Here he talks about the daily progress, by which the image of God grows strongly in us.

(St. Augustine)

*“Who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies”* (4)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: *“Who redeems your life from corruption”*.

Corruption dwelt upon us through sin; Whereas our enjoyment of non-corruption and the eternal glory will be realized through the mercy and the salvation work of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 29 on ps. 102 (103).

❖ *“Who redeems your life from destruction”. “You were bought at a price; Do not become a slave of men” (1 Corinthians 7: 23).*

What could be a greater price than when the Creator sheds His blood for the sake of His creation?!

*“Who crown you with loving kindness and tender mercies”.* Saving you, He crowns you.

He grants you a crown; not for your worthiness, but for the sake of His compassion and loving kindness.

*“For You, O Lord, with favor You will (crown) the righteous with a shield” (see psalm 5: 12).*

Notice what he says: “For You, O Lord, with favor, You crown us with a shield”. You may wonder: Could one be crowned with a shield? crowning is usually with flowers or gold; and not with a shield!... The shield of the Lord is a crown, for He surrounds us with His care and defends us. That is how He crowns us.... The *“loving kindness and the tender mercies”* in this psalm, refer to what the shield means in another psalm<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ *“Who redeems your life from corruption”....* Think about your health... If your body weakness confirms that you are ill, take care of yourself. ... Christ is your health; Think about Him. Receive the cup of His faithful health. *“He who heals all your weaknesses”*. If you acquire such health (the Lord Christ), your life will be redeemed from corruption ... *“He who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies”*. ... When you probably start to feel somewhat haughty, listen to the words: *“He who crowns you”* <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ It is the mercy that sets priests out of men.

Yes, It is a priesthood that brings forth a great reward. The merciful man (the priest) is not clothed with a robe that goes down to his feet, carries no bells of gold, and puts no crown on his head, But he is girded with the garment of love and compassion, which is holier than the holy garment.

He is anointed with oil, not made of material ingredients, but of the produce of the Spirit ...

He carries the crowns of mercies, as it is written: *“He crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies”* (4).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

<sup>2</sup> In 2 Cor. Hom. 20 (P. G 61: 540).

Instead of the breastplate that carries the name of God, he himself will become like God; according to the words of the Lord Himself, saying: “*To be like Your Father in heaven*” <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom).**

***‘Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s’ (5)***

God alone is the wholly Good, namely, the unchangeable goodness; Whereas the goodness of man changes from man to man, and from time to time. If we wish to have the true goodness, it would be befitting of us to acquire God Himself, the Source of goodness.

There are several and amazing things said about the renewal of the eagle’s youth.... Like many birds, it enjoys every year a new set of feathers which renew its energies.... It lives the longest among the birds.... It is blessed with a sharp sight, by which it is able to see the tiniest objects from up high; ... And it is said that it suffers no weakness in its old age, .. The eagle is actually counted as the king of birds (See Exodus 19: 4; Deuteronomy 28: 49; Proverbs 30: 19; Isaiah 40: 31; Jeremiah 4: 13; Habakkuk 1: 8).

❖ The righteous who lives by faith, certainly has hope in the eternal life; the faith by which the hungry and the thirsty to righteousness, progress through the renewal of their inner selves day by day (2 Corinthians 4: 16); and by which the righteous hopes to be satisfied in the eternal life, where, what is written in the psalm: “*Who satisfies your mouth with good things*” (5), is realized<sup>2</sup>..

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ They were called ‘eagles’ on account of that their youth is renewed like the eagle’s; and of that they are provided with wings to fly up to reach the passions of Christ<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ The Lord says: “*Arise, let us go from here*” (John 14: 31); Namely, let us depart from the things of this generation and world;; teaching every one of us to (arise) from the earth, and to lift his soul, lying on earth, to the high up things; He calls him his eagle, saying: “*so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s*” <sup>4</sup> (5)

**(St. Ambrose)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Letter & Spirit*, 56.

<sup>2</sup> *PL 23: 179*.

<sup>3</sup> *Death as a Good*, 5: 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Prayer of David 4: 9: 35*.

❖ David is right to cry out as someone whose youth is renewed. He says: *“Then I will go to the altar of God; to God my Exceeding joy, and on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God”* (Psalm 43: 4). He also said: *“My eye wastes away because of grief, it grows old because of all my enemies”* (Psalm 6: 7); but here he says that he has his youth renewed after being old and falling... And in another text he says: *“Your youth is renewed like the eagle’s”* (5). ...

We are being renewed by the renewal of baptism, and through the pouring of the Holy Spirit; And we shall be further renewed by the resurrection.

To know the way we shall be renewed, read: *“Wash me and I will be whiter than snow”* (Psalm 51: 7); And in Isaiah: *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow “* (Isaiah 1: 18).... He who changes from the darkness of sin to the light of virtue and to grace, is already renewed. That is why, he who has been previously defiled with uncleanness, shines now whiter than snow<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ It is well known, O brethren, that each one of us seeks his comfort and pleasure, yet he does not seek them as he should, It all depends on the discernment of the true pleasure from the false one, and vice versa; as we often are deceived by vain pleasure and false good.

The mean, the haughty, the greedy, and the lustful man, all seek pleasure; yet one seek it in gathering riches, another in honors of high ranks, another in enjoyable kinds of food and drinks, and another in satisfying himself with defiled lusts. As none of them seeks his pleasure as he should, none of them will find it, although many desire it.

As all what is in the world, are not enough to satisfy the soul, or to provide her with true pleasure, why then would you labor, O foolish man, and wander around in many places, expecting to find goods that would satisfy your soul and body?

You should rather seek the One, who has all the goods; as in Him you would find your satisfaction.

Seek comfort in the One, great, and general Goodness; for in Him you will find satisfaction of everything!

As for you, *“O my soul, bless the Lord, who satisfies your mouth with good things”* (1-5).

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

❖ Asked by a brother about the interpretation of the verse, saying: “*Who renews your youth like the eagle’s*”, St. Maccari answered: [Like the gold is renewed through being put in the heat of a furnace, So is the soul, if she has of the virtue that could purify her of her defilements, to be renewed and to fly high up]. And when the brother asked him: [‘What does flying up high mean?], he said: [Like the eagle, if it flies high up, it would be saved from the snares of the fowler; while, on the ground it would probably falls in them; So is the soul, if she slothfully descends down from the heights of virtue, she would fall into the snares of the fowler of the spirits].

**(Paradise of the fathers)**

***“The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed” (6)***

In the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “***The Lord who makes mercy and judgment to all those oppressed***”.

As the true believers in all eras live in troubles, and are subject to oppression and affliction, the Holy Book confirms that the Lord, for their sake, executes righteousness (mercy) and justice at the same time. Many may assume that there is some contradiction between mercy and justice; But God, is wholly merciful in His justice, and wholly just in His mercy. In His love for mankind, He is longsuffering and compassionate, with the hope that all would eventually return to Him, to enjoy the crowns and the blessings through His judgment and justice.

According to **St. Augustine**, When an adulteress was brought to the Lord Christ to be stoned to death according to the law (John 8), she stood before the Author of the law, who bowed to write something on the dust of the ground, by which those who seized her discovered what truly lie in their own adulterous consciences; and were embarrassed and retreated.... So it is befitting of us to treat the sinners, and to support them, not as being sinful, but as being humans who are in need of those who support them against sin. We should receive the sinners, not as sinners, lest we would perish, but in the name of the Savior of the sinners, so that they would enjoy mercy, and be justified in judgment, by Him who forgives and justifies.

Let us present to the sinners the divine mercy, so as to enjoy it ourselves.

***“He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel” (7)***

God delivered His law to Moses, and revealed to him His divine plan, not to judge and condemn, but for all to perceive their need for the Savior, the divine Physician, full of love.

❖ **“He made known His ways to Moses”** ...For such a purpose He gave the law: for the sick to recognize his weakness and seek the Physician ... to receive the grace of healing<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ **The ways of God** are the works of mercy and judgment for all the oppressed. For He made mercy and judgment for His people, when He rescued them from Pharaoh, and destroyed their enemies. He made them known to Moses, and through him to the children of Israel. **His will** (His works) are His commandments: Do not kill; do not steal, do not commit adultery, etc.

His ways and His will, are also the works of incarnation, made by the Son of God for the sake of our salvation; For crossing over the sea has been a symbol of our baptism; ... And the water that flowed from the rock and satisfied the thirsty, has been a symbol of the precious blood that flowed from the body of our Lord, and gave us life; ... And the manna that came down from heaven, has been a symbol of our spiritual food. All those were ways to our salvation, made known to Moses and the children of Israel by the symbol; namely, to the prophets, the seers of God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## **GOD THE WHOLLY MERCIFUL:**

This section includes a meditation in the Mosaic era (Exodus 34: 6-7), and in the prophetic preaching (Hosea 11: 1; Isaiah 1: 2-4; Jeremiah 3: 4, 19; 4: 22).

**“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy” (8)**

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the Lord made His ways known to Moses, when he stood alone at the head of the mountain, and *“God descended in the cloud and stood with him there, passed before him and proclaimed: ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; ....Before all your people I will do marvels, ... and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord; for it is an*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

*awesome thing that I will do with you*” (Exodus 34). ... That was what God made known to Moses: to perceive that God will take a body, and be seen; so that the people will return to Him and will not perish.

According to **St. Augustine**, it is befitting of us not to misunderstand the long-suffering of God, and not to be like the raven which was sent by Noah out of the ark and did not return. It went out crying ‘Gras!’, ‘Gras’, namely (Tomorrow!), (Tomorrow!); ... and kept crying out, postponing his return to the bosom of God; and for it, tomorrow never came.

***“He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever” (9)***

God is the Judge of the earth, and a Father, merciful, gracious, long-suffering, and opens up the doors of His mercies, to prepare the faithful souls for glory on the great day of the Lord.

***“He has not dealt with us according to our sins; nor punished us according to our iniquities” (10)***

If our sins are many and extremely heavy, Yet God in His long-suffering, even while chastising, seeks our comfort and peace, and not our recompense.

❖ Thanks be to God, for not dealing with us as we deserve, ***“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities”***<sup>1</sup>

(St. Augustine)

***“For as heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him” (11)***

The Holy Book confirms the greatness of God’s graciousness and compassion (Psalm 36: 5; 57: 10; 108: 4; Isaiah 55: 7-9).

This analogy, revealing the limitless exalted compassion of God, and His great might of salvation, lifts the soul from the dust up to heaven.

❖ Notice how heaven (the sky) covers the earth on all sides; with no place on earth that heaven does not cover. While humans commit sins and iniquities under heaven; heaven keeps covering them up; ... From it the eyes enjoy light, we get air to breathe, and rain for the fruits to grow. ... From heaven we get mercy and help; which if taken away from the earth, the later will collapse right away. ... As the protection of heaven covers the earth, so the protection of God dwells

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

upon those who fear Him. You fear God; You may suffer, and assume that God has forgotten you; ... God may forget you, if heaven ceases to protect the earth<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The riches of God's mercy becomes clear when He proclaims it upon those forsaken by men, and trodden under their feet; upon those who put their hope, not in their riches, nor in their own strength, but in the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ The holy words of the Song of songs bear some hidden thoughts, as though they are covered by a thick veil; and are difficult to understand. We should give more care to the text; and seek help from God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer, that their meanings are not lost from us. The way he who seeks the knowledge of the stars of heaven; Although we keep enjoying their beauty; yet we wonder how they were created, how they give light, how they glitter and twinkle, and how they fill the eyes of the soul with light. ... The prophet says: "*As heaven is above the earth...*" (11). If this is the place where our soul will ascend; as it was in the case of Elijah; where our minds will be taken up to the beauty of heaven, in a fiery chariot (1 Kings 2: 11); and we understand that the fiery chariot is the Holy Spirit, who came down to grant Himself to those dwelling on earth, in the form of tongues of fire, divided on the disciples; We shall not despair of approaching the stars, or searching the holy things that shine their light upon our souls by the spiritual heavenly words of God<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

- ❖ Responding to those who got depressed, and came to him saying: "*The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me*", the prophet says: "*Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb?*" (Isaiah 49: 14, 15).. As though he says: As a mother would never forget her nursing child, God would rather never forget humanity. By this the prophet does not mean to compare God's love for men to the mother's love for the son of her womb; but that, although the mother's love for her nursing child surpasses all other loves; yet God's love is greater!

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Rom. 9: 23.

<sup>2</sup> عظة 10 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

<sup>3</sup> العناية الإلهية للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، ترجمة عابدة بسطا.

The Lord of the prophets, and the Lord of all, confirms that His love surpasses that of the father and mother for their children; and the love of man for his beloved; the way light surpasses darkness, and good surpasses evil... The prophet David says: “*As the heavens are above the earth, so great is God’s mercy toward those who fear Him*” (11)

The way man, in his love, would frantically recall all the words he uttered, for fear that he might have said something that would hurt the feelings of his beloved, So the Lord says: “*My heart churns within me, My sympathy is stirred; I will not again execute the fierceness of My anger*” (Hosea 11: 8-9). God does not refrain from using such a human expression to proclaim His love for His beloved creatures.

The works of God’s care are shining more than the sun. By mentioning the examples of the father, the mother, the groom, and the lover who fears, lest he would hurt the feelings of his beloved, even by a single word; God intends to confirm that His love differs from all kinds of other loves, the way good differs from evil<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“*As far as the east from the west, So far has (God) removed our transgressions from us*” (12)**

The way man cannot measure the distance between the east and the west, God takes away from us our transgressions, in a way difficult for us to describe or to put into human accounts.

The way the east and the west will never meet in one point, so God’s mercies can take away our transgressions from us eternally; as though there is, and never has been, any relation between us.

According to the church tradition in the east, as well as in the west, when denying the devil, together with his evil hosts and works, the one to be baptized, together with his godfather look toward the west. Then when confessing the Holy Trinity, they turn their faces toward the east. That is why **St. Augustine** asks us to keep looking toward the east, seeking from the grace of God to shine upon us, and abide in us forever; and to turn our backs to the west, proclaiming our total rejection of the devil and his works; so that our sins would (set) and forsake us with no return.

❖ It is befitting of us to look at the east, and turn our backs to the west; to forsake our sins, and to return to the grace of God; For, once our sins fall down from us, we would be lifted up... Let our sins, then, fall down; and let the grace of God abide in us forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 226: 3.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The human mind could not find an analogy of the mercy of God over those who fear Him, more fitting than to compare it to how heaven is high above the earth; and to how east is far from the west. It also likens the virtues to heaven and to the east, because of their high status and their light; contrary to the iniquities.. Whoever fears God and avoids iniquities, would rise up to heaven, reach the east, where God has established His paradise; enjoy the light of the glory of God, acquire the Son, and enjoy seeing Him.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Keep away, then, from the west, and head to the east. Remember one man, in whom both ‘Saul’ and ‘Paul’ were -- Saul in the west, and Paul in the east; a persecutor in the west, and a preacher in the east; an ancient man in he west, and a new man in the east<sup>1</sup>.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

*“As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear Him” (13)*

The fear of God would never bring us forth into a condition of terror, but rather into the taste of the compassionate fatherhood of God; As according to the Lord Christ: *“What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone. Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?”* (Matthew 7: 9-11).

❖ Let God then, be angry as much as He intends to be; for He is our Father. Let Him chasten us and allow us to grieve, and let Him wound us; for He is our Father. .. O son, if you wail, do that under the eyes of your Father; do not do it with malice, nor with the haughtiness of pride; for the sorrow you suffer is a medication and not a punishment. Therefore, do not reject chastisement, if you wish to have the inheritance. Do not think of the punishment while suffering from chastisement; but rather think of the place which you have in the covenant of God<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

<sup>2</sup> Paedagogus, 1: 8.

- ❖ He reveals to us His fatherly love; for he remembers for sure how He created us out of dust; how He has got our nature of dust, over the Person of His deity; and how He experienced our weakness.

**(Father Onesimus, of Jerusalem)**

*“For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust”*

**(14)**

In His love, God deals with us according to our weakness; For He knows that we are dust, who need to be raised up from it.

- ❖ It is rather more befitting of the psalmist to pray with such words as: “Remember that we are dust”; Namely, [Commiserate with us; as having Yourself a personal experience of the extent of suffering because of the weakness of the body]. ...

That is why the Lord is good, trustworthy, and commiserates with us; out of His great love for mankind<sup>1</sup>.

**(St, Clement of Alexandria)**

- ❖ The prophet Jeremiah, likewise, attempting to seek forgiveness for the sinners, says: “*O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name’s sake*” (Jeremiah 14: 7); and, “*O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*” (Jeremiah 10: 23); And the prophet David says: “*Remember that we are dust*” (14).

Those who supplicate for the sake of the sinners, when they find no good thing to say in their favor, they diligently seek any shadow of excuse for them, even if it is not literally or Theologically true; for that would probably be a kind of comfort for those who mourn the arrogance of the sinners. ... You should therefore not literally read their words; but rather take them as coming out of a bitter soul, seeking to save the sinners; and a just verdict in their favor<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ “*For He knows our frame*”. He knows what He has created; how they would fall, how to mend their ways, and how to adopt them<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ In His mercy, He would look at our weakness, and “*remember that we are dust*” (14); For He is the One who created man out of dust and gave him life; And for the sake of His earthen handwork, He

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<sup>1</sup> في مديح القديس بولس، 3.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 7: 13.

delivered His Son to death. ... Who then, could explain; And who would be worthy to perceive the extent of His love for us<sup>1</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

❖ Why have You forgotten me?... Why have You rejected me?... God would never forget; and it is not possible for Him to forget; For all the past, present, and future events are before His eyes; Yet, for “*God knows His own*” (2 Timothy 2: 19), our sins led Him to wipe out those unworthy of His visit; And when some commit evil, He says to them: “*I do not know you*”. *Who then, can say to God: “Why have You forgotten me?”*... Such feeling is shared by the saints and us, the weak. The saint talks as though he is aware of his worthiness; but the more holy he is, the more humble he becomes. So, if the saint talks with such labor, how much more would I do, a sinner, other than to go back to that complaint, and say: “*Why have You forgotten Your work?*”; “*Why have You forgotten Your visit?*”. Yes, Why have You forgotten my weakness? For who is man to visit? (Psalm 5: 8 (4); Hebrew 6: 2). That is why You would not forget the weak; You would remember that You have created me weak; That You have created me out of dust!... How could I stand, if You do not perpetually cover me with Your care to give strength to that mire? “*When You hide Your face all are troubled*” (Psalm 104: 29)... If You practice Your judgment, Woe to me, for You will find in me nothing but the filth of sins! ... What would be the use of being forsaken, or of being taken care of? When, even while being the subject of Your care, we still commit iniquities? Yet, I am still sure that God will never forget those for whom He cares; for He purifies those He sees; and “*A fire before Him that devours sin*”<sup>2</sup> (Joel 2” 3).

(St. Ambrose)

❖ When it is sought of us to search ourselves, so that our behavior would conform to the statutes and teachings of God, We find some who preoccupy themselves with interfering with the affairs and the works of others. And in case they find some fault in their ethics, they hasten to tear up their persons with sharp tongues; disregarding the fact that by slandering the others they are actually slandering themselves; Hence the wise Paul says: “*Therefore, you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in what you judge another, you condemn yourself, for you who judge, practice the*

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<sup>1</sup> *Prayer of David 4: 6: 22.*

<sup>2</sup> *عظة عن إنجيل لوقا 32، 33.*

*same things*” (Romans 2: 1). We should, therefore, have compassion on the weak, who fell captive of his own vain lusts, and before whose face, all the ways are shut, that it is difficult for him to rid himself of the cords of sin and evil.

Let us then pray for the sake of such despairing miserable men; Let us stretch the hand of help to them; And let us strive not to fall as they did; “*For he who speaks evil of a brother, and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law, and judges the law*” (James 4: 11). ... As it is supposed for him who attempts to judge the evil soul, to be better than that soul; And as we cannot claim for ourselves to take the position of judges, because of our own sins, We should therefore refrain from taking over such a task; For, how could we, being sinners, judge and condemn others?!

If you find in yourself the tendency to judge the others, you should know that the law has not set you a judge or a prosecutor; Therefore, claiming for yourself such a position will bring you forth under the verdict of the law, on account of that you are violating it..

Everyone who has a pure mind, instead of fishing for the transgressions of the others, or preoccupying his mind with their iniquities and sins, should only concentrate on searching for his own shortcomings and drawbacks. That was what the blessed psalmist did, describing himself by the wise words, saying: “*If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*” (Psalm 130: 3); And in another psalm, he, confessing his weakness, and asking for the forgiveness of his sins, he entreats God with the words: “*Remember that we are dust*” (Psalm 103: 14).

Drawing His disciples’ attention to the danger of tearing up the others with sharp tongues, the Lord said: “*Judge not, that you be not judged*” (Matthew 7: 1). Then He mentioned several parables, and many evidences, to exhort us not to condemn others according to our desires and wishes; that we would rather search our own hearts to liberate them of the evil tendencies that flare between our ribs; and entreat God to purify us from our own iniquities and transgressions.

To draw our attention to an apparent bitter fact, the Lord addresses us, saying: [How could you criticize the others, expose their evil and wickedness, and look for their ailments and illnesses, when you yourselves are evil, wicked, and sick?! ... How could you see the speck in the eye of the other, when there is a plank in your own eye, that keeps you from seeing anything?! ... Do not dare to do that! ... You should rather care to take away your own shortcomings, and to quench

the flame of your faults, to be in a position to judge the others who may be guilty of things less serious than your own.

While the Lord was going through the grain fields; His blessed disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands. Seeing them doing that, the scribes and the Pharisees approached the Lord and said to Him: *“Why are your disciples doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”* (Luke 6: 1, 2). They so uttered while they, themselves have done everything wrong to the sanctuary, and disobeyed God’s commandments and statutes; About whom the prophet Isaiah said: *“How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; Everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them”* (Isaiah 1: 21-23).

Despite all the shameful things committed by those people, they persisted on their craftiness, and dared to accuse the blessed disciples of the Lord of breaking the holy Sabbath. But the Lord Christ brought their reproach back on them, saying: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matter of the law: justice, mercy, and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!”* (Matthew 23: 23-24).

The Pharisee was, as you can see, a hypocrite and deceptive; used to bring others into account for little things, while he, himself, commits the worst shameful things. No wonder that the Savior called them *“like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside full of dead men’s bones, and all uncleanness”* (Matthew 23: 27).

That is the way of the hypocrite, who judges others, and accuses them with the most horrible sins, while being blind of himself, on account of that the plank in his eye hide the light from him.

We, therefore, should care to search ourselves before sitting on the bench of judgment to judge the others, particularly if we occupy the position of a guide or a teacher; For, if the instructor is pure, adorned with the grace of reverence, not just having the knowledge of the exalted virtues, but doing and behaving according to them; Such a man would be worthy of being a role model, and of having the right to judge the others, if they go astray from the upright path.

Whereas if the instructor is slothful and blameful, he would not be fit to judge the others, on account of having the same shortcomings and weaknesses which he sees in them. Hence, the blessed apostle counsels us, saying: *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment”* (James 3: 1). And the Lord Christ, while adorning the foreheads of the righteous with the holy crowns, and punishing the sinners with a multitude of chastisements, says: *“Whoever, therefore, breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; But whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5: 19) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

*“As for man, his days are like grass; as the flower of the field, so he flourishes”* (15)

Likening the life of man on earth, with its short duration, to the grass, which soon appears and soon withers, is common in the Holy Book (Psalm 37: 2; 90: 5; Isaiah 40: 6-8; James 1: 10-11; 1 Peter 1: 24).

❖ Why would we be haughty, if we flourish now, to wither and dry after a very short time? ... It would be better for us to have God’s mercy dwell on us, to turn into gold.

Do not marvel that you are going to partake of His eternity, for He, Himself, has already partaken of your grass nature! ... Would He who has taken from you what is low, refuse to grant you what is glorified<sup>2</sup>?!

**(St. Augustine)**

*“For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and its place remembers it no more”* (16)

By the “wind” here, he most probably refers to the devastating kind of typhoons, common in the far east, which leave in its wake, vast stretches of land, utterly destroyed, with no trace of life.

❖ *“For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and its place remembers it no more”*. Here he does not talk of the material grass, but of those, for whose sake, the divine Word has become grass.... *“Every flesh is grass”*; and *“The Word became flesh”* (John 1: 14)... How great would be the hope of the grass, when the Word has become flesh?...

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

He, who endures forever, did not despise to become grass, so that the grass would not despair of itself<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children’s children” (17)***

While the temporal life, eventually, and very soon, will come to and end, and would be as though it has never been; God’s mercies on those who fear Him, who enjoy entrance into a covenant with Him, are everlasting and eternal. He who fears God would enjoy it here, and its traces would endure over his children, and his children’s children; and would provide him, as well, with a fellowship in the eternal glories.

❖ Meditate in yourself, think about your low stature; think about the grass; do not ever be haughty... If you are in a better situation, it would be through God’s grace and mercies ... And You, who does not fear Him, will become as miserable as grass; ... I wish those who fear Him rejoice, for His mercy is upon them.

***“And His righteousness to children’s children” (17)*** ... As many of the ministers of God may have no children, he calls our works ‘our children’; and the reward of the works are the children’s children<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ As the godly things undoubtedly surpass the human things; and the spiritual things surpass the carnal; he who wishes for the true life, would anticipate that bread, for through its hidden practice, the human hearts are strengthened<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

***“To such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them” (18)***

God by nature, and at the same time, is Merciful, Just and Unchangeable. Our enjoyment of His mercy depends upon our fear of Him, our desire to keep His covenant, and our obedience of His commandments. Although He presents His free grace to mankind; yet he does not force them to receive it. *“Therefore know that your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

<sup>2</sup> Exposition of Luke 4: 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

*generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments”* (Deuteronomy 7: 9).

It so seems that **St. Augustine** could not memorize many texts of the Holy Book by heart, as much as meditate in them and practice them. He used to say to his listeners: [You may haughtily boast of memorizing the psalms, or texts of the law by heart, something that I, myself cannot do; In that you are better than me, and than any one who fears God, who cannot memorize them word by word; while you keep the commandments as well].

❖ How can you keep the commandments? ... Not by just memorizing them by heart, but by practicing them in life<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

#### **4- THE DIVINE THRONE:**

What a glorious end! The prophet David, since his youth has recognized God as “*The Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel*” (1 Samuel 17: 45); and by such faith he has overcome the one who reproached God and His people.

**“*The Lord has established His throne in heaven; and His kingdom rules over all*” (19)**

God’s throne is high up in heaven; nothing is higher, comparable, could hinder His work, nor hide it (See Job 9: 4; Isaiah 44: 28; 46: 10; Ephesians 1: 5; Philippians 2: 13) <sup>2</sup>.

God refers His throne to heavens, on account of that they are more exalted than the earth, with its continuous confusions, disturbances, and non-steadfastness, and about which it is written: “*He shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble*” (Job 9: 6).

Heavens are so high up, pure, and glorious, that, neither the deceptions of the devils, nor the craftiness, uncleanness, or defilement of men, could crawl into them.

❖ Who would establish His throne in heaven, except the Lord Christ; who descended and ascended; died and is risen from the dead; He who raised up to heaven the Manhood He took for Himself?

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Men refer to heaven as the throne of God, because it is higher and more beautiful than all the seen creation; Because of the presence in it of the hosts of angels, on whom, as it is written, He sits and settled,

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<sup>1</sup> W. S. Plummer, Ps. 103.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Plummer, Ps. 103.

for He finds pleasure in their purity and holiness; Because there, the souls of the righteous ascend; And up to it the Lord ascended with His body after being risen from the dead; And from there He will ultimately come to judge the world.... And lest it would be assumed that His dominion is limited to heaven alone, the prophet David added: **“And His kingdom rules over all”**.

His dominion over men is of two kinds: by force or through choice. He rules by force over those unworthy of His kingdom; on account of that He is the Creator and Lord of all; And He rules through choice over the righteous for whom He established the kingdom of heaven. For this, our way, as believers, is to let *“our citizenship be in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 3: 20); And also, according to the apostle Paul: *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God”* (Colossians 3: 1) ... Blessed are they who submit to God’s rule by choice.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word” (20)***

About the angels four things are said<sup>1</sup>:

1- They are referred to God, as *“His angels”*.

2- They excel in strength; No one is equal to their strength or authority.

3- They minister to God. According to the two testaments of the Holy Book, angels are presented as messengers and minister of God, who carry the spirit of obedience to Him, and the spirit of love to us. If the fallen angels with Satan their head keep on opposing the truth in us, to draw us to the sonhood of the devil, and the servitude to him; There would be no doubt that the angels would not stand negatively, but would pray and work in true longing to let us enjoy the sonhood of God, and to be liberated from the captivity of the devil and his angels.

4- They are holy, they consummate the will of God, and the subject of His pleasure. Describing the perpetual work of the angels in the obedience of God, the psalmist says: ***“Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word”*** (20).

The psalmist does not present this song alone; but is accompanied by a harmonious choir that embrace the mighty angels of

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<sup>1</sup> راجع نبذة عن عذوبة العمل البناء: كنيسة مارجرس بأسبورتج.

God, and all His hosts of working ministers, together with His whole works everywhere. It is as though the psalmist finds pleasure in having all the heavenly and earthly creation accompany him in praising God; and to accompany them in their joyful task.

This section is considered, as well, of special importance. If God, Himself, works for the sake of the pleasure of His creation, the heavenly hosts work as well; And man, sanctified in the Lord, finds special pleasure in work, in fellowship with His brethren, as well as with the whole creation; according to the words of the apostle: “*God’s fellow workers*” (1 Corinthians 3: 9) <sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ You are committed to discern between work and toil, for they are different. But, is there work without toil? Is it possible? Yes; for this has been the will of God in the first place; yet you rejected it. He put you in paradise to work (See Genesis 2: 15), and set for you what to do, but did not bind it to toil, because if He did from the beginning, toil would not be a punishment later on (See Genesis 3: 17). It would have been possible for man, therefore, to work without toil like the angels, who also work. Listen to what David says: “*Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word*” (20)... The absence of mental health, is the reason behind toil. But it was not that way from the beginning... God still works, as confirmed by the lord Christ, who says: “*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working*” (John 5: 17) <sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ You can work with no anxiety like angels<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ What is the most exalted thing we see in angels? Is it not their doing the word of God? according to the testimony of David, saying: “*Bless the Lord, you His angels, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word*” (20). There is nothing equal to this achievement by these pure spirits<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ I bless the unseen hosts, for they love God, and do His word in every thing<sup>5</sup>.
- ❖ I wish we present thanksgiving, not only for the sake of the blessings that dwell upon us, but for the blessings that dwell upon the others as well ... That is the kind of thanksgiving that liberates man from earth,

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on John. Homily 36.*

<sup>2</sup> ترجمة: دكتور جورج عوض إبراهيم.

<sup>3</sup> *In Hebr.. homily 36: 2.*

<sup>4</sup> الألب الياس، ص 286

<sup>5</sup> *Homilies on Rom. Hom 10.*

lifts him up to heaven, and makes him like angels, who present thanksgiving to God for the sake of the goods granted to us men, saying: “**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men**” (Luke 2: 14) <sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ Nothing could hinder us from reaching the perfection of those high hosts. We cannot use our dwelling on earth as an excuse; for even while dwelling here, we can do everything as though we are high up. What he says here is this: [The way the angels, “... *who excel in strength, who do His word*” do not obey God partially, and disobey Him partially; but obey Him in everything, and submit to Him all the way; Let us, men, as well, do God’s word, not partially, but according to His will<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ The Holy Spirit who first commands the soul of the righteous to bless the Lord, Now commands the angels to do the same, ... How then, could some people say that the Holy Spirit is equal to the angels in rank; when He commands them as He commands the soul of man to bless the Lord? ... Let them know from this that the Holy Spirit is God, a Creator, equal to the Father and the Son in essence of Deity, in might, and in authority; and is not in the rank of the created angels.

As the angels rejoice for the sake of the repentance of the sinners, the Holy Spirit exhorts them to bless the Lord, and to give thanks to Him for the sake of the repentance of the Gentiles and their salvation through their faith in Christ.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ “*Thine will be on earth as it is in heaven*”

The holy and blessed angels of God do the word of God, according to the prophet David who says: “**Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word**” (20). Hence, this prayer means: “As Your will is in angels, let it be on earth in me, O Lord” <sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- ❖ “**Excelling in strength**” (20), in doing the word of God, and in destroying His opponents, this is a proof that the angels, on account

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<sup>1</sup> In Matt. Hom 25: 3.

<sup>2</sup> On Matthew, homily 19.

<sup>3</sup> الأسرار 5، 14

of their good will, stand before God, and minister to Him, as though they are His right hand (Luke 1: 19) <sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ When the term “**strength**’ (or power) is used in the singular tense, it refers to the power of God; Whereas when it is used in the plural tense, **it refers to the strength (or power) of the angels**. For example, using it in the singular tense in saying: “*Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 1: 24), refers to the deity of the Lord Christ; Whereas using it in the plural tense in saying: “***Bless the Lord, all you His hosts (powers)***” (21), refers to the spiritual nature of the angels. Using two or more terms of the same meaning, implies a more conformation of the meaning, the way the divine inspiration often does, as for example, in saying: “*The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer. My God, my strength, in whom I will trust, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised, so shall I be saved from my enemies*” (Psalm 18: 2-3). Here, every word expresses the same meaning, yet using several words gives more confirmation to the meaning. ... So is the use of the plural tense for the word power or strength, of the same meaning, refers to the nature of the angels<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

***“Bless the Lord, all His hosts, You ministers of His, who do His pleasure” (21)***

This phrase, as well as the one preceding it, are used to reveal the honor of labor, which is practiced, not as a punishment, namely, as a ‘chastisement’. Before man falls, “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden ‘to till’ it and keep it*” (Genesis 2: 15) But it would be a way of ‘chastisement’ to bind the ‘labor’ with ‘toil’; as it is in the words of God to Adam: “*By the sweat of you face you shall eat bread*” (Genesis 3: 19).

He probably refers here to God’s works, like the sun, the moon, the stars, and the rest of creation that join the heavenly hosts in praising God and blessing Him, each with its own language or tongue; sometimes even with the language of silence.

❖ Those disciplined hosts (the angels), are forever perpetually holding the reign of things, have authority on everything, and unceasingly

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<sup>1</sup> *De Principiis 1: 8 (Henri de Lubac).*

<sup>2</sup> عظة 4 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار

glorify God. The Seraphim, although continuously flying, yet they never change their places; and the Cherubim never cease carrying the divine throne. So are all His hosts and ministers, who perpetually “do His pleasure” (21) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

*“Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul” (22)*

It is befitting of my soul to learn from all who, and what, are around her, to practice what the heavenly and the earthly creatures do of praise and thanksgiving to God. That should be my first and main task.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the Holy Spirit calls, not only the angels to bless the Lord, for the sake of opening the door of salvation before the Gentiles, through faith in the Lord Christ, but He calls, as well, all the works of the Lord, including the souls of the righteous to partake of this work of the angels.

❖ Let no one say: I cannot praise the Lord in east, for He has departed to the west; or I cannot praise Him in the west, for He is in the east... God, being everywhere, we can rejoice in Him everywhere we live well... As this verse starts and ends with blessing the Lord, We should set forth praising Him everywhere, and continue praising Him forever<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ When, in an assembly, a message from the emperor is publicly read, all present, including all the elites, and leading officials who happen to be there, would listen to it with reverence and in complete silence;. A disturbance by anyone in the midst of this silence would be strictly dealt with, on account of that it would be considered as an insult to the person of the emperor..... Here, in the church, there is chaos everywhere, while messages come down from the King of kings in heaven, who is incomparably greater than all earthly kings, and the audience are of higher caliber; including, not only men but angels, and archangels, who are commanded to praise, according to what is written: “*Bless the Lord, all His works*” (22); And although the messages recited, always bring to us news of conquests which stir up in us greater awe than any earthly news.

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 4 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 103 (102).

Yes, the works of the Lord are not little achievements, but they surpass all talks, all thoughts, and all understanding of man<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

### AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 103

#### LET ME JOIN THE CHOIR WHO PRAISE YOU

- ❖ Grant me, O Lord, to join the choir of those who praise You;  
My soul exults in Your holy name;  
You are the Holy One, who sanctifies my depths by Your Holy Spirit;  
You forgive my trespasses, and heals the ailments of my soul and body;  
You save me from the hidden snares of the enemy;  
And rescue me from the pit he set for my perdition;  
You satisfy me, o the Bread that comes down from heaven;  
You renew my youth like the eagle's;  
What more should I ask, than to be attached to You forever?
- ❖ If oppression would become the law of the world;  
You alone would help the oppressed;  
Revealing to me Your mercies, I would never fear the oppression;  
Proclaiming to me Your longsuffering, my depths would find comfort;  
Forgiving my transgressions, You would lift me up from earth to heaven;  
You would carry me and bring me forth from the west to the east;  
The devil and his hosts, together with his deceptions, would have no authority over me;  
As long as I am in Your bosoms.
- ❖ You created me from dust; Yet You received me as Your son;  
Although my life is like grass, yet heaven waits for me;  
Although the world is ever changing, yet Your promises are steadfast forever;
- ❖ Allow me to join the choir of those who praise you;  
To enjoy the fellowship of the heavenly hosts;  
To follow their lead, and enjoy their love and their support of my weakness;  
To bless You together with them forever and ever, Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> عظة ربنا يسوع المسيح على الجبل.

## **PSALM104**

### **BLORY BE TO THE GREAT CREATOR**

According to some versions, this psalm is a consummation of the last one, which presents God, as the Lord of history, while this psalm presents Him as the Lord and Shepherd of nature. According to the Septuagint, Syrian, Volgata, Arabic, and Ethiopian versions, it is referred to David.

It is considered as a song dedicated to Jehovah, namely, the Word of God, the Creator, the Care-taker of creation, and their Savior. It does not talk about the incomprehensive nature of God, but about His glory, according to what God proclaims about Himself, for the sake of the edification of His creation beloved by Him, man in particular.

The Jewish people used to sing this psalm on the morning of 'yom kipper', the Great day of atonement; the unique day in the whole year, in which the High Priest is allowed to go through the veil and enter into the Holy of Holies, only once a year, as a symbol of the entrance of the believing humanity into heaven, into a new life as though without sin. Hence they sing to the Creator, amazing in His love, Grantor of the new life<sup>1</sup>.

According to some, there is an obvious degree of analogy between this psalm and the song of 'Akhnaton' the great pharaoh, to the Sun (the fourteenth century B.C.), especially in portraying the creatures of the day and night (20-23), of the springs and valleys (10), of the great and wide sea (25); in talking of life and death, and of the dependence of creatures on their Creator (27-30). Yet, other than that, the two songs diverge from one another to completely different directions. For example, in contradiction to the extreme Akhnaton's song to the Sun, saying: [Whenever you rise they live, and whenever you set they die]; Psalm 104, on the other hand, talks about the exalted fact of God's ordinance of the whole life.

#### **Between psalm 104 and the Book of Genesis:**

Talking about the magnificent story of creation, psalm 104 is a piece of poetry recording what came in the first and second chapters of the Book of Genesis:

<b>The first day: Creation of the light</b>	<b>1-2</b>
<b>The second day; Creation of the firmament</b>	<b>2-4</b>

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<sup>1</sup> Kinder, p. 372.

<b>The third day: Separation of the earth from the water</b>	<b>5-9</b>
<b>The fourth day: Creation of the two lights as keepers of time</b>	<b>19-20</b>
<b>The fifth day: Creation of the aquatic animals</b>	<b>25-29</b>
<b>The sixth day: Creation of animals and men</b>	<b>27-28</b>
<b>Provision of food for all</b>	<b>29-30</b>

In all that, the psalmist did not copy what came in the book of Genesis; While the book of Genesis parades what God created, The psalmist concentrates on the way, and the cause of creation. Talking about the intimate relationship between the Creator and the world; the psalmist concentrates more upon the Creator than the creation; and proclaims God, the compassionate, more than God the mighty One.

<b>1- The divine Creator</b>	<b>1 – 9</b>
<b>2- The divine care</b>	<b>10 – 23</b>
<b>3- “The earth is full of His possessions”</b>	<b>24 – 35</b>
<b>4- A praise by the psalmist to the Creator</b>	<b>31 – 35</b>

You should know, O believer, that we, in the East,, recite this psalm every evening; on account of all the secrets and supplications it includes, and because it tells about what we have got through the incarnation of our Lord, at the fullness of time.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

## **1- THE DIVINE CREATOR:**

This psalm starts by a call to praise the greatness and the glory of the Lord in His heavenly throne. Its preface refers clearly to the works consummated in the first and second days, according to what came in the first chapter of Genesis.

According to the Book of Genesis in **the first day**, God said: “*Let there be light*” (Genesis 1: 3); While here, the psalmist sees that beyond the seen light, there is the unseen light of God (2).

In **the second day**, God said: “*Let be a firmament in the midst of the waters*” (Genesis 1: 6); Here, the psalmist sees “*God stretches out the heavens like a curtain; He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters; makes the clouds His chariot; and walks on the wings of the wind*” (Psalm 104: 2-3); What an amazing poetical expression!

In **the third day**, God said: “*Let the water under the sky gather together into one place, and the dry land (the continents) appear*” (Genesis 1: 9); While here, the psalmist says: “*At the voice of Your thunder, the waters hastened away, they went up over the mountains, they went down into the valleys, to the places He founded for them* (7,

8); God “fixed limits for them, and set bars and doors” (Job 38: 9-11); and “placed the sand as the bound of the sea; by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it” (Jeremiah 5: 22).

If God does that to the waters, His good creation, how much more would he do to reign evil?

**“Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great; You are clothed with honor and majesty” (1)**

According to the Septuagint and Coptic version, it came as: “I confess that You have become clothed with the greatness of majesty”.

What does he mean by saying: “**You are (have become) very great**”? Does God increase in greatness, He who is absolute in greatness, not to increase or decrease? .. The greatness here, does not refer to His Essence, which no one can behold; but to what He proclaims of His greatness and majesty to His creation, for the sake of their pleasure and edification; hence he adds: “*You are clothed with honor and majesty*”. According to the Lord Christ: “*No one has ever seen God, It is God, the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made Him known*” (John 1: 18)

❖ “**Bless the Lord, O my soul**’. I wish the souls of all of us would become one in Christ, to say: “**O Lord my God, You are (have become) very great**”...How did You become great? ...I confess that “*You are clothed with honor and majesty*” ... Confess, so as to become, yourself, beautiful, so that He would be clothed by you, “He is clothed with light”. He is clothed with His church, which, having been darkness before, has become light in Him, according to the words of the apostle: “*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the world*” (Ephesians 5: 8)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The word “confession” (confissio) could be understood in two ways: It could be used to praise God; to confess for example, that: “*With majesty You were clothed*” (1); and according to the words of the Savior Himself: “*I confess to You, O Father*”; namely, “*I praise You*”. Or it could refer to confessing our sins to the Lord; For by that, we would praise, and glorify Him<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

❖ This psalm is considered a worship presented by the creation, praising its Creator, and blessing Him (seek His blessing) through the prophet; similar to psalm 18 (19), saying: “*The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork*” (Psalm 19: 1)<sup>1</sup>

(St. Jerome)

❖ God blesses man when He supports him, honors him, gives him reason, and security against his enemies, as He did when He blessed Abraham... And man blesses God when he gives Him thanks for everything He did, according to the words of the apostle: “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Colossians 3: 17).. In either case, namely, whether the Lord blesses man, or man blesses the Lord, the benefit would be for man, for God needs nothing from us. The same could be said when man curses God or is cursed by God, the harm would come on man, and not on God.

Saying “*You have become great*”, does not mean that God’s greatness increased after being smaller; Far from it! ... But it rather means that if man does great works, God would be great in him; namely God’s greatness is more proclaimed in His pious men.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

❖ As it happens if a king encounters a girl clothed in filthy rags, instead of feeling disgusted, he would take away her filthy garments (Isaiah 64: 6; Zechariah 3: 4); cleanse her blackness (Nahum 2: 10); clothe her in a nice attire; and let her sit together with him at his royal banquet; ... So the Lord has done when He encountered the human soul, wounded and stricken, He treated her with soothing medication, took away her unclean rags, and the filth of her sins; clothed her with the glittering glorious, divine, heavenly, royal attire (Psalm 104: 1); crowned her, and let her sit at the royal banquet.

(St. Maccarius the Great)

“*Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment; who stretch out the heavens like a curtain*” (2)

God often proclaims Himself as **light** and **fire** (Genesis 15: 17; Exodus 3: 2; 19: 18; Matthew 17: 2). He is a “*consuming fire*” (Deuteronomy 4: 24; Isaiah 30: 33; Jeremiah 21: 12, 14); and “*Light*” for His people (Psalm 27:1; Isaiah 10: 17); and is called by the apostle James as “*The Father of lights*” (James 1: 17).

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

According to **St. Augustine**, the garment of the Lord Christ is the church; That is why on the day of His transfiguration, the Lord Christ's clothes became as white as the light. For the Sun of Righteousness dwells, and is glorified in His church, and "becomes" extremely great, when she becomes one spirit, and confesses with one soul, to be worthy of being clothed with the divine beauty.

As to saying: "*Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain*" (the leather cover of a tent); it is symbolically interpreted, according to **St. Augustine**, as the divine books that present to us the heavenly life, spread all over the earth, where mortal men dwell, like the leather cover of a tent; Namely, the Word of God grants the heavenly life to the mortals living on earth.

- ❖ Notice the order: Starting by confession, man receives beauty and grace; then he would receive the light. As the psalm adds: "**Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment**<sup>1</sup>".
- ❖ You are God of all; and my God in particular; For, although I am no more a slave of sin, yet I am not worthy of being called Your slave. Great You are in truth. When I look up toward heaven, and down to earth; When I see the beasts, the birds, the serpents, and the rest of Your creation, I marvel at their Great Creator and glorify Him<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ His descent is double: He once came hidden "*like rain upon the mown grass*" (Psalm 72: 6); And there will be His anticipated second coming.

In His first coming, he was Wrapped in swaddling cloth, and laid in a manger. And in His anticipated second coming, He will appear "*covering Himself with light as with a garment*" (2).

In His first coming, "*He endured the cross, despising the shame*" (Hebrew 12: 2); And in the second, He will be surrounded by glorifying hosts of angels<sup>3</sup>.

We do not only leaning upon His first coming, but we anticipate His second coming as well.

And the way we said on His first coming: "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*" (Matthew 21: 9; 23: 39); We shall say the same words on His second coming. Encountering our Lord

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

<sup>3</sup> ربما اقتبس القديس كيرلس المقارنة بين المجيبين عن الشهيد يوستينو (دفاعه 1: 52؛ مع تريفو 110). أنظر أيضًا ترتليان (ضد اليهود 14) وهيبوليتس (ضد المسيح 44).

surrounded by His angels, we shall worship Him saying: “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*”.

He will come, not to be judged, but to judge those who have judged Him.

He who kept silent during his first trial, will say to the wicked who dared to mistreat Him: “*These things you have done, and I kept silent*” (Psalm 50: 21).

By a divine ordinance, He came before to teach men by conviction; Whereas on His second coming, they will have to receive Him as a King, even those who are not ready to do so<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ It would be befitting of us to add that the garment by which we are clothed, is our Lord Jesus Christ, a garment that goes down to our feet; And its diverse colors are the colors of the flowers of wisdom, of the holy books, and of the gospels, that will never fade with time ... as it is written: “*He who is clothed with light as with a garment*” (2). That is why, when we prepare our garments, we should avoid extremes, extravagance, and keep everything within reason<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

❖ There is a separation between those who dwell in heaven, or those clothed with the heavenly Man; ... and evil. For God, in stretching out heavens, has separated the corrupt things from the good things, to keep the righteous man who considers himself a heaven, from being defiled; Hence it is said: “*By His understanding He stretched out heavens*”.

How then were heavens stretched out? ... They were stretched out by Wisdom; according to the verse: “*I have stretched out my words, and you have not paid attention*”. The way the words are stretched out, heavens have been stretched out<sup>3</sup>. ... And as it is said in the psalm: “*Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain*” (2), we are as well: Our souls which were before crumbled, will become stretched out, to be able to receive the Wisdom of God.

Let us now get back to our subject. We said that heavens has been stretched by Wisdom; And that those who have been clothed by the heavenly man are heaven, as well. Actually, as it is said to the sinner: “*You are dust, and to dust you will return*”; Could we not rather say to

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 15 : 1 .

<sup>2</sup> Paed 2: 11.

<sup>3</sup> إن "السماء المنبسطة" بين الخير والشر تتمثل في كلمات الحكمة التي تمكن الإنسان من التمييز بين الخير والشر.

the righteous, who bears the image of the heavenly man: ***“You are heaven, and to heaven you will return”***?

Each one of us has his heavenly works, as well as his earthly ones. The earthly works lead to earth, for they bear the earthly nature; like him who treasures on earth, and not in heaven. On the contrary, the works of virtue lead to the places that bear the same nature, namely, to heavens. He who treasures in heaven, is he who bears **the image of the heavenly**<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ The light here, is the clear and prominent knowledge; namely, that man would be, as though clothed with the clear knowledge of things, like a garment. He would be able to see on all sides; and nothing would be hidden from him.

According to some, the garment of light is the pure body that was worn by the Son of God, in which he sometimes felt hunger and thirst; and oftentimes demonstrated His deity when he performed miracles

And according to some, that word refers to the light created by God on the first day of creation, (before creating the stars); which He spread to make day, then took back to make night. Hence the psalmist, adding what God created on the second day, said: ***“Who stretched heavens like a curtain”*** (2); namely the second heaven, by which He separated between the water He took upward, and the water He kept downward. He likened it to a tent, to demonstrate how God, marvelously stretched the vast heaven, the way man stretches a tent; and to demonstrate, as well, that we, in this world, are as though living in the shadow of a tent.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters; Who makes the clouds His chariot; who walks on the wings of the wind”*** (3)

When man builds an upper chamber on the top of his house, he covers it with solid material to protect himself against the heat of the sun, and against the rain. God, on the other hand, covers His upper chambers with clouds full of water.

He uses the clouds like horses that move His chariot everywhere He intends to go, according to His pleasure; Everything, even the clouds and winds obey Him.

Often presenting to us the clouds as a symbol of heaven, the psalmist sees in them a divine chariot. ... Yet ascending to heaven, the

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عظات للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكلين سمير كوستي، 8: 2.

Lord Christ needed no chariot, for He is the Creator of heaven, and count them as His chariot.

Presenting to us a symbolic interpretation of the phrase: “*He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters*” (3), **St. Augustine** says: [The talk here concerns “*the heavens*”, as the divine books; whereas “*the upper chambers*” are the commandment of love, which no other commandment is greater (Mark 12: 31). ... Love is compared to water; “*because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” (Romans 5: 5). ... How could the Holy Spirit be water? The Lord 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*” (John 7: 37, 38)... “*He who walks on the wings of the wind*”; Namely, on the virtues of the souls; on love itself! ... But how could He walk on them? For God’s love is greater than our love for Him<sup>1</sup>].

❖ Why “**Was He taken up, and a cloud received Him?**” (Acts 1: 9). That was, as well, a sure sign that He ascended to heaven. He was not taken up by fire, nor on a fiery chariot, as it happened with the prophet Elijah, but He was taken up by a cloud, a symbol of heaven. The prophet says: “**He who makes the clouds His chariot**” (3); and another prophet says: “*The Lord rides on a swift cloud*” (Isaiah 19: 1 LXX)<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

❖ By so saying, the prophet shows that God’s care covers the water, clouds, and winds, and grants their benefits to the world. And he also shows that God’s nature is as swift, as the wings of winds. Whereas His upper chambers are the church secrets, He establishes and lays its beams by the water of baptism.

He made clouds His chariot when He appeared to the children of Israel....And when our Lord ascended from the Mount of Olives to heaven, He was received by a cloud underneath His feet.

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

“**Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire**”

(4)

There have to be angels responsible for the holy works, who give understanding of the eternal light; of the secrets of God, and His Deity.... Angels are preachers, as well.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> On Acts of Apostles, homily 2.

The Holy Book never mentioned that the heavenly creatures have any kind of bodies, but they were generally said to be “*made spirits and flames of fire*” (Psalm 104: 4; Hebrew 1: 7). Angels are spirits (Habakkuk 1: 7, 14; Revelation 16: 14). The fathers of the church tend to say that angels have spiritual bodies; who, compared to men, are considered spirits; on account of that they do not have material bodies like men; and are in no need to eat, to drink, to have rest, to get married, etc. ... And compared to God “the Spirit”, they are counted as spiritual bodies. ... The Nicene Counsel in the year 784 A.D. proclaimed that angels are ethereal or luminous bodies; While the ‘Lateran Counsel’ in the year 1215 proclaimed that angels are without bodies altogether; Although some Catholic, Armenian, Lutheran, and Reformer Theologians, refer pure bodies to angels<sup>1</sup>.

According to **St. Gregory the Theologos**, angels are spirits without bodies. And, responding to Deodor and Theodor, **St. Cyril the Great** says:

[Angels are spirits from heaven, and are not bodies. And being bodiless, they appeared to the perfect men in diverse forms of imaginary bodies; like when they appeared to Elisha as chariot and horses; to Belaam as a man with a drawn-out sword; to Gideon as someone with a stick; to Daniel as someone clothed in linen, the attire of honor, his waist girded with gold of Ophaz, his body white like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightening, his eyes like torches of fire; his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude. ... Angels were flying to the divine tomb, girded in white attire<sup>2</sup>].

“*His ministers a flame of fire*”. This is the nature of the heavenly creatures, ministering to God the “*Consuming Fire*”. Encountering us, they enflame our life with longing toward the Creator, through the work of His exalted grace, to burn up what is inside us of wood, grass, or hay; while making what is there glitter like gold, silver, or precious stones. That is the divine fire working in the heavenly creatures, and working by His grace in the believers. . It is, therefore, befitting of us to work under the leadership of God, who sets out of us what are like angels, moving swiftly like wind, working by His exalted grace; and bearing the spirit of strength, to become truly His ministers aflame with a holy fire.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Charles Hodge: *Systemstic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 637-8 L. Berkhof: *Systematic Theology*, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> ابن العبري: ركن 5، باب 3، فصل 2، مقصد 1.

Concerning the consistent fire, As God, Himself is said to be “A *consuming Fire*” (Deuteronomy 4: 24); and His ministers “*a flame of fire*” (4), the appearance of the divine chariot through a consistent fire, therefore, proclaims the presence of God (*the Consuming Fire*), who burns the thorns that choke the soul; and, at the same time, grants her an inner enlightenment to shine like lightning, and to glitter like bronze in the midst of fire.

“*The Lord descended on Mount Sinai as consuming fire; its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly*” (Exodus 19: 18).

❖ “*And His minister as a flame of fire*”, which refers to their purity, and to the fact that they do not submit to sin. There is yet another interpretation: To a believer, a good angel of light is sent; Whereas to a sinner, an angel of wrath is sent to torture him<sup>1</sup>.

❖ This is the fire that burned in the hearts of the disciples of the Lord, walking on the way to Emmaus, and made them say: “*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)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ That divine fire burned, as well, in the bones of the prophets; that made Jeremiah say: “*His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not*” (Jeremiah 20: 9)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ Unless the minister preaches with fire, he would not be able to enflame those to whom he preaches<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ If we compare the apostle Paul to angels, our daring would not be going too far. If the Holy Book calls John the Baptist an angel; and the priests as well. So, why should anyone marvel when we say that Paul is worthy of being so called, on account of the virtues he enjoyed?!

The angels are so great on account of their obedience to God, and their utter refusal to disobey His commandment; that the prophet David

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

<sup>2</sup> Epistle 52: 3.

<sup>3</sup> In Luke 12: 49-50.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

says about them: “*Who excel in strength, who do His Word*” (Psalm 103: 20). That is exactly what Paul faithfully did; not only obeying God’s commandments, but proclaiming: “*When I preach the gospel of Christ, I present it without charge*” (1 Corinthians 9: 18).

What the prophet David admires in the angels, to say that God “*made His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire*” (4), We may see, as well, in Paul, who crossed the earth length and width in his preaching mission ... What makes Paul even more distinguished is that, while on earth in the mortal body, he demonstrated such courage, and conquered the unseen evil hosts<sup>1</sup>.

❖ “*Who made His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire*”

(4). Paul presents to us the same scenery; As a spirit and fire, he traveled across the whole earth to preach and purify; And what is amazing is that, while still living in this world, clothed in a mortal body, he likened the body-less hosts<sup>2</sup>!

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Not to let the grace of the Spirit given to us, cool off , the blessed Paul warned us, saying: “*Do not quench the Spirit*” (1 Thessalonians 5: 19), to keep our partnership with Christ, if we hold fast, until the end, to the Spirit we took from Him. He does not mean to say that the Spirit is under the authority of man, nor may suffer from him; but on account of that the un-thankful man intends to quench the Spirit, and comes to be like the wicked who disturbs the Spirit by doing unholy works.

Being without understanding, deceitful, sin-loving, and walking in the darkness; they would not have “*the true Light that gives light to every man who comes into the world*” (John 1: 9).

**Such a fire has caught the prophet Jeremiah**, when the word in him was like fir, which he could not endure (Jeremiah 20: 9).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, in His love for man, came to send fire on earth, “*and how He wished it already kindled*” (Luke 12: 49).

Another example, Cleopas and his fellow disciple (Luke 24: 32), although weak at first because of their lack of knowledge, yet they became so enflamed by the words of the Savior, to proclaim the fruits of His knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> في مديح القديس بولس، 1.

<sup>2</sup> الأب إلياس، ص 268.

And the blessed Paul, when he took hold of this fire, he did not refer it to flesh and blood, but, as one experiencing the grace, he came to be a preacher of the Word<sup>1</sup>.

**(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ In a cave, in a new tomb dug by Nicodemus, they laid the divine Son of that blessed woman.

Later on, the blessed apostles, gathered together to lay the mother of the Son of God in a similar cave; But it was actually their Lord who laid her with them in that tomb, in a procession attended by a multitude of the children of light, and hosts of beings – flames of fire (Psalm 104: 4).

**The Seraphim with their wings of fire** ... the Cherubim who carry the divine throne, have all moved to praise the Lord, saying: “*Hosanna*”.

**(St. (Mar) Ephraim el-Serougi)**

❖ “*For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways*” (Psalm 91: 11) ... For the righteous is in need of the help of the angels of God, lest the devils would cast him down, or an arrow that flies in the darkness, would pierce his heart<sup>2</sup>.

❖ ‘Hermas’, in his work: ‘The Shepherd’, proclaims that two angels (one good and the other evil), keep company with every man. Whenever good thoughts come to his mind, it would be presented by the good angel; And whenever bad thoughts come to his mind, it would be through the evil one<sup>3</sup>.

❖ Certain angels are designated to carry out the holy works, to provide the knowledge of the eternal light, and the secrets of God<sup>4</sup>.

❖ The apostles had angels to support them in their preaching ministry, and to consummate their evangelic mission<sup>5</sup>.

❖ If certain people have got the honor to minister as evangelists; And if the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, came with the good news, and preached the gospel to the poor; He would surely not exempt His angelic spirits, His ministers, the “*flames of fire*” (4), of being preachers as well.

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<sup>1</sup> *Paschal Letters*, 3: 4.

<sup>2</sup> *In Num. hom 5: 3*.

<sup>3</sup> *In Luc, hom 35*.

<sup>4</sup> *In Num. hom 14: 2*.

<sup>5</sup> *In Luc, hom 11: 4*.

That is why the angel came to the shepherds, keeping watch in the field over their flock at night,... *“the glory of the Lord shone around them; ... and said to them: ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’”* (Luke 2: 10-11). At a time when none of the people had knowledge of the secret of the gospel; the dwellers of heaven, the army of God, praised God, saying: *“Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”*.

After praising God, the angels got back to heaven, leaving us to meditate in how the joy that came with the birth of Christ, is a glory to God in the highest. They condescended down to earth, then got back to the place of their comfort, to glorify God in the highest by Jesus Christ. The angels also marvel at the peace that dwells, by the birth of Christ, on earth, the cradle of wars; and toward which Satan -- the morning star -- has fallen from heaven, to enter into war with Jesus, and to be defeated<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Holding fast in union with the believers in His name, we have to cross over from earth to heaven, and even beyond heaven; For the Lord Jesus has stored for us, in God – as though in a treasure – signs and wonders far greater than what are mentioned in the Holy book; which we cannot understand as long as we are still in a nature connected to the material body. ... I am convinced that God has stored for us in Himself, things more amazing than anything seen by eyes, like the sun, the moon, and the stars, and even of more splendor than what the saintly angels, those whom God created spirits and flames of fire (Psalm 104: 4; Hebrew 1: 7), have seen; And that He will reveal to us those wonders, once the creation will be saved from the bondage of the enemy, to the glorious liberty of the children of God (Romans 8: 21)<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ It is God Himself Creator of the angels from non-existence into existence; who made them according to his own image, in a non-material nature, like wind and fire; described by the prophet David as: *“Who made His angels spirits, and His angels flames of fire (4). God set in them light weight, heat, swiftness and sharpness of response to*

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<sup>1</sup> *Comm., on John 1: 13 (ANF).*

<sup>2</sup> رسالة إلى الشهداء (ترجمة موسى وهبة مينا)، فصل 2.

His commands, and the exaltation of their souls above any material thoughts<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father John of Damascus)**

- ❖ Angels are described by the prophet as “*spirits*”, on account of that they are unseen by human eyes, and of their swift response to God’s commands and words; and as “*flames of fire*”, because they are as strong as fire.

The apostles are “*angels*” as well, for they told the world about the new covenant;.... “*spirits*” for they are spiritual; And they are flaming “*fire*”, for they have got the grace of the Holy Spirit who dwelt upon them like tongues of fire, by whom they burned non-belief, and gave light to the world.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ The hosts of heaven are not holy by nature, because if they are, they would not be different from the Holy Spirit. But they are holy in a relative sense, as a privilege and not by nature. The way iron, burning hot by fire, could be seen as though it is fire itself, although different from fire<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

- ❖ A sign that a sacrifice is well received by God, is the descent of fire from heaven to burn it. When Abel and Cain, together, brought their offerings to God, the living fire that ministers to God (Psalm 104: 4), came down from heaven and consumed the pure offering of Abel, but did not touch the impure offering of Cain. By that Abel knew that his offering was regarded by God; and Cain knew that his was rejected<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Afrahat, the Persian Savant)**

***“You who laid the foundations of the earth, so that it should not be moved forever” (5)***

While scientists stand in awe before the ‘consistent movement’ of the earth, when the inhabitants on the earth do not sense this movement, but feel as though the earth is steady and immovable. The same could be said about the ‘force of gravity’. ... God, the Creator of earth, has granted it, certain natural laws, for the sake of man’s comfort and service.

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<sup>1</sup> Orthodox Faith 2: 3 ترجمه الاشمندريت ادريانوس شكور

<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit, 16: 38.

<sup>3</sup> Demonstrations, 4: 2.

Although God created man out of dust, yet He cared to honor and support him, so as not to let him be moved.

❖ What is the foundation of the church, but that described by the apostle, saying: “*No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 3: 11). Established on the foundation of Christ, the church would shake if her foundation is<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ It is truly amazing, how the earth with its incredible weight, through the care of God, could be well-established on such an unseen power, and would never be moved<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

❖ Man is called “earth” by the prophet, for he is well-established on the foundation of faith, that would endure to the age of ages, namely to the age to come.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“You covered it with the deep as with a garment; The waters stood above the mountains” (6)*

Some believe that the talk here concerns the great flood that came upon earth in the days of Noah (Genesis 7: 18-19). While, according to others, it refers to what came upon earth during the process of creation (Genesis 1: 9).

If the seas and the oceans are so deep to terrify man who lives on land; yet they give the earth a kind of beauty, as a garment to adorn and benefit it.

According to **St. Augustine**, the church passes through great floods of persecution all over the world; so high to sweep its high mountains, namely, its prominent leaders.

❖ This verse refers to the ordainment of God, indescribable and non-perceivable by man. The way our eyes cannot fathom the deep ocean; we cannot meditate in God’s majesty and wisdom.

*“The waters stood above the mountains”*. Symbolically, the waters refer to the teachings, and the mountains to the saints<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ In a translation by Aquila and Thaodonion, it came as: “You made the deep its garment”. Which would mean that waters surrounded the

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

<sup>3</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

earth, and covered it as a garment; And with the wind blowing hard, the waves of the sea may get so mighty like mountains, yet they come short of invading the dry land, in obedience to Your command, sounding high like thunder, that would check their advance.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“At Your rebuke they fled, At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away” (7)***

Here the psalmist reveals the authority of God, who created the mighty oceans to serve man, living on dry land, and to adorn his habitat. Yet, despite their extensive depth and width, they flee before the rebuke of God; according to the words of St. Mark the Evangelist, saying: *“They (His disciples) feared exceedingly, and said to one another: ‘Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!’”* (Mark 4: 41).

If God allows for His church to go through afflictions, so mighty to cover the high mountains; Yet, *“at the voice of Your thunder”*, the waters of this great flood of persecution would retreat and hasten away. As an example, Peter and Paul, *“the high mountains”*, have been inundated with great floods of persecution for a limited time; but now, their memory is highly revered by emperors.

❖ The thunder is the voice of the Lord, by whose command *“the waters under the sky gathered together in one place, and the dry land appeared”* (Genesis 1: 9-10)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“They went up over the mountains; They went down into the valleys, to the place which You founded for them” (8)***

According to some, the talk here concerns the mountains which go up above sea level, and the valleys which, in certain locations, go down below sea level. But it is obvious that it concerns ‘the waters’ which form snow covering the tops of mountains, that eventually melt and flow down to form lakes, as in the region of “Big Bear” in California, U.S.A.; Or flow down as torrent falls, as in Niagra, Canada.

According To **St. Augustine**, the talk here concerns the waves of persecution, that may rise up to cover the mountains – the apostles and the ministers, then eventually fall down, to rise again.

***“You have set a boundary that they may not pass over; that they may not return to cover the earth” (9)***

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

Watching the mighty waves of the sea, it would seem to man that nothing could stand before their violence. But God has set a boundary, over which they may not pass; amazingly by the sand which may look so weak and helpless; except by the allowance of their Creator..

If God allows for the afflictions and persecutions to stir up and to become mighty waves like high mountains; which may seem unstoppable; Yet we should not fear them; for “*God has set a boundary that they may not pass over*”.

❖ “*You have set a boundary that they may not pass over*”; It is actually awesome and amazing to hear the roar of the sea, and to see the mighty waves rising up like mountains, and rushing forward as though to sweep over the whole world; But once they reach the shore, they stop at the boundary set by God, and peacefully retreat.... Not like men who do not keep the precepts of God<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

## 2- THE DIVINE CARE:

In the last section (verses 1 to 9), the psalmist sang for the creation that testify to the glory and greatness of God, as through them we can see God “*clothed with honor and majesty, and covered with light as with a garment*”; who “*stretches out the heavens like a curtain*”; “*who lays the beams of His upper chambers in the water*”; “*who makes the clouds His chariot*” and “*who sets a boundary for the waters that they may not pass over*”.... In the present section, he reveals the exalted care of the Creator; to whom the creation is indebted, not only for their mere existence, but for the continuity of their existence. For He sends rich springs of water, free to the animals of the wilderness; ... He fulfills the needs of His creation freely and with the utmost compassion; ... The birds, with their natural instinct, build their nests at secure places; “*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*” (Matthew 8: 20)... . How amazing that He seeks the comfort of men, birds, and beasts, while choosing for Himself the poverty and need, for the sake of His love for His creation!

The psalmist talks to us about the free water (10), the bread (14), the wine that makes glad the heart of man (15), the oil, the free lodging, even for the sparrows (17), and for the wild goats (18), etc. ... All those carry symbol of God’s exalted gifts to man, to whom He presents His Holy Spirit as free water; His delivered body as bread, and His shed blood as wine, to satisfy him, and to make his heart glad. He grants the

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

oil of His grace, and presents the divine bosoms as dwelling place for His believers.

***“He sends the springs into the valleys, which flow among the hills” (10)***

Caring, even for the beasts of the wilderness, God sends springs into the valleys, and on the mountains. In many parts of the world man enjoys the scenery of water, moving among the mountains, which are called by some “the exultant, laughing, or dancing water”; as though, in their movement, they praise God, and sing for Him with their sweet voices, day and night.

Some may probably say: If everything is created for the benefit of man, what is the use of water springs in the wilderness?... Yet we may say that God who created everything by His care; as all creation are His, providing even the irrational animals with their needs, would ultimately be for the benefit of man<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst” (11)***

In the midst of the most desolate and barren wilderness, where no man lives, we often find springs flowing with sweet water; as for example, those around the monasteries of St. Anthony, and St. Samuel the Confessor. By that God proclaims to us that He cares even for the beasts of the wilderness, to find water to quench their thirst. Many of such springs, not known to man for a long time, have been discovered by the irrational beasts, that knew their way to them.

If God cares to provide water for the beasts of the wilderness, how much more would He care to provide the water of the Holy Spirit for mankind?!

According to **St. Augustine**, the “*beasts of the wilderness*” are a symbol of the Gentiles, whom God did not forsake, but provided them with the Word of salvation to let them enjoy faith.

***“By them the birds of the heavens have their habitation; they sing among the branches” (12)***

Having their habitation among the branches of trees, birds, feeling protected by their Creator, present to Him the voice of praise. ... If even the irrational creation, like birds and beasts, that have no

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

dwelling places, give thanks and praise to their Creator, How much more it is befitting of us, men, to praise and glorify Him?!

According to **St. Augustine**, “*the birds of the heavens*” are the spiritual souls that have their habitation and comfort on the “*high mountains*”; namely, through the prophets, apostles, and preachers of the Word of Truth.

❖ Each of them praise God by its own song, given to it<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Jerome**)

The psalmist gives us a marvelous portrait of the irrational creation praising God, each by to its own language and way. If God has given man a mouth to praise Him, and to express the gladness of his heart for the Creator who cares for him; Yet, unfortunately, man often practices the role of denial and grumbling against God; While we find, on the other hand, the senseless nature, the earth, clothed by the oceans as a beautiful garment, glorify its Creator;... We find the movements of waters, on and among the mountains, and in the valleys, praise Him, as though with exultant dances; ... We find the beasts of the wilderness discover the locations of springs of water in the midst of the barren desert; ... We find the birds that have no storehouses of their own, sing over the branches of trees; sometimes even in the darkness of the night.

***“He waters the hills from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works” (13)***

God uses every way to quench the thirst of the beasts of the wilderness, whether through springs among the rocks, or rain that fall over the mountains. He cares to clothe the mountains with the beauty of snow crowning their peaks, with green forests, or even with grass; He cares for the land for the benefit of man, animals, and birds.

If the “*mountains*”, as we saw, symbolize the prophets, the apostles, and the preachers; And if God from the highest, provide them with the water of “*His Word*” to quench their thirst; and they, in turn, present them to “*the earth*”; namely, to mankind; The fruit, though, is not the work of the ministers themselves, but it is the work of God; according to the words of the psalmist: “*The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works*”.

According to **St. Jerome**, the works of God, here, that satisfy “*the earth*”, are the apostles who satisfy men with the word of preaching.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

***“He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth” (14)***

Wherever there are no humans to farm the land, God allows for the grass to grow to sustain the wild animals. And in case man brings forth vegetation from the earth, God’s care intervenes to help them grow. Namely, God allows grass to grow to sustain the wild animals, and provide man with the possibilities to farm the land to bring forth food for himself.

The apostles, while still in flesh, carried the Lord Christ, the Bread coming down from heaven; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“We have a treasure in earthen vessels”* ; and they, in turn, presented that bread to those whom they preach, to enjoy.

❖ *“To bring forth food from the earth”*. Here, he refers to the Lord who chose to become Man; according to what is written: *“I am the bread which came down from heaven”* (John 6: 41)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ He did not provide them with the material bread of the earth, but with the bread that came down from heaven<sup>2</sup>.

❖ The rational soul feeds upon the spiritual food, by the Word of God (the Logos); for the food provided by the earth does not feed the spirit<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

❖ Strengthen your heart; partake of that spiritual bread; and have for yourself an exultant face<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

***“And wine that makes glad the heart of man; Oil to make his face shine; and bread which strengthens man’s heart” (15)***

Grapes are a kind of fruit that was often mentioned in the Holy Book. When Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son Jephunneh, intended to prove to the people of Israel, the fertility of the promised land, they cut down, and brought forth to them, a branch with a cluster of grapes (Numbers 13: 23).

Oil has been basically used in the ointment for the dedication and the gladness in God (See Exodus 30: 22-25). And it was the custom in

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<sup>1</sup> *Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).*

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on Luke, Homily 10.*

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on Luke, Homily 12.*

<sup>4</sup> *Mystagogic, 4: 9.*

the old, to anoint the forehead of guests for a social event with oil, as a sign of gladness. Whenever the believer looks up to God, who grants light, and goodness, and shines with His glory on His creation, his look would turn into oil and anointment that makes his face shine; and the joy for the salvation of God would shine in his depths.

According to **the scholar origin**, the wine here, refers to the grace of teaching, that brings gladness to the heart of man; whereas the vines and fig trees of the Gentiles (Psalm 105: 33), refer to the poisonous teachings, foreign to the faith in God.

Who is the wine that makes glad the heart of man and makes his face shine, but the Lord Christ who says: “*I am the true vine*” (John 15: 1). He is the true food and the true drink; Whoever enjoys his body and blood, would be filled with divine strength, with gladness of his depths; and the light of the Sun of Righteousness would shine on him.

According to **St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian**, “*the bread*” that sustains the heart of man is keeping the commandments; While “*the wine*” that makes his heart glad, is seeking the forgiveness; And “*the oil*” is the repentance that purifies the soul, pours beauty on it, and qualifies it to have communion in the body and blood of the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

According to **St. Gregory the Nezianden**, “*the wine*” that makes glad the heart of man, is the sound teaching, which should not be mixed with foreign water (Isaiah 1: 22), namely, with the wrong teachings<sup>2</sup>.

❖ “*And wine that makes glad the heart of man*”. That is the wine promised by the Lord, not to drink from, before the day of His resurrection (Matthew 26: 29; Mark 14: 22-25; Luke 22: 18-20).

“*Oil to make his face shine*”. The face of God makes the righteous shine with joy; Yet, it is not oil for the heads of the wicked (Psalm 141: 5).

“*And bread which strengthens man’s heart*”. The bread that came down from heaven<sup>3</sup>.

❖ When the symbolic meal of Passover together with His disciples, came to an end, the Lord Jesus Christ moved to the Bread that strengthens the heart of men; to the true secret of the Passover, being like Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, who was a symbol of Christ, in offering the bread and wine (Genesis 14: 18). By that He transformed the bread and wine into His true body and blood<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> تفسير خر 27: 1 - خر 28: 1.

<sup>2</sup> In Defense of His Flight, Oration 2: 46.

<sup>3</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on Matt 4: 26: 27.

❖ Although the “material wine” does not make glad the heart of man, but may even bring forth foolishness to it; according to what is written, that: “*It is not for kings to drink wine*” (Proverbs 31: 4); and, “*It is good neither to eat meat nor to drink wine, ... by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak*” (Romans 14: 21); ... Yet, the kind of wine, told here, that brings gladness to the heart of man (15), refers to the “spiritual wine”, that makes man spiritually drunk<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ It is not possible for the souls to live, unless they get the strength of being born again in the land of the living (the font of baptism), raised in it by the Spirit, and grow before God a spiritual growth (by repentance and confession); and be clothed by the deity, by the garments of the heavenly beauty, that surpasses all description; ... Without such strength, it would not be possible for her to live comforted and satisfied. For, in truth, in the divine Nature, we find the Bread of life, He who said: “*I am the bread of life*” (John 6: 35), the water of life (John 4: 10), the wine that makes glad the heart of man (Psalm 104: 15), the oil of gladness (Psalm 104: 16), all kinds of the heavenly spiritual food, and the garments of spiritual light, that are from God; ... By all that the soul shall live... Woe to the body that stays at the bottom of its nature, for it gets corrupt and dies. And woe to the soul that leans only upon the strength of its nature, on its works, and has no fellowship with the divine Spirit (1 John 1: 2), For in truth, it gets corrupt and dies, because of not being qualified for the eternal life of the Godhead(John 17: 3).

**(St. Maccarius the Great)**

❖ Our Lord called Himself a “*grain of wheat*” (John 12: 24), on account of that His preaching strengthens our hearts, like with bread and wine, and brings gladness to our souls, like oil. We may also understand that His holy body, together with His precious blood, are bread and wine, coming forth from the pure and virgin earth, that strengthen and bring gladness to the heart. As to the oil, it is the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ The church, bearing such a great grace, exhorts her children and friends to come and partake of the holy sacraments. For what we eat

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 42 (Ps. 127).

and drink are proclaimed by the Holy Spirit, by the prophet saying: “*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him*” (Psalm 34: 9). In this sacrament there is Christ, for it is the body of Christ, not a carnal, but spiritual food; about which the apostle says: “*All our fathers ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink*” (1 Corinthians 10: 3); For the body of the Lord is spiritual, the body of Christ is that of the divine Spirit; In the epistle of Peter we read: “Christ died for us” (Romans 5: 8). Finally, according to the prophet David, this food strengthens our hearts, and this drink brings gladness to the heart of man (15).

- ❖ “*My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me: Where is your God?*” (Psalm 42: 3). Tears, here, are truly called “food”, where hunger is for righteousness, according to the words: “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled*” (Matthew 5: 6). That is why there are tears, described as bread that strengthens the heart of man (15); which brings to mind the words of Solomon: “*Cast your bread upon the water*” (Ecclesiastes 11: 1 LXX); **For the bread of heaven is there where the water of grace is.**

Truly, those, out of whose hearts flow rivers of living water (See John 7: 38; 4: 10), will get the help and support of the divine Word, and a secret kind of food. There is, as well, that living bread (see John 6: 51), where there is the water of tears and crying of repentance; for which it is written: “*With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back*” (Jeremiah 31: 9); That is why, blessed are they, whose bread are tears, for they deserve to laugh: “*Blessed are they who weep now*” (Luke 6: 21)<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ Let us learn what kind of food, God will provide those in whom He finds pleasure. He finds His pleasure in him who dies to his sin, wipes out his transgressions, destroys and buries his iniquities; and whose hands drop with myrrh (used in anointing the bodies of the dead). Sins are dead, for they cannot include the sweetness of life; Moreover, the wounds of the sinners are dampened by the oil of the Holy Book; and by the bread, the strong food of the Word (15), which is dipped in the Word of God like honey<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ Fittingly, tears are called bread, where there is a famine for righteousness. “*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for*

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<sup>1</sup> *Prayer of David 4: 2: 7.*

<sup>2</sup> *Death as a God 5: 20.*

*righteousness, for they shall be filled*” (Matthew 5: 6); And there is, as well, the tears, the bread that strengthen the heart of man (15); “*Cast your bread upon the water*” (Ecclesiastes 1: 1). For the bread of heaven is there, where the water of grace is. Those from whose hearts the living water flow (John 7: 38), will truly receive help from the Word, and feed upon a secret kind of food<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ Love is enough for man to feed upon, instead of food and drink; that is the bread that strengthens the heart of man<sup>2</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)

- ❖ That is the meaning of the flowering vine, whose wine brings forth gladness to the heart (15); which, one day, will fill the cup of wisdom, and will be given free to those who quench their thirst from the exalted sermons, and enjoy them, as though drunk with what goes beyond the material things, to the spiritual ones. Now the vine flowers through its blossoms, out of which a sweet and smooth fragrance will fill the air.

You recognize this sweet fragrance in the person of St. Paul (2 Corinthians 2: 16), and know how it also applies to all those who are saved.

The Word of God clarifies these things to the bride as a memorandum of the beautiful days of the spring for the soul; Then He exhorts her to enjoy what is before her, and encourages her, saying: “*The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vine with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away*” (Song 2: 13)<sup>3</sup>.

- ❖ In my previous sermons I mentioned, how the bride of the song got the grace; ... how she was able to differentiate between the apple with its sweet taste, and the wild fruit; ...how she longed for the shadow of her Groom; ... how she enjoyed the taste of his sweet fruits; ... how she entered into his inner chambers for the joy, she likened to the “wine” that brings forth gladness to the hearts of those who drink from it (Psalm 104: 15). Abiding in love, its strength increased in the bride by the sweet fragrances from the apple branches that formed a shade over her. Then she received the arrow

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<sup>1</sup> *Prayer of Job and David 4: 2: 7.*

<sup>2</sup> *Asetic Homilies, 46.*

<sup>3</sup> عظة 5 على نشيد الأنشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

of love in her heart, followed by the hands of Him who aimed the arrow; And allowed herself to aim an arrow for the knowledge of truth, by the strong hands of him who aimed the arrow (Psalm 127: 4).

Do not perplex yourselves much with the bread. But to Him who brings the bread forth from the land; who feeds the ravens (Psalm 147: 9); who gives food to all flesh (Psalm 136: 25); who opens His hands, and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145: 16): Say: [My life is from You; and from You, I will get all the needs of life<sup>1</sup>].

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

- ❖ Unless the soul is born now in “*the land of the living*” (Psalm 27: 13), take spiritual food from it, grow before the Lord, and be clothed by the Divinity with the garments of heavenly beauty, that surpass every description, Unless she gets all that, she will not be able to live on her own in joy and comfort.

The divine nature contains the bread of life, He who said: “*I am the Bread of life*” (John 6: 35), and “*the living water*” (John 4: 10), “*the wine that makes glad the heart of man*” (15), the oil of gladness (Psalm 45: 7), and all the different kinds of food of the heavenly spirit, and the garment of the heavenly light, that is from God<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Maccarius the Great)**

- ❖ Solomon, the wisest of Men, says to us: “*Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart; let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his misery no more*” (Proverb 31: 6-7). By this he means, [those who came to be in the anguish of sorrow and grief because of their past works, support them with the abundant joys of the spiritual knowledge “*like the wine that makes glad the heart of man, like oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man’s heart*” (15). Reform them by the strong drink of the Word of salvation, lest they may fall into the despair of death, and, “*be swallowed up with too much sorrow*” (1 Corinthians 2: 7)]. ... Whereas, about those who are still cool and slothful, not struck with the sorrow of heart, we read: “*The idle chatter leads only to poverty*” (Proverb 14: 23)<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Nestor)**

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<sup>1</sup>The Lord's Prayer, Sermon 4.

<sup>2</sup>عظة 11: 1.

<sup>3</sup>Cassian, Conferences 14: 17.

❖ It is that law, planted deep in the members of all men, which fights against the law of our minds, and keeps them from beholding God. After the earth was cursed by our works, following our knowledge of good and evil, it started to produce the thorns and thistles of thoughts, that strangle the seeds of the natural virtues; so that, without the sweat of our face we cannot eat our bread coming down from heaven (John 6: 33), which strengthens the heart of man (15). ... That is why all humans with no exception, are under that law<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Theonas)**

❖ We have learned, and have become sure, that what looks like bread, even if tastes like it, is not bread, but it is the holy body of Christ; and that what looks like wine, even if it tastes like it, is not wine, but it is the blood of Christ; ... About that David, in the old sang, saying: “*Bread which strengthens the heart of man, and oil to make his face shine*” (15).

Therefore, strengthen your heart by spiritually partaking of that bread, and let the face of your soul shine; so that by baring your face with good conscience, you will reflect like mirror the glory of God, and will move from glory to glory in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom is the glory, honor, and power, now and to the age of ages, amen<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

❖ The house where the church dwells are the writings of the fathers, the law, and the prophets; for there, is the secret place of the King, full of the riches of wisdom and knowledge; And there, as well, is the house of wine – the teaching – whether the secret or the ethical, which makes glad the heart of man<sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ According to the prophet David, God created wine to make glad the heart of man; Whereas those who drink too much of it, are wasting its joy.

❖ Drunkenness definitely happens, not from drinking wine, but from over-drinking it. Wine is granted to us, for no other cause, than to strengthen our physical health, which depends upon reasonable use<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 23: 11.

<sup>2</sup> الاسرار 4، 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on Songs* 3: 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Pom. On Eph.* 19: 5. 17.

❖ He who feed upon the Word of Christ, needs no earthly food; and he who feeds upon the bread of the Savior, would not desire the food of this world. The Lord Savior, Himself, will be his bread; as He has taught us, saying: “*I am the bread which came down from heaven*” (John 6: 41). About this bread, the prophet David says: “*bread which strengthens the heart of man*” (15)<sup>1</sup>

**(Father Maximus, bishop of Turin)**

Blessing his son Jacob, Isaac said: “*May God give you the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine*” (Genesis 27: 28).

❖ These things are befitting for Christ, and befitting for the new people. The dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth, namely, the Word, is given to us by God the Father, together with the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; “*through which we became partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1: 4). We have also been granted plenty of grain and wine, namely, of strength and happiness.

The bread is truly said to strengthen the heart of man, and the wine to make his heart glad (15). The bread is a symbol of spiritual strength, and the wine of the physical strength. They are both given to those who are in Christ. ... By which other way, would we be steadfast and unshaken in piety; and in the perception of good things? ... We are even given “*the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy*” (Luke 10: 19); which I believe is the meaning of “*plenty of grain and wine*”....We are given by God, as well, wine “*to rejoice in hope*” (Romans 12: 12), “*whereof we are glad*” (Psalm 126: 3). According to the Holy Book, we anticipate the heavenly dwelling places, the eternal life with no corruption, to reign together with Christ. ... All those things are, therefore, written for our sake<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great).**

**“*The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the Cedar of Lebanon which He planted*” (16)**

According To **St. Augustine**: [With His bread, wine, and oil, God satisfies first the humble, the pious believers -- the trees of the valleys, then the elites, namely the kings, princes, and rulers -- the cedars of Lebanon which He planted; ... Although the wicked are also called “*the cedars of Lebanon*”, according to what is written: “*The Lord splinters the cedars of Lebanon*” (Psalm 29: 5).

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Maximus of Turin: Sermons 51: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Glaphyra on Genesis, 3: 5.

The word '**Lebanon**' also literally meaning (**glittering**), may refer to the world, glittering with its worldly pleasures; The "cedars of Lebanon", are said to be, "*The trees planted by God*" (16); "*the glory of Lebanon*" (Isaiah 35: 2; 60: 13); "*full of majesty*" (Psalm 29: 4-5); "hugely high" (Amos 2: 9); and "*of excellent beauty*" (Songs 5: 15); ... It is written that "*The righteous shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon*" (Psalm 92: 12); And the Syrians still call it: 'The cedar of the Lord'

***"Where the birds make their nests; The stork has her home in the fir trees" (17)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, instead of the 'stork', it came as the '**Belshum**'; and according to **St. Jerome** it came as the 'Heron', a kind of birds which has no specific nest, but settles down wherever it happens to be, and usually enters into fights against the eagle, the king of birds, and prevails on it. ... In that, it represents a monk, having no cell of his own, fights against the devil, and prevails on him.

The cedar tree may refer to the righteous, who embraces the poor in spirit and the weak (**the birds**), the way God embraces us and has compassion upon our weakness; which teaches us to do the same toward our weaker brethren.

The fir tree, in Palestine, is evergreen, and compete with the cedar tree in height.

❖ By so saying, the psalmist means to say that, the way the birds differ in the type of food they take, they differ, as well, in their nests they build for themselves.

By saying "birds", he also means the souls that the devil attempted to catch, but the Lord has broken up his snares, and saved them from perdition. These symbolic birds build their nest on the high trees, namely the exalted teachings; and feed their young on what they themselves have collected.

The 'stork' is a kind of birds that build their nests on the tops of trees; and in case it is caught in the net of fowlers, it would tear it up and escape; And if it gets familiar to someone, it would follow him and never separate from him; which reminds us of the apostle Peter, who, after being strong-headed and reluctant at the beginning; once he chose to follow the Lord, he never quitted

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***"The high hills are for the wild goats; the cliffs are a refuge for the rock-badgers" (18)***

God gives every kind of creature what suits it: He lets the weak and helpless sparrow live among the tree branches, specially those of the cedar trees, being “the trees of the Lord”. It is as though God has created the cedar trees, with their beauty and plenty of possibilities, for the sake of the weak and helpless sparrows.

The stork find refuge mostly in the fir trees.

The wild goats(Ibex), incredibly swift, actively and freely run on the high hills;

Whereas the rock-badgers (a kind of rabbits), being prone to frequent attacks by wild beasts, find their refuge in the clefts of the rocks.

If God provides the birds, and animals with the habitats that suit them, how much more would He care for man and his needs; together with protecting him against the devil and his hosts, and every source of harm?! ... He presents Himself to us as the “*Rock of Ages*”, where we find refuge against the winds and tempests of the world, as long as we are hidden down in Him.

According to **St. Jerome**: [On this Rock, God established His church, from which the apostle Peter was given his name by the Lord Christ Himself, saying: “*You are Peter, and on this rock I build my church*” (Matthew 16: 18).

On this rock there is no trace of the serpent; hence the prophet says: “*He set my feet upon a rock*” (Psalm 40: 2); And, “*The cliffs are a refuge for the rock-badgers*” (18).

As the rock-badgers take refuge in the cliffs when it fears an enemy, the prophet Moses, (little like a rock-badger), was told by God after his exit from the land of Egypt: “*While my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by, then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back*” (Exodus 33: 22-23)<sup>1</sup>].

Feeling that we are little and helpless, and in need of a rock where we may hide, we take refuge in the “*Rock of Ages*”, on whom our spiritual building is set; fleeing from the serpent, which, finding no place on this True Rock, it will never touch us.

❖ As the wild goat kills the serpents, the wisest of animals, that deceived Eve. the mountain, namely the garden of paradise, is the suitable welling place for them<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> In Matt 7: 25.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

- ❖ In case you are asked: Why have the mountains become a refuge; you may say, to protect the weak animals, in case they are chased by stronger animals.

Like the wild goats which attack and kill the serpents, the apostles of Christ were against the Jews, called by the Lord serpents and “*brood of vipers*” (Matthew 12: 34). Like the wild goats, by their swift motion, they rose up to the tops of teaching; While the weak, and those of little stature among the believers, will find refuge in the “*Rock of Ages*”, namely, our Lord and God Jesus Christ.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ The wild goats refer to the saints who came to this world to wipe out the venom of the serpent. How about the high mountains that seem to be reserved for the wild goats; and no other animal can climb them? I personally believe that they are the knowledge of the Holy Trinity, called the High Mountains; For no one can achieve such a knowledge unless he is a wild goat<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

**“He appointed the moon for seasons; The sun knows its going down” (19)**

The Book of Genesis talks about the creation of the sun and the moon in the fourth day. But here the psalmist reveals, that by their creation, God has set the seasons of the year, the day and the night, for the benefit of man.

While several nations of the atheist world have so honored the sun to make it a god to worship; as did the ancient Egyptians who worshipped the god ‘Ra’; And while many peoples looked at the night as a symbol of evil; The psalmist, on the other hand sees God’s care as amazing; and in his talk he gives precedence to the moon, so as not to despise it.

God cared to set a feast connected to the head of the month and the moon. As both the day and the night are created to serve us, they are holy for God. And several feasts like Passover, the Pentecost (the weeks), are governed by the moon.

According to **father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem**, the moon, made to designate a certain time, refers to the Jews, on account of that the Jewish religion was to play a certain role in history, until the first coming of the Lord Christ, the Sun of Righteousness.... As to “*the sun*

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Songs 3: 12.

*which knows its going down*” The Lord Christ , the Sun of Righteousness knew the day of His passion, crucifixion, and death.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**; because some ignorant people, noticing that the growth of plants are somehow connected to the movement of stars, wrongly assumed that the stars have created the trees; the prophets Moses and David, in their talk, gave precedence to the trees over the stars to let those people know that it is God alone who created all things; and that it is through His command that creatures help one another.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions it came as : ***“The high mountains are for the deer, and the cliffs are a refuge for the rabbits”***.

❖ The ‘deer’ are the spiritually strong men, who, in their life, passing over forests and jungles full of thistles and thorns. *“He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places”* \*Psalm 18: 33); hold fast to the high mountains, namely, to the high commandments of God; and are justified through thinking of the exalted things in the holy books; ... as the high mountains are for the deer.

How about the humble animals? ... How about the little, weak, and the coward rabbit of the wilderness? ... How about the porcupine, covered with thorns? ...

What do thorns mean but the sins? ... Whoever, on a daily basis, commits even little sins, would become covered with little thorns. In his weakness, he is like a wild rabbit; and being covered with little thorns, he is like a porcupine. He would not be able to hold fast to the perfect high commandments, *“for the high mountains are for the deer”*.... What then? Will these little animals perish? ... No! For the Rock is a refuge for the rabbits and porcupines; The Lord is a refuge for the poor and weak<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“He appointed the moon for seasons”***. Spiritually, we may understand that the church, in her approach toward the Sun (our Lord Jesus Christ)...has grown from a little, to a larger size, as though from death to life.

When the church was first emerging from the darkness; men were still in vanity; and *“the wicked bent their bows, made ready their arrows on the string, that they may shoot secretly at the upright in*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

heart” (Psalm 11: 2) ... How blind is he who, in his vanity, goes astray, when the moon has already become perfect<sup>1</sup>!

❖ **“The sun knows its going down”**. could refer to “*the Sun of Righteousness*” with its healing rays, about whom we read in Solomon, that the wicked will say: “*The sun has not risen for us*”... Christ, being the true “*Sun of Righteousness*”, knew the hour of His going down, when He delivered Himself to passion for the sake of our salvation; For, when He was crucified darkness and the night prevailed upon the souls of His disciples<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

**“You make darkness, and it is night, in which all the beasts of the forest creep about” (20)**

Of the most important (double) principles of the Gnostics, is that there is ‘an exalted Being’, beside a ‘Creator of matter’, which according to them is an element of darkness; Hence, according to them, ‘The Creator of Matter’, is a wicked god, or is inferior to ‘The Exalted Being’.

❖ By saying: “**You make darkness, and it is night**” (20), the psalmist mutes the followers of ‘Mercion’, who claimed that the light is created by the good god, whereas the darkness is created by Satan.

Darkness is not an essential creation, but is rather ‘the absence of light’; the same way, evil is ‘the absence of good.. That is why the psalmist does not say: ‘You created darkness’, but says: “*You made darkness*”; As the prophet Moses wrote: “*God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night*” (Genesis 1: 4-5).

**(Father Onesimus, of Jerusalem)**

Here, the psalmist does not speak of God as the Creator of night or darkness, but says that He brought it through the absence of the sun or light. Darkness, having no being in itself, does not need to be created, but is just the absence of light.

The psalmist here, talks about the darkness and the night, being gifts of God, necessary for the life of man, and his comfort, as well as of animals and plants in general; as certain animals, specially those of the wilderness, do not practice their life during the day, but mostly hide in caves, and come out to seek their preys at night..

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 136: 3.

According to **St. Augustine**, when the “*Sun of Righteousness*” sets in man’s life, darkness dwells over his depths, and the devil comes out like a lion to devour his soul. And as the Lord Christ said to Peter: “*Simon, Simon, listen, Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, that you own faith may not fail*” (Luke 22: 31-32). ... When Peter denied his lord three times (Matthew 26: 70-71), Was he not in the lion’s mouth?

The fathers, like **St. John Chrysostom**, often talking of the blessings of the night, and of the absence of the sun for the sake of the comfort of man, and the renewal of his energy through the night sleep; count the night as a divine gift, of benefit for life..

❖ Symbolically, when the “*Sun of Righteousness*” sets on us, we become in complete darkness; the wild beasts start to charge against us, and the lion starts to roar in our wilderness, ready to devour us<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ Once the sun rises, every ferocious beast retreats and takes refuge in his den. The same way, when the sun rays of prayer rises from our tongues, and comes out of our mouths, the savage lusts that destroy our mind retreat to their dens. When our prayer comes out of a vigil soul and alert mind, the devil retreats<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

❖ The night is, however, not less than the day in its benefit to man ...As much as we need the light of the day, we also need, and long, for the quietness of the night; and the other way round ... The night leads men to their homesto enjoy a warm meal and a sweet sleep. It also leads the ferocious beasts to come out of their dens to seek their freedom and pasture<sup>3</sup>.

(**Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus**)

❖ The son of darkness intends to make out of us, children of darkness like him, to plunge in deep sleep, to have the chance to devour us in the darkness. Once darkness dwells, he hastens to come out to seek his preys. ... Yet, when that ferocious beast sees us in the light of prayer, watching the night with our Lord, like the angels of light, in spiritual praises and songs, glorifying our Creator God, he burns with

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

<sup>2</sup> On the Incomprehensible Nature of God, homily 7: 59.

<sup>3</sup> On Divine Providence, Discourse 1: 25-27.

jealousy, and becomes filled with envy, and strives to bring us forth into deep sleep, to partake of his darkness<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Martyrus (Sahdona) the Syrian)**

- ❖ The time when our souls are attacked is a night and perpetual darkness; It is, according to the prophet David, when the beasts of the wilderness come out of their dens to seek their food by devouring the flocks of the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

***“The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God” (21)***

- ❖ At the time of the crucifixion of the Lord Christ, when the darkness of doubt dwelt upon the souls of His disciples, those spiritual beasts wandered to devour the souls. But while doing that, the Sun rose, and they had to retreat. .. The Lord is risen, and the light of faith started again to rise in the souls of the disciples. *“The young lions gather together, and lie down in their dens”* (22); namely in the hearts of the Jews<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

***“When the sun rises they gather together, and lie down in their dens” (22)***

The love of God is so amazing that, once the sun rises, man sets forth to work after a period of comfort and quietness at night. And, on the contrary, the beasts of prey retreat, and gather together to seek refuge in their dwelling places. That is the exalted care of God, to keep the life His children safe.

Once the *“Sun of Righteousness”* rises in the life of His believers, the demons gather together and hide in their dens, and lose their authority on the true believer.

- ❖ He who falls into a sin, should not be depressed, but repent; for the *“Sun of Righteousness”* will certainly rise again in his life, all the wild beasts will flee together with his sins, and he will get back to his past condition before his fall<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Perfection.*

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on Songs 6: 7.*

<sup>3</sup> *Sermon 136:4.*

<sup>4</sup> *Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).*

***“Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening”***

**(23)**

God allows for the darkness to dwell, for the sake of man’s comfort after laboring all the day long; and for the sake of the wild beasts to come out of their dens to seek their food; and to make the wicked men fear going out to practice their evil doings. ... And by staying in their dens all day long, they do not harm men who go to their work from sunrise to sunset.

❖ Now, O man of God ... O church of God, O body of Christ whose Head is in heaven!... What are you doing for the sake of uniting with Him? .... Do the good works in the security of the peace of the church, up to the end<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Once the “*Sun of righteousness*” rises, we should go out to work until the evening; namely, until the day of our departure from this world. It is of utmost importance to do the works of righteousness every minute of our life<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ “*Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening*”.(23). It is to be understood that this man who goes out to work, refers to the church – the body of Christ – before the resurrection of Christ, was formed of the disciples alone. ... When a maidservant asked Peter if he was a disciple of Christ, he denied three times. But once the “*Sun of Righteousness*” – the Lord Christ – was risen, Peter got strengthened, and was ready to be scourged, and even to be killed for the sake of the name of Christ.

Hence, once he receives the grace of the Holy Spirit, man; namely, the church of Christ, starts to go out to work; and to labor until the evening; namely until the end of the world.

To refer that to the grace of God, and not to man’s own strife, the psalmist directly adds: “*O Lord, how manifold are Your works*” (24). They are indeed His works, and not out of our worthiness.

Then the psalmist adds: “*In wisdom You have made them all*”. Namely, every thing is consummated by Christ, Your power and wisdom; “*The earth is full of Your possessions*”<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 136: 5.

### 3- “THE EARTH IS FULL OF HIS POSSESSIONS”: (24 – 30):

*“O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of your possessions” (24)*

The Lord is the Lord of life and death; On Him depends the procession from life to death, then to life anew. How wonderful is His wisdom, proclaimed in all His creation and works. Nothing in them happen by mere chance, as is thought by man in the darkness of his human mind.

All creation bear the touches of a mighty and loving Creator. *“The earth is full of His possessions”*; bear His exalted grace, and proclaim the greatness of His glory. As for man, Why would he ever fear Satan, whom God has made a playing toy for ridicule? When all humans enjoy the Spirit of God who renews the face of the earth<sup>1</sup>!?

❖ *“O Lord, how manifold are Your works”* They are truly great and exalted... *“In wisdom You have made them all”*. You have made them all in Christ<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Flowing with gratitude, the psalmist, finding no words enough to praise God, he cries out, saying: *“O Lord, how manifold are Your works”*. Your Works are beyond all human understanding; *“In wisdom You have made tem all”*, in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“For by Him all things were created”* (Colossians 1: 16; Namely, they are created by the wisdom of God.

When we perceive, how the tiny ant, knowing that winter is approaching, starts storing its food!; ... How the mosquito, the flee, the bee that makes honey, and all the other creatures, including the huge elephant, all have eyes and the rest of sensory and other organs like us; ... Are not all those wonders, *worthy* of amazement?! ... Are they not all full of His wisdom<sup>3</sup>?!?

(St. Jerome)

❖ As God is the eternal Fountain of the wisdom, befitting of Him, His wisdom has to be eternal as well. For, according to his psalm, David says that by wisdom all things are created; and *Solomon* says: *“By wisdom the Lord formed the earth, and by understanding He has the*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gaebelain, p. 386.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>3</sup> Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).

word". And according to John the Evangelist: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1: 3) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Athanasius, the apostolic)**

- ❖ I believe that the true wisdom and counsel, is the wisdom that was there before creation, by which God (the Father) has created all things, : "***In wisdom You have made them all***" (24); and, "*Christ is the Power of God and the Wisdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 1: 24). By Him all things were made"<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ According to the apostle Paul, It is God who has built the temple, and set its foundation on the holy mountains, namely on the prophets and the apostles? (Ephesians 2: 20); They are its living stones, set in a special order that makes them a unity, like that of faith; and by their growth in the bond of peace, they have become a holy temple, a dwelling place for the Lord in the Spirit.

Solomon, with his wisdom, refers to the true Wisdom. History testifies that Solomon has gone beyond the human wisdom, having kept the knowledge of all things in his heart, surpassing all those who came before him, and those who came after him. Yet, God is the origin of power, truth, and wisdom, as, according to the prophet David: "*O Lord, how manifold are Your works, In wisdom You have made them all*" (24); Interpreting this psalm, the apostle says" *By Him all things were created*" (Colossians 1: 16); namely, were created through the wisdom of God<sup>3</sup>.

- ❖ He, whose essence surpasses all nature, unseen, and unperceivable; could be perceived by wisdom reflected in the universe ... Through meditation in the system of creation, we do not form an image of the Essence, but of Him who made all things with wisdom<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

- ❖ Everyone of the wise, is a partner of Christ as much wisdom he possess, For Christ is the Wisdom. And everyone with power, would acquire a greater power, as much as he is a partner of Christ; For Christ is the power<sup>5</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Four Discourses against the Arians, 1: 16.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Ecclesiastes, 5.*

<sup>3</sup> عظة 7 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار

<sup>4</sup> *On the Beatitudes, Sermons 6.*

<sup>5</sup> *Commentary on John, 1: 244-246.*

❖ Bowing your knees in good reverence before the Maker of the worlds of sense and mind, the manifest and the hidden; You glorify God with a holy tongue, with ever-uttering lips, and with a non-failing heart, saying: “*O Lord, how manifold are Your works, in wisdom You have made them all*” (24). Honor, glory, and majesty, are Yours, now and forever, Amen<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ Not one of His work is done without wisdom; For He does all things in befitting time, and proper way<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great)

❖ As no language is befitting to talk about the wonders of creation; no ear is capable to hear it; and no time is long enough to perceive it; Let us then say together with the psalmist: “*O Lord, how manifold are Your works; in wisdom You have made them all*” (24)<sup>3</sup>.

❖ Has the day passed? Give thanks to Him who gives us the sun to help us in our day work; the light at night, and who provides all our other needs in life. I wish the night, as well, give us the inspiration to pray.

When you look at heaven, and see the beautiful stars, pray to the Lord of all the things seen, the Creator of the universe, who, “*in wisdom made them all*” (24).

And when you see all nature falling asleep, you should again worship Him, who, even against our will, relieves us of the continuous pressure of labor; and, through a concise period of rest, restores to us again our activity to work.

Do not allow the whole night to be dedicated to sleep; Do not allow half your age to pass without benefit, in a slumber of laziness and slothfulness. ... Divide the time of the night between sleep and prayer; ... Let your light sleep, itself, become a practice of piety; For our dreams while sleeping are mostly reflections of our thoughts by day<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Basil the Great)

❖ What tongue, is capable of singing praise to the Creator, as is befitting?!

What talk or words could truly fulfill the description of our Creator?!

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 9 :16

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Luke, Homily 130.

<sup>3</sup> Hexameron 9: 3.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Reg. Brev. 32.

Who could have the wisdom to perceive completely the wisdom of the Creator<sup>1</sup>?!

(Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus)

❖ What could surpasses the beauty and splendor of heaven, glittering with the rays of the sun by day, as though flaring with love; and with uncountable number of stars by night, that guide the skippers of boats and the travelers by land, as though holding their hands<sup>2</sup>?!

What could surpass the beauty and splendor of heaven, stretching above your head, sometimes as a pure transparent cover; and some other time as a stretched plain adorned with flowers?! ... The enjoyment of the beauty of flowers by day, cannot surpass the meditation in the beauty of heaven by night, glittering with the stars, the flowers that would never wither!

In case you would not be bored by meditation, you can see God's care in several witnesses along the seasons of the year, in the seas, and on the land, with all their inhabitants. ... Is there smaller and humbler than a butterfly, an ant, or a bee? Yet, all of them proclaim God's care, might, and wisdom.

That is why, having been qualified by the Spirit to meditate in the creation as a whole, the prophet David cries out, saying: "***O Lord, how manifold are Your works; in wisdom You have made them all***" (24)

Yes indeed, even the air is created for our own sake ... to dry up the mire, to appease the heat of the summer, to make the plants grow, and to help the boats to sail, etc.

During the night, you can see the care of the mighty God, in helping your tired bodies, calm down your exhausted nerves ... save you from the sufferings of the day, and its worrisome anxieties.... Whoever is deprived of the comfort of the night would lose the day; and whoever gives no chance to his mind to rest and relax, would corrupt his work.... All that, O man, are for your sake<sup>3</sup>!

Now, having understood that the rays of God's care surpasses the light of life, Do not ever attempt to search, curiously, the issues that go beyond your own stature; and do not ever walk along things that do not benefit you ... Our mere existence is, in itself, a gift from God, with His exalted love; For He is in no need of our servitude<sup>4</sup>!

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<sup>1</sup>On divine Providence, Discourse 3.

<sup>2</sup>أفاض القديس في الحديث عن فائدة الشمس والقمر والنجوم.

<sup>3</sup>تحدث عن الموت كعطية حسنة، معلم لنا للنوم الروحي، وينقلنا إلى عدم الفساد...

<sup>4</sup>The Divine Providence.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

*“This great and wide sea, in which there are innumerable creeping things, living things both small and great” (25)*

If the great and wide seas and oceans terrify man, who sees them as tombs for whoever ventures through them, Yet, they embrace innumerable living things, both small and great, which can live nowhere else.

- ❖ Here, by this terrifying sea and ocean he means this great and wide world, teeming with snares that threaten the slothful among men; ... they creep, but let us beware, lest they may catch us.

In the midst of the mighty waves of these waters, let us look up toward the tree (the cross), to feel safe.

Do not let faith slumber; Do not let Christ sleep; And if He does, wake Him up, to command the wind, and to calm down the waves (See Matthew 8: 24-26); then our journey would end in peace, and we would rejoice in reaching our home port.

In this terrifying sea , I still see non-believers; who live in barren and bitter waters; they, both small and great, hate the church; and the name of Christ for them is something heavy to hear; they are stirred up because they are not allowed to set forth the immense violence in their hearts.... Yet, Do not ever fear them<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ In this great and wide sea, Is it not amazing to find such innumerable creeping things (Reptiles), and fishes of every kind, living even in its deepest parts, where they grow and renew their life. ... Man would die if he happens to be there; and on the contrary, these small and great creatures would perish if they get out of the water to dry land<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ The “Wisdom” by whom God created all things is His Only-begotten Son, by whom all things were created; the Word and Power of God; who came down from heaven to earth; Who made men a new creation; renewing them by the true faith, and through the holy baptism.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ *“This great and wide sea, in which are innumerable creeping things” (25)...* Who can describe the marvelous world of fish living in it? ...

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 104 (103).*

<sup>2</sup> *Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).*

Who can imagine the mighty whales, and how the splendid nature of Amphibians live sometimes in water, and other times on dry land?!

Who can describe the depth, the vast width of those seas, and their mighty waves?! ... Which, nevertheless stop at certain boundaries set for them; *“This far you may come, but no further; and here your proud waves must stop”* (Job 38: 11)... There, the mighty sea, showing obvious obedience, stops at a clearly defined line, drawn by the waves, proclaiming to everyone that so far he is allowed to go, but no further<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

❖ *“This great and wide sea, in which are innumerable creeping things”*. The sea refers to the world, full of tempests, and mighty waves; full of salinity and bitterness; where larger fish devour smaller ones.

Then the psalmist adds: *“... There, the ships sail about”* (26); which rather refer to the church, that tends to reach the shore of paradise by the righteous and holy works, in the midst of mighty waves and the diverse tempests and winds of afflictions; despite which, being directed by the holy (oars), and led by the breaths of the Holy Spirit, they are borne to the eternal life, by the same adversaries who oppose her.

In this sea there is also that mighty dragon ‘Leviathan’ created to play in it. This dragon refers to Satan, who works in the wicked, not only provoking them to commit sins, but also by perpetually using them as tools to persecute the saints and the righteous. This monster has been created as a good angel in the hands of God; but once he exalted himself by pride against God, he fell down from his blessed angelic stature ... Deceiving himself with pride, he also deceives the slothful among men, through the allowance of God, and His just hidden judgment<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

*“There, the ships sail about, and there is that Leviathan, which You have made to play there”* (26)

In the episode of Noah, some believe that it was God who taught man how to build a fleet of ships.

If the sea with all its dangers, was seen as the dwelling place of Leviathan, the mighty sea dragon, referring to Satan; Yet, God has given the believers the authority over the hosts of darkness, and turned them into playing toys, despised even by little children.

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 9 : 11 .

<sup>2</sup> Sermons, 136: 6.

The sea which terrifies man by its mighty waves and torrent swells, is actually the connecting link between the different countries through the marine commercial fleets of ships.

In one of his Passover sermons, **St. Athanasius the apostolic**, the man of sufferings, presents to us a living portrait of the believer, full of hope in the Lord, who fears no one, not even Leviathan, namely, Satan. He wrote to His people, likening the world to a mighty sea, over which we sail as though in a ship led by the divine Word, sailing with our whole freedom toward our home port in peace, not fearing even Leviathan, who was created for us to play with<sup>1</sup>.

❖ There, the ships sail above the sea that disturbs you. By the 'ships' we understand (the churches), that sail in the midst of the storms, the stirred-up temptations, the mighty waves of this world, and among the monsters, small and great.

As long as Christ, on the cross, is the Skipper. I wish the ships do not fear, nor be confused where to sail; but put their trust in their Skipper... They sail diligently, and in security, until they reach their destination<sup>2</sup>.

❖ The tempter may come against me with a strong army; yet he cannot overcome me, for You, O Lord, has broken his awe down, and given me courage before him<sup>3</sup>.

❖ Many may say: [Satan has been given such a great authority, to reign over this world, and to prevail over many. ... Can he do much? ... To what extent, can he prevail?

Unless he is given the authority by God, he can do nothing.

If you know this, he would not be allowed to tempt you, but will flee defeated, and will not acquire you... He may be allowed to tempt some saintly ministers of God; yet they will overcome, because they never flee from the way; they will put their eyes on their (heels), so as not to fall.

O brethren, Whoever beware of the serpent's head, will safely cross this sea.

If you fear hell, and love the Kingdom of God, you will beware of the serpent's head; for "*There is no authority except from God*" (Romans 13:1)..... From whom, then, shall we fear?!

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Paschal Letters 19: 7 (Easter 347: A, D)*.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 104 (103)*.

<sup>3</sup> مناجاة 16.

Let Leviathan stay in its place in the water; while you cross through it; for he is allowed by God to live there.... You may assume that it is a great place for it. But coming to know that it became the place of dwelling for the fallen angels; what you assume to be glory for Leviathan, is actually a verdict against him<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ The serpent intends to devour; While He (God), does not devour those who chooses Him.
- ❖ If you wish not to be food for the serpent; Do not be dust! ... You may ask how? ... If you have no pleasure in tasting the earthly things. Just listen to the apostle, saying: “*Set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Colossians 3: 2)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ In case Satan sees you bound to heaven, watching the night, he will not dare, even to stir at you<sup>3</sup>!
- ❖ The good behavior will shut up the mouth of Satan, himself, and will mute him<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ According to **St. Basil the Great**, the ships refer to the souls of the saints, sailing by the sails of virtues, through the sea of this world.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season” (27)***

All the heavenly and the earthly creatures wait for God with the spirit of hope, on account of that He created all, cares for all, and fulfills their needs in due season.

***“What You give them, they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good” (28)***

On His side, God gives in abundance to satisfy us. On our side, we are committed not to stand negatively, but to pick up what He gives us to get satisfied.

God, Himself, being called ‘Goodness’, the whole Goodness; by stretching His hands, specially on the cross, He floods us with goodness;

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>3</sup> In *Incompr.*, homily 4.

<sup>4</sup> الحب الأخوي، 1964، ص 84.

to become good through Him; For without Him, we would never enjoy the true goodness.

❖ Christ is the ‘Hand’ (or the ‘Arm’) of God: “*To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*” (Isaiah 53: 1). It is revealed to whom it is opened; For revelation is an act of opening.

“*You open Your hand, they are filled with good*”. When You reveal Christ to others, they are all filled with good; But they have no good on their own<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Saying: “*You open Your hand, they all are filled with goods*”, refers to the abundance by which He grants them food. And also refers to the opening, and stretching of our Lord’s hands on the cross; For, by His crucifixion, the heaven, the earth, and all creatures, were filled with God’s good and mercy.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ “*Do not be afraid, O little flock*”. By saying: “*Do not be afraid*”, he means that their heavenly Father grants life to all those who love Him, and without doubt. He will not forsake His own, but will surely open up His hand, that forever fills the universe with good<sup>2</sup>.

St. Cyril the Great)

❖ What is good, is from God; And what is from God, is good<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

“*You hide Your face, they are troubled, You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust*” (29)

The life of all creatures on earth are a gift from God, and depend on Him. Once the spirit is taken away, the body returns to its origin, namely to dust.... And once God hides His face from His creation; Namely, once He takes His care away from them, they are troubled.

❖ He who repents his sins, would realize that he has no power in himself, and would confess to God, saying: ‘I am dust and ashes’.

O you proud; Once your spirits are taken away from you, you will no more do what you are proud of; and you will return to your dust.

Knowing that you are created from dust, Once God hides His face from you, you will return to your origin. ... You should, therefore, pray, and confess your weakness<sup>1</sup>!

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Luk, Homily 91.

<sup>3</sup> Flight from the World, 6: 36.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Somewhere else, the blessed David says about those on earth: “*You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth*” (Psalm 104: 29, 30). By the face of the earth, he means its beauty; and by the beauty of the human nature, he means its non-corruption<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ The dead who were risen to life by Christ, as referred by the prophets, are the greatest witnesses to the resurrection from the dead; It is written: “*Your dead shall live; ... they shall arise; awake and sing, you who dwell in dust*” (Isaiah 26: 19). Waking up, refers to the life, granted by Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; To that, the psalmist also refers by verses he addresses to God, the Savior of the world, saying: “*You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust*” (29)

Because of the disobedience of Adam, God hid His face from us, and our faces got attached to dust of the earth; For God has issued a verdict on the human nature, saying: “*For you are dust, to dust you will return*” (Genesis 3: 19). But, at the end of time, the surface of the earth will be renewed, because God, the Father, through His Son, grants life to all those in the universe.

Death brought the signs of old age and of corruption over men ... But Christ is the life-Giver who renews; For He is life<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril the great)

**“*You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth*” (30)**

All creation is the workmanship of God, for He created the world, and keeps on caring for it, as though He renews the face of the earth.

- ❖ What came in verse 29 concerns the life of senses; Whereas what came in verse 30 concerns the souls of men that enjoy the first resurrection, as a deposit of the enjoyment of the ultimate resurrection. According to ‘**Isitheos**’: [God sent the Holy Spirit, and created the nations through the preaching of the saintly apostles].

(Father Onesimus, of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Luke, Homily 136.

<sup>3</sup> عظة 36.

❖ According to the apostle Paul: “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good work*” (Ephesians 2: 10); We get grace from His Spirit to live in righteousness, for he is the One “*who justifies the ungodly*” (Romans 4: 5)... Once He takes our spirits away, we return to our dust, and acknowledge our weakness for the sake of our edification; and when we receive His Spirit, we are renewed<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ If creation means, giving life anew to the dead, how would the works of the Holy Spirit not be mighty, He, who, concerning us, is the Grantor of life after the resurrection; and He, who harmonizes our souls with the spiritual life in the life to come? ... Creation means a change for the better, for those who have fallen into sin in the present world; as it came in the words of Paul, saying: “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*” (2 Corinthians 5: 17); And the change that happens to us in this life by the Holy Spirit, from our sensory earthly condition to the heavenly behavior, and hence lifts our souls up, to the highest state of admiration<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Basil the Great)

❖ If God the Father, by the Word, in the Holy Spirit, creates and renews all things; There would be no sense in such heresy that would lead to blasphemy on the Son; For those who claim that the Spirit is created, would also say that the Word, by whom all things are created, is created as well<sup>3</sup>!

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

❖ About this, the apostle Paul says clearly: “*Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*” (2 Corinthians 4: 16). By this he intends to tell us that the renewal is realized as we grow in the knowledge of God, Namely, through meditating and having our thoughts abide in the Person of God, who is Just and Holy (2 Corinthian 4: 17). By so practicing, all what is vain and temporal, will lose their connection to us; and consequently, we would start to resist everything that may corrupt the image of God in us, and to despise such things.

This is the inner change for your soul, and the continuous progress toward eternity. Stop trusting in the issues pertaining to the

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> On the Spirit, 19 (49).

<sup>3</sup> الرسائل عن الروح القدس إلى الأسقف سيرايبون 1: 24 (ترجمة مؤسسة القديس أنطونيوس).

seen world, more than in those of the unseen world. That will have its effect on the renewed spiritual thoughts.

The inner change implies putting an end to scattering your energies, and to being preoccupied with things that bring forth carnal pleasures; through having hope in bringing forth satisfaction to your depths, and infinding the true perpetual joy inside yourself, that comes forth from the fountains of the Spirit.

Through such continuous strife, we can control, and lessen our desire for life according to our body lusts, according to the earthly perception; Namely, to get bound to what is spiritual through our love for God, and our persistence on following Him by the spirit.

Finally, our success in all that depends upon the divine help. The Word of God teaches us and grants us comfort, by saying: “*Without Me, you can do nothing*” (John 15: 5).

This gives us an idea about the daily work realized in those who spiritually progress as they should<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Hovering on the earth, the Holy Spirit make it bring forth a plenty of fruits; for by the help of the Holy Spirit, the seeds of the new birth that is renewed, are brought forth, according to the words of the prophet: “*You send forth Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth*” (30)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

### 3- A PRAISE BY THE PSALMIST TO THE CREATOR:

“*May the glory of the Lord endure forever; May the Lord rejoice in His works*” (31)

All what God has created are good, and He rejoices in His works, and not in the sin which is not His work; ... He rejoices in what He did, and not in what is foreign to the nature He has created.

❖ “*The Lord rejoices in His works*”. Not in your works; which, in case they are evil, would be as such; and if they are good, it is because of the grace of God<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Many call themselves “men”, **namely** (humans); yet they are actually not so; on account of that they behave like animals, spitting their

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<sup>1</sup> *On Seeing God. 17.*

<sup>2</sup> *Hexameron, 1: 8.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 104 (103).*

frustrations like reptiles, and their violence like voracious beasts; Hence the prophet David says: “*Man, though in honor, does not abide, he is like beasts that perish*” (Psalm 49: 12).

The term “man” applies to him who carries the image of God (See Genesis 1: 27), he who befittingly protects his honor, who knows how to choose between good and evil, , and brings pleasure to God, who would rejoice in him (31).

So was a “man” in the land of ‘Uz’, by the name of ‘Job’. Although the region was barren, yet it contained one fruitful plantation – a “man” called ‘Job’. He was a treasure, he lacked nothing, as a perfect creation of the true God. With no hypocrisy, he used his virtues to the account of Truth, consummating the commandments of God. He worshipped God according to His will<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Hesichius of Jerusalem)**

***“He looks on the earth, and it trembles; He touches the mountains and they smoke” (32)***

According to many fathers of the church like **St. Augustine and St Jerome**, God desires to set out of us a new heaven. In case we receive His work in us, we may enjoy His looks on us, and in Him we may find our joy and satisfaction; But if we persist on living like earthly creatures, bound to the earthly, and not the eternally issues; His looks will make what is earthly in us, tremble and shake; with the hope that we may return to Him, and become heaven. ... If our souls become haughty, and we count ourselves as ‘mountains’, He will touch us, and we shall smoke.

❖ O earthly man, You who are proud of your goodness; and refers your perfection and (spiritual) riches to yourself; ... Behold, God is looking on you, and makes you tremble – for trembling in humility is better than the trusting in pride – You, therefore, should act with trembling; you should listen to the psalm, saying: “*Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling*” (Psalm 2: 11).

***“He touches the mountains and they smoke”*** ... By the smoking of mountains he means that they pray to God.... Feeling that he is a mountain, man needs to be touched by God to smoke; Namely, to offer prayers to God, as sacrifices of his heart; ... Smoking toward God, he strikes his chest, and starts to cry; for smoke causes tears<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Job, homily 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 104 (103).*

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The earth's condition depends upon the power of God; as shown by the words, saying: "***He looks on the earth, and it trembles***" (32); and, "*Again I move the earth*". The earth remains steady, not through its own balance, but by the allowance and free will of God. The righteous 'Job' says: "*He shakes the earth out of its place*" (Job 9: 6). ... By the support of His will, God has set the earth, for "*In His hands are the deep places of the earth*" (Psalm 95: 4)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ Intending to let us know the greatness of God's might, the prophet David says: "***He Looks on the earth and it trembles***" (32). Despite its hugely great weight, When God looks on it with anger, the earth trembles and shakes like a tree leaf before the wind; And tby His touch, the mountains will burn and smoke; as it happened to Mount Sinai, while God gave His law to the prophet Moses.... According to St. Athanasius and St. Asichius, all the nations on earth will tremble with fear in the day of judgment; And the evil mountains, namely, the adversary hosts, will smoke and disturbed.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***"I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being"*** (33)

Whoever gets attached to God, will enjoy the exultant new life, and his whole being will sing to the Lord, his life.

- ❖ "***I will sing to the Lord as long as I live***"; namely, with everything He desires... At the present time, our life is only hope now, and will later on be eternal .... Being loved forever, He will be eternally praised by us<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ I mean to say that, whoever, by his mind, thinks of the past and present goodness of God's, of His care for ordaining the world, of His might, truth, justice, and of His judgment of everyone in the ultimate day, according to his works, .... would sing praises to the Lord, not just by words; but, according to **St. John Chrysostom**, who says: [O man, if you spend your whole life supplicating and beseeching; and if the whole world pray for your sake, Yet your behavior in life is not proper; All those prayers and supplications would be of no avail. But

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<sup>1</sup> *Six Days of Creation 1: 6: 22.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 104 (103).*

if your works conform to your prayers, you will bring pleasure to the heart of God, will rise to the level of angels, will get your request, will hope to get other rewards, and will rejoice in the Lord].

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the Lord” (34)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: ***“My words (my talk) will be sweet to him”***

God will rejoice in our souls, exultant in Him; And our souls will rejoice in singing praise to Him.

❖ What is the talk of man to God, but the confession of his sins?

Confessing to God what you are, you are talking to Him.... Talking to Him, and practicing good works, you enter into a dialogue with Him.

According to the prophet Isaiah: *“Wash yourselves; Make yourselves clean”* (Isaiah 1: 16). What is the talk to God other than revealing yourself to the One who knows you; So that He would reveal Himself to you, who do not know Him.

Behold, that is how your talk to God should be: an offer of humility, the labor of your heart; the sacrifice of your life; all of which would bring pleasure to God.

Now, what will bring pleasure to you? ***“I will be glad in the Lord”***.... That is the way your talk to God should be; ... Your confession will bring pleasure to Him; And His grace will be sweet to you. ... He will talk to you by His Word; Namely, by Christ<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ How sweet will be the voice of the soul, when it utters the Word of God; when it interprets the faith and teaching of the Truth; when it reveals His dealings and judgments<sup>2</sup>. The great and wise prophet David says: *“May my meditation be sweet to Him”* (34)<sup>3</sup>.

❖ When the (bride of the song) became worthy of being told, what was written about the prophet Moses: *“Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice”* (Exodus 19; 19); When she is told (by the Groom): *“Let me here your voice”* (Song 2: 14), it is a great commendation clarified by adding: *“For your voice is sweet”* (Song 2: 14). ... When

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 104 (103).

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Songs 3: 15.

<sup>3</sup> Origin: Comm. On the Songs of Songs, book 3 (4): 14 (ACW).

the prophet David, great in wisdom, also says: “*My meditation is sweet to Him*” (34), it refers to that the voice of the soul becomes sweet to God, when it utters the word of God, interprets the faith and the teachings of the truth; and when it reveals the dealings and judgments of God<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ To know for sure that prayer is a talk to God, listen to the words of the prophet David, saying: “*My meditation be sweet to Him*” (34), Namely, let my meditation bring forth pleasure before the eyes of God.... Will God not grant us our need, even before we ask Him to? ... Of Course He may, but he waits for us to give Him the chance to make us worthy of His care. And, whether our request is fulfilled or not, let us persist on our prayers, and on giving Him thanks, not only when we get our request, but also when we do not get it. If it is God’s will not to respond to our request, on account of that it is for our own good, let us give him thanks, as though we have got what we are asking for; For as we do not know what is good for us, as well as He does; it is befitting to thank Him just the same<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

**“*May sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!*” (35)**

The interpretations of the ‘Telmud’ and the ‘Madrash’ call on us to notice, that it is the first time to find the expression “*Praise the Lord*” in the Book of Psalms, at the end of this psalm. For it is the psalm of the glory of the Creator, who works in the whole creation to the account of man; who grants the animals and the birds their needs; who renews the face of the earth; and who makes Satan a playing toy, for ridicule. And It is the psalm of exultation in God the Philanthropic, the Lover of mankind)....

It is befitting of the believer to sing unceasingly: “*Bless the Lord, O my soul*”. For, discovering the light in which His God dwells, the clouds, His chariot, and His ministers the flames of fire, would bring forth joy to his heart; For, through enjoying the image of His Creator, the splendor of the divine light would be poured on him, and he would bear an exalted power, for the whole nature works to his account; and he would even be, together with the heavenly ministers of God, a fire flaring with the divine love.

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on Songs 3: 15.*

<sup>2</sup> *IN Gen. Homily 30. PG. 53: 280.*

This psalm proclaims the goodness of the world created by God, for there is no more place for sin in it, and the sinners are consumed (35). The Spirit of God gives power for purification, that evil would return to the dust from which God makes a new *creation*.

According to **St. Jerome**<sup>1</sup>, the psalmist did not say: “May sinners be eternally consumed”, but said: “*May sinners be consumed from the earth*”(35). The psalmist does not seek their eternal perdition in the fire of hell, but seeks their return from evil, wishing that the wicked will be no more on earth.

❖ “*May sinners be consumed from earth*”. Let their spirit be taken away from them; so that (the Lord) would send His Spirit to renew theirs

“*And the wicked be no more*”. How could they be no more, except, being wicked?!... Let them be justified, that they become wicked no more. Seeing all that, the psalmist, filled with joy, repeated the first phrase in the psalm: “*Bless the Lord, O my soul*” (Psalm 104: 1).

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ “*May sinners be consumed from earth*”. The psalmist does not pray for the eternal perdition of the sinners, but for the sin to be of no avail. Once there is no more sin, there will be no more sinners, and all will be righteous<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ The psalmist cries out seeking the consumption of oppression and sin; for man is not an enemy of his fellow man, but an enemy of the evil in the free will of man... About this point, the apostle Paul talks in great detail, saying: “*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)<sup>4</sup>.

(**St. Gregory of Nyssa**)

❖ According to **St. John Chrysostom**: [By saying: “*May sinners be consumed from earth, and the wicked be no more*”, the blessed prophet does not mean their utter perdition; for God and His pious do not seek the perdition of the sinner, but his salvation and reform. ... By saying: “*be consumed from earth*”; he means ‘Let their desire for

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<sup>1</sup> *Against the Pelagians, 1: 28.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 104 (103).*

<sup>3</sup> *Homily 30 on Ps. 103 (104).*

<sup>4</sup> *The Lord's Prayer, Sermon 1.*

earthly things be consumed, and become of no avail; ... Let their behavior be reformed, ... and let their wickedness be no more’].

According to **St. Dedymus the blind**: [On the day of judgment, heaven and earth will be renewed, free of any corruption and sorrow, filled with joy and gladness; and will become a dwelling place for the righteous; ... But the sinners and the wicked will be consumed from earth.... Knowing that, O my soul, “*Bless the Lord*”, and keep on praying, supported by a new behavior].

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

#### **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 104**

#### **HOW AMAZING YOU ARE, IN YOUR CARE, O MY CREATOR!**

- ❖ My depths praise You, and give You thanks for Your exalted care;  
In Your humility, You allowed us to look at Your splendid light;  
At how You are clothed with an unutterable light;  
For us to enjoy the reflection of Your splendor on us;  
Indeed, no creation in heaven or on earth can perceive Your Essence;  
But through Your exalted care, You bring us forth into Your light;
- ❖ What kind of garment do You need, O You, the non-perceivable?  
You have Your church as a garment You put on;  
You shine Your light in her;  
You set out of her a light and a splendid cloud;  
You make her a throne and a chariot for Yourself;
- ❖ You made Your angels spirits without heavy material bodies;  
And Your ministers flames of fire, non-quenchable by the enemy;  
Let the fire of Your Holy Spirit burn in us;  
To ignite our hearts with the fire of Your love;  
To enlighten our eyes;  
To perceive Your divine secrets.
- ❖ The perpetually moving earth; seem as though, established on strong foundation;  
As though made steady for man’s own sake, to enjoy dwelling on it;  
You have created me out of dust; But You granted me a breath of life;  
Through my sin, I became under the verdict to return back to the dust;  
But by Your salvation You have lifted me up;  
To return back to heaven, to live together with You.

- ❖ My soul is extremely belittled before the hugely wide earth;  
And before the mighty mountains and the deep oceans;  
And before the violence and power of the wind;  
But, through finding a place for myself in your bosom;  
I see nature with all its greatness, bows down to serve me;  
I see nature behave within limits according to Your command;  
Power and glory be to You, for the sake of Your care for me.
- ❖ How exalted is Your care for all Your creation;  
You care for the animals of the wilderness;  
You allow for springs to gush in the wilderness to quench their thirst;  
You grant the birds secure places to build their nests;  
You plant grass to satisfy the hunger of cattle;  
You provide food for humans;  
The earth presents vines to provide us with wine;  
Yet, You granted us reason not to drink too much of it, and lose our  
balance and peace;  
The earth presents to us the oil of gladness and joy  
You let our bodies in need of nothing;  
Would You let our souls in need?  
By Your Holy Spirit You grant us the wine of the Spirit;  
That our souls get drunk with Your love;  
And You grant us Your body and blood for an eternal life;  
To partake of the banquet of heaven, and to enjoy the bread of angels.
- ❖ You provided the animals and birds with diverse dwelling places;  
You let the birds build their nests among the branches of trees;  
You provide the stork with home in the fir trees;  
The high hills for the wild goats;  
The cliffs a refuge for the rock badgers;  
You are our eternal dwelling place, O Rock of ages;  
Your divine bosom grants us a perpetually secure place.
- ❖ Rejoicing in the light of the day, we go to work;  
And look forward to the night to give rest to our bodies;  
With Your Light, O Sun of Righteousness, You shine on our souls;  
And our souls find comfort in Your bosoms.
- ❖ When I look at the seas and oceans;  
I feel belittled in my own eyes;  
The dragon Leviathan (Satan) thinks he is capable of devouring me;  
But You destroy all the power of Satan;

You even turn him into a playing toy in the hands of Your sons and daughters;

We sail on the sea and oceans of this world;

We sail in Your holy church;

As long as You are Her Skipper, she will never shake;

She will take us forth to the port of peace – the Higher Jerusalem;

- ❖ we shall not be preoccupied with the currents of this world;  
Nor be confused by its whirlpools;  
We shall only be preoccupied with Your Holy Spirit who renews our youth like the eagle's;  
Who grants us the spirit of joy and praise;  
We perpetually offer to You the sacrifices of thanksgiving  
That we, together with the heavenly hosts, sing Your praise;
- ❖ Glory be to You, O Forgiver of sins;  
Glory be to You, O Grantor of goods;  
Glory be to You, O Sanctifier of the life of Your children.

## ***PSALM 105***

# **THE PERPETUAL FAITHFULNESS OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE**

This psalm is considered the fourth of the psalms that meditate in God's dealings with His people along the history; which are psalms 78; 106; and 136. These psalms do not give a historical account, as much as they proclaim God's compassion and faithfulness to fulfill His covenants and promises, despite the unfaithfulness of man.

This psalm confirms that the promised land is a divine gift.

It is a call to the people, as well as to every believer to search in the amazing works of God, whether as a Creator, or as a Care-taker of His people along the ages.

It concentrates our sight upon God's mercies; and exhorts us to be filled with hope in the faithful promises of God.

### **Its occasion<sup>1</sup>:**

There is a wide difference among scholars as to the occasion of writing this psalm,

1- According to some, the author of this psalm is the prophet David, who sang it when he brought forth the ark of the covenant to the holy city (1 Chronicles 16: 8-22).

2- There is almost unanimity that the prophet David is the author of both psalm 104 and 105.

3- There is no word nor statement that indicate that the prophet David is not its author

If Israel finds in their liberation from the bondage of the Pharaoh of Egypt, a fertile material to celebrate the work of God with them, the hearts of Christians would burn with more joy and exultation for their enjoyment of salvation from the bondage of the devil through the cross.

<b>A call to praise and to remember God's mercies</b>	<b>1 - 6</b>
<b>God's covenant and the promised land</b>	<b>7 - 15</b>
<b>Joseph in Egypt</b>	<b>16 - 22</b>
<b>The Israeli people in Egypt</b>	<b>23 - 38</b>
<b>The enjoyment of the promised inheritance</b>	<b>39 - 45</b>

### **The title:**

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<sup>1</sup> W. S. Plumer, *Ps. 105*.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as  
“**A decree of Alleluia**”

- ❖ The word “Alleluia” in Hebrew, is interpreted as (Praise the Lord). This is the first psalm with the title “Alleluia”, which exhorts the believers to praise God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## **1- A CALL TO PRAISE AND TO REMEMBER GOD’S MERCIES:**

It is unique in this psalm, to find a meditation in the patriarch fathers, and God’s promises to them. The worship to the Lord concentrates in the verse: “*Seek the Lord*” (4).

*“Oh, Give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; Make known His deeds among His peoples” (1)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “Confess to the Lord, Call upon His name, proclaim His deeds among the nations”

The word translated as “*Give thanks*” is sometimes translated as “Praise”, and sometimes “Confess”; together with opening the heart wide to all the nations.

- ❖ “*Make known His deeds among the peoples (the Gentiles)*”. The literal translation according to the Greek language, as well as in some Latin versions, came as “Preach the gospel of His deeds among the Gentiles”. To whom would this be addressed except to the Evangelist, through the prophecy<sup>1</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Shame on the Jews who say that His wonders and deeds were realized only in Israel<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ According to **St. John Chrysostom, and to St. Isichius**, the Holy Spirit exhorts the believers to confess their transgressions, then call the name of the Lord; Namely, to praise Him from pure hearts and minds.

- ❖ According to **St. Athanasius**, the Holy Spirit commands and exhorts the apostles to make known the old and the new wonders of God to the Gentiles; on account of that the Jews have rejected and did not

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 105 (104).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

receive this command, contrary to the Gentiles who have not known or heard about God's old goodness to the Jews.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Sing to Him, Sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works” (2)***

The verses 1 to 5 came as a call to the believers to worship the Lord, with the spirit of humility, with joy and gladness, yet without humiliation or despair.

The psalmist calls upon us to praise, supplicate, pray, confess, sing, and boast in the holy name of the Lord; to meditate in His amazing deeds; to enjoy His divine presence, and the joyful debate with Him.

❖ Praise Him with the word, as well as with the work; As we sing with the voice, and play on a musical instrument, namely with our hands<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Whoever understands the holy Scripture, meditates in the law of the Lord, and elaborately thinks about the things of heaven, would sing to God. Moreover, whoever acquires every virtue, does all the good deeds, as though playing on the guitar of virtues, would sing praises to the Lord.... Psalm 107 says: *“Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters, they see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep”* (Psalm 107: 23, 24). If we, in the ship of our bodies, sail through this non-corrupt life, without being sunk by a storm, nor destroyed to pieces by a rock, We can proclaim the amazing deeds of God. The greatest of wonders is indeed to sail blamelessly through this world<sup>2</sup>!

**(St. Jerome)**

***“Glory to His holy name; Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the Lord” (3)***

The apostle says: *“He who glorifies, let him glorify in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1: 31). The believer finds in the glory of the Lord a true and faithful source for his inner heart, to rejoice, together with a true and increasing longing to seek the Lord, or to search for Him in the depth of the soul.

❖ ***“Glory to (or Boast in) His holy name”***. This is a prophecy concerning the Gentiles; that we shall be called by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 105 (104).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

***“Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the Lord”***. ... Let the hearts of the monks rejoice. ... If the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice, how much more will the hearts of those who find Him? ...For once they find the Lord, they will certainly never let Him go<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Do not boast in much wealth and glory, and similar things of this mortal world, but in the holy name of the Lord, as Christ said; and never seek anything else beside Him. He seeks the Lord, he who believes in Him, who perpetually thinks of him, and who talks to Him in prayers. He who seeks the Lord this way, will definitely rejoice in his heart and soul.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“Seek the Lord and His strength; Seek His face evermore” (4)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as:

***“Desire the Lord and Cherish Him, Seek His face forevermore”***.

Whoever seeks the Lord with joy and gladness of heart, and beseech Him to proclaim Himself to him, will experience His strength, and will perpetually enjoy His divine presence.

If the old people, while coming out of the land of Egypt, have felt the mighty arm of the Lord, and experienced His divine presence; And if, once they reached the promised land, they always looked forward to the three major annual feasts, to set forth to Jerusalem to celebrate them with the gladness of heart; ... The true Christians, having become a holy temple of the Lord, in their hearts, the Savior will perpetually transfigure, together with the Father and the Holy spirit.

- ❖ Indeed, faith will make us actually find Him; But hope will make us keep on seeking Him. Love binds faith and hope together: By faith, we shall find Him; and by hope we shall keep on seeking Him, until we see Him; to become so satisfied to search for him no more... For, unless faith reveals Him in this life, it would not be said: *“Seek the Lord”*.... And, If, by faith we find Him, but we do not diligently keep on seeking Him, it would not be said: *“if we hope for what we do not see, then we eagerly wait for it with perseverance”* (Romans 8: 25)... That is truly the meaning of the words: *“Seek His face evermore”* (4); Namely, revelation will not put an end to seeking; by which love is tested; but by the growth of love, seeking for Him will become more intense<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 105 (104).

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ “*Seek the Lord and His strength*” (4). Before seeking the Lord we were weak and disturbed; But now, having our hearts bound to Him, we have become strong and courageous. How much more would our perfection be, if we find Him?!

“*Seek His face evermore*”. The Jews were instructed to appear before the Lord three times in the year (See Exodus 23: 17).

But here, the prophet David exhorts the believers to perpetually, and unceasingly seek Him; the same way the New Testament commands us to “*Pray without ceasing*” (1 Thessalonians 5; 17; Luke 18: 1) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ The church says to the Lord in the book of the Song of songs: “*I am lovesick*” (Songs 2: 5). Bearing in her heart the wound of love, she, with a burning desire, seeks to find healing through seeing the divine Physician<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Gregory the Great)

- ❖ O sinners! Seek the Lord and His strength for the sake of hope. Seek His holy face with repentance evermore (4). Then, you will be sanctified by His presence; and “*you will be cleansed from all your filthiness*” (Ezekiel 36: 25). ... O sinners! Hasten to the Lord, for He will take away your iniquity, and wipe out your sins. ... He vows, saying: “*As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*” (Ezekiel 33: 11).; And: “*I have stretched out my hands, all day long to a rebellious people*” (Isaiah 65: 2); And, “*Why should you die, O house of Israel?*” (Ezekiel 33: 11); “*Thus says the Lord of hosts: Return to Me, and I will return to you*” (Zechariah 1: 3) <sup>3</sup>.

(St. Isaac the Syrian).

- ❖ Those who hold fast to the upright dogmas, seek the truth, and commit themselves to reading the holy Scripture. Together with their good works, they seek the Lord, seek His holy face, and will see him in spirit.

Seeing the holy face of the Lord, is said about knowing Him.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the face of God, is said about His appearance with His care, help, and support for His pious.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

<sup>2</sup> Forty Gospel Homilies 25.

<sup>3</sup> Ascetical Homilies 5: 76-77.

According to **St. dedymus the blind**, the face of God is His only-begotten Son; for He is the image of the Person of the Father, and the ray of His glory... Whoever sees the Son, sees the Father.

Those who fear God, seek Christ evermore; and by seeing Him, their hearts rejoice, and are strengthened in every good work.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ A question from a brother to an elderly father, says: [The Lord Jesus who seeks the lost sheep, teaches us how to seek the Shepherd, as well. ... O blessed father, It is written: “**Seek the Lord and His strength; Seek His face evermore**” (Psalm 105: 4). How can a sinner seek the Lord evermore? ... For the sake of Him who gave you the wisdom, I beg you to teach us, so that we, as well would seek the face of the Lord; ... Glory be to Him, forever, Amen].

To this, **father Parsnovius answered, saying:** [O, brother Othemius; I ask your love to labor together with me, praying to God the Philanthropic. ... As to your question, how could we seek the Shepherd, Let me say to you: I kept supplicating to God concerning this very question. And He answers me, saying: If you purify your heart from the thoughts of the old man. I shall give you free answers to your questions; For my gifts find a place, and are given to the pious. ... But, as long as your heart moves with anger, with the remembrance of evil, and with similar lusts of the old man, wisdom shall never enter into it... Therefore, In case you seriously wish for my gifts, “*Throw all the (foreign) household goods out of the room*” (Nehemiah 13: 8); Then, my own goods will come to you. Have you not heard the divine words: “*No one can serve two masters?*” (Matthew 6: 24). If you serve Me, you cannot serve Satan as well; and If you serve Satan, Do not serve Me. Therefore if someone intends to be counted as worthy of my gifts, let him keep my steps; for I, as a blameless Lamb, led to the slaughter, I received all passions without opening My mouth (See Isaiah 53: 7). I have exhorted you to be as meek as a dove; And yet, instead, you have the violence of evil lusts. ... Have I not said to you: “*Walk in the light of your fire*”? (Isaiah 50: 11).

**(Paradise of the fathers)**

According to **St. Pachum**, We should seek the Lord, not only by the lips, but by the work as well.

❖ Seek the Lord like Abraham who, in obedience to Him, he offered his only son a sacrifice to God, who called him “*My friend*”.

Seek the Lord like Joseph who wrestled against defilement, to become worthy to govern his enemies.

Seek the Lord like Moses, who, through faithfully following God, he was counted worthy to receive the divine law, and to behold the (likeness) of God.

Seek the Lord like Daniel, whom God taught great secrets, and saved him in the den of lions.

Seek the Lord like the three saintly young men; who encountered Him in the furnace of fire.

Seek the Lord like the righteous 'Job', whom God healed of his painful boils.

Seek the Lord like Susanna; whom God saved from the hands of the wicked<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Pachum)**

***“Remember His marvelous works which He has done; His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth” (5)***

The psalmist asks us to remember God's dealings with us, not the events, but the marvelous works He has done for the sake of our salvation; His wonders that proclaim His care for us; and the judgments of His mouth, which reveal His love, and His longing to debate with us,

In His divine works, whether concerning the creation, or His salvation. and perpetual care for us; It so seems as though God's heart and mind are only preoccupied with man, and He is always working to our account. And, in heaven, He is preparing a place for us, to come and take us together with Him.

***“O seed of Abraham, His servant, you children of Jacob, His chosen ones”(6)***

If God has made a covenant with Abraham, the father of fathers, and with Jacob, whom He has chosen, That covenant and that choice, were not just with Abraham and Jacob, but with us all, being the spiritual children of Abraham, and as the chosen ones of the Lord, to enjoy His righteousness and salvation.

❖ *“If you were Abraham's children , you would do the works of Abraham”* (John 8: 39). That is why, those who are full of pride, are not counted as his children. Even if they are his seeds, yet they are servants, submitted to the law of fear; ... They do not have the perfect love that casts out fear (See, 1 John 4:18). We are the children of Jacob, who craftily took the place of his older brother, and

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<sup>1</sup> Instructions, 1: 25.

confiscated his first-birth rights.... “*Many are called, but few chosen*” (Matthew 20: 16) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Those saintly apostles who were born of the seeds of Abraham and Israel, and who also believed in Christ the Lord, are described by the Lord Himself, saying: “*I have chosen you from the world*” ( ). The Holy Spirit exhorts them to tell God’s marvels and His wonders to the Gentiles; and to make out of them children of Abraham and Jacob, according to faith, and servants of God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## 2- GOD’S COVENANT AND THE PROMISED LAND:

As the promised land refers to the heavenly Jerusalem, God’s promise concerning it to the early fathers became the foundation of the covenant in the Holy Book. All the divine gifts come forth from that free gift.

God set a covenant, not only with Abraham, and Jacob; but with their descendants, being His people.

The psalmist, confirming the initiation by God to set that covenant; confirms that He searches for us, chooses us, and sets us a people of his own.

“*He is the Lord our God; His judgment is in all the earth*” (7)

He did not say: “*His judgment is in Israel*”, but “*His judgment is in all the earth*”. If He has set a covenant with Abraham, and chosen Jacob; yet He is the Lord and Savior of all mankind, whom He calls to enjoy His eternal blessings in the only-begotten Son, by whose precious blood He presented a new eternal covenant; ... “*He did not leave Himself without witness*” (Acts 14: 17) in all the earth.

- ❖ “*His judgment is in all the earth*”. ...Is He God of the Jews only?” (Romans 3: 29) ... Far from it!... “*He is the Lord our God*”, For the church in which His judgments are preached is **all over the world**<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ God who, in the old, has given the law to the children of Israel alone, is the One who, by His incarnation, brought forth His judgments to all the universe through His apostles, to whom He said: “*Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16: 15).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 105 (104).

***“He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded for a thousand generations” (8)***

Talking about His covenant with the fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He remembers it for a thousand generations; For what He presented to the fathers, He presented to all the world for a thousand generations. Seeing in the figure 1000 a reference to eternity, some believe that what God presented to the fathers does not concern a certain time limit, nor a material promised land, but those covenants extend to the heavenly home for all believers along the generations.

If God requests from us to remember His marvelous works with us, He, on His side remembers His covenants and promises; Proclaiming His faithfulness in His covenants; He will never forget what He promised.

❖ About this figure 1000, the apostle Peter wrote: *“With the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”* (2 Peter 3: 8).. And the prophet Daniel said: *“A thousand thousands ministered to Him”* (Daniel 7: 10). The word “thousand”, therefore, does not mean the known figure, but refers to a great multitude.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“The covenant which He made to Abraham, and His oath to Isaac” (9)***

His covenant with Abraham came in Genesis 15: 17-18; And His oath to Isaac came in Genesis 26: 3. Concerning the goal of those covenants, and oaths to the fathers and prophets, Zechariah the priest said: *He has raised up a horn of salvation for us, in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouths of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began”* (Luke 1: 69-70).

***“And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel for an everlasting covenant” (10)***

The confirmation of the covenant to Jacob came in Genesis 28: 10-15; and 35: 9-15. And in the latter occasion, God changed Jacob’s name to Israel.

Those covenants with the fathers, although they bear a personal side, and a privilege, yet they are eternal. In essence, they are a covenant with humanity in Jesus Christ, to enjoy the glories and eternal inheritance in heaven.

***“Saying: ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan, as the allotment of your inheritance” (11)***

If those fathers have not got those covenants in their temporal life, but their descendants entered into the land of Canaan, which became the allotment of their inheritance. But what is greater, is that by Your incarnation You present to us Your kingdom dwelling in us, and open before us the gates of Your heavens to enjoy, being the heavenly Canaan, as the allotment of our eternal inheritance.

***“When they were but few in number, indeed very few, and strangers in it” (12)***

When they descended to Egypt, in the days of Joseph, they were very few strangers (66 individuals, according to Genesis 46: 26, or (70 individuals, including Joseph’s family, according to Exodus 1: 5).

***“When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people” (13)***

If the fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who entered into covenants with God, lived as nomads and strangers, with no place to settle down; It is befitting of their descendants, even after getting the promised land, to keep in mind their perpetual sojourn, as long as they are in this world; And it is befitting of us, as believers, to bear the same feelings.

❖ We cross over through many kingdoms on our way to the promised land<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“He permitted no one to do them wrong; Yes, He reprovved king for their sakes” (14)***

So, the church sings in the eve of the feasts of the prophet Moses and Zechariah, the priest; namely, on the eighth of the Coptic month of ‘Tut’, when Pharaoh persecuted Moses; and when king Herod persecuted Zechariah; Yet neither of them was actually harmed; For Moses got the honor of God’s salvation through the exodus from the land of bondage; and Zechariah enjoyed being the father of St. John the Baptist, the angel who paved the way for Jesus the Lord.

Although the life of believers are perpetually subjected to a multitude of troubles, yet God, with His care, keeps them against any harm, even though their oppressors may be kings and mighty rulers (See Genesis 12: 14-20; 20: 1-9; 26: 7-11, 26-33; 35: 5).

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

- ❖ The Pharaoh of Egypt, and king Gerar, were both warned by heaven not to harm Abraham (Genesis 12: 17-20; 20: 3); another king was warned not to harm Isaac (Genesis 26: 8-11); and others not to harm Jacob (Genesis 32-33); while they were all few and strangers<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“Saying, ‘Do not touch My anointed ones; and do My prophets no harm’ (15)*

Although we have not heard that any of the early fathers were anointed by a royal anointment, yet they were anointed by the Holy Spirit for a mission that concerns the salvation of mankind.

**St. Augustine** wonders how could Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob be called anointed, although the anointment of kings were not yet known, by which they came to be called anointed?! ... To which he himself responds by saying that in a secret way, they were counted as such. For although Christ, according to the flesh, has come from them; He Himself, namely, the Word, before incarnation, was before them; according to His words to the Jews: *“Before Abraham was, I AM”* (John 8: 58). The Lord has been proclaimed beforehand, on account of that it is impossible for anyone to reconcile with God outside that faith in Jesus Christ, whether before or after His incarnation. This was clarified by the apostle Paul, by saying: *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Jesus Christ”* (1 Timothy 2: 5).

- ❖ What a shame for the Jews to claim that, unless someone is anointed by a royal anointment, he would never be called “Christ”; and say accordingly, that our Lord should not be called “Christ”. Yet, they forgot that, before the law, although the great Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) were not anointed with a royal anointment, they were called ‘anointed’, on account of that they were anointed by the Holy Spirit. By denying to call our Lord “Christ”, they are, therefore adversaries to the Holy Scriptures<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Those enlightened (the baptized) bear the features of the power and image of Christ. Their likeness to the Word (Christ) is printed on them, and is realized in them through the confirmed knowledge and faith. By that, Christ is spiritually confirmed in everyone; and *“the church ‘labors in birth again until Christ is formed in us’* (See Galatians 4: 19). It is as though everyone of the saints, partaking of

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 105 (104).*

<sup>2</sup> *Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).*

Christ gives birth to a Christ. With such meaning it is written: “*Do not touch My anointed ones. And do My prophets no harm*” (15).

Those who are baptized in Christ, through the fellowship of the Spirit, would, themselves, become as though they are other Christs<sup>1</sup>,

**(Father Theodosius of Philippi)**

❖ “*The Lord Jesus Christ will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body*” (Philippians 3: 21); For “*we have become partakers of Christ*” (Hebrew 3: 14).

You are truly called for Christ; and about you, God say: “*Do not touch My anointed; And do My prophets no harm*” (15).

You have become “anointed” through receiving the seal of the Holy Spirit.

All things have been done in you to be like (Christ); for you are an image of Christ.

By going down into the River Jordan, He let the knowledge of His deity be known in its water; Then out of it He came, and on Him the Holy Spirit shone, and dwelt upon Him with perfection.

For you, as well, coming out of the holy water of baptism, you have an anointment like that by which Christ was anointed.

This is the Holy Spirit, about whom the blessed Isaiah said in his prophecy about the Person of the Lord: “*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me*” (Isaiah 61: 1) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

❖ It often happens that someone intends to do harm to someone else, but because it is not allowed by God, his counsel is of no avail. ... The will of men are thus put under test ... Many evil plots woven against the saintly fathers; Yet, because God did not allow for them to happen, no one could do them any harm; as it is written: “*He permitted no one to do them wrong; Yes, He reprovved kings for their sakes; saying: ‘Do not touch my anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm’*” (14-15). ,, And intending to reveal His might, God even moves by compassion the hearts of those who have no compassion; according to what is written: “*God had brought Daniel into the favor and good will of the chief of the eunuchs*” (Daniel 1: 9).

**(St. Zosima)**

### **3- JOSEPH IN EGYPT:**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, 8: 8.

<sup>2</sup> الأستار 3، 1.

***“Joseph, while being a slave, was called to teach wisdom to kings, rulers, and elders” (16 – 22)***

Referring to the plagues in the land of Egypt, was not to show the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart, but to show the multi-sided power of God, and His dealings with His people.

***Moreover He called for a famine in the land. He destroyed all the provisions of bread” (16)***

Here, he talks about the famine, as a special messenger of God, whom He calls to deliver a certain message to the account of His believers.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the psalmist here, refers to the famine that happened in the days of Joseph, to chastise the Egyptians, to get to know the true God through seeing Joseph, who sold them food; to know God, whom Joseph worshipped, as the true God, whom they should worship, as well.

By saying: ***“all the provisions of bread’***, the psalmist means that the land in Egypt has been deprived of wheat, and all other kinds of grains from which bread could be made.

❖ ***“He called for a famine in the land”***. This may seem as contradictory to the divine care; But:

Unless Joseph’s brothers envied him, and sold him, how could he go to Egypt?

Unless the famine did happen, how could the early fathers go to Egypt, to be recognized by their brother Joseph?

Without all those circumstances, how would Egypt be struck by the ten plagues?

How could the people of God come out of the land of Egypt?

How could water come out of the rock in the wilderness?

How could all those secrets be realized in the wilderness as symbols of the (Crucified Lord Christ)?

Unless Judas betrayed his Lord, how could we be saved?

Unless the Jews doubted and crucified Him, how could we become believers?

It so happened that Joseph came down to the land of Egypt, to give hospitality to his brothers, and to provide their households with food<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

All the events concerning Joseph came as symbols of, and prophecies about the Person of the Lord Christ, on many aspects.

❖ Joseph was persecuted by his brothers; ... Joseph was glorified, and his brothers prostrated themselves before him, a realization of his dreams and visions.

Joseph the persecuted was a symbol of Jesus the Persecuted.

Joseph was clothed by his father with a multicolored robe; ... And Jesus was clothed by His Father God with a body from the Virgin.

Joseph was beloved by his father more than his brothers; .... and Jesus was the beloved Son of His Father God.

Joseph saw visions and dreams, which were all realized in the Lord Jesus.

Joseph has been a shepherd of sheep together with his brothers; .... And Jesus was the Head of Shepherds.

Joseph was sent by his father to visit his brothers, who, when they saw him coming, they plotted to kill him; .... And when God the Father sent His Son Jesus to visit His brethren, the Jews, they said: "*This is the heir, let us kill him and seize the inheritance*" (Matthew 21-38)

Joseph was cast by his brothers into a well; .... and Jesus was sent by His brethren down to dwell among the dead.

Joseph came out of the well; .... And Jesus was risen from the dead.

Joseph, after coming out of the well, got dominion over his brothers; .... And Jesus, after dwelling among the dead, was highly "*exalted by His Father, and was given a name which is above every name*" (Philippians 2: 9), for His brethren to serve Him, and for His enemies to submit under His feet.

Joseph, after being recognized by his brethren, they were ashamed, and struck with awe and fear before his greatness; .... And when the Lord Jesus will come at the end of time, and proclaim His greatness, His brethren, who crucified Him, will be ashamed, struck with awe and fear before Him.

Joseph was sold to Egypt through the counsel of his older brother Judah; .... And Jesus was delivered to the Jews on the hand of His disciple Judas Iscariot.

Joseph, when sold by his brothers, he did not utter a word; .... And Jesus, did not utter a word in response to those who judged Him.

Joseph was unjustly put in prison by his master; ... And so was Jesus who was unjustly judged by His people.

Joseph has forsaken his garment twice, the first time to his brothers, and the second time in the hand of his master's wife; ... And Jesus had his garments divided among His crucifiers.

Joseph at thirty years of age, stood before Pharaoh, and became the master of whole land; .... And Jesus, at thirty years of age, came to the River Jordan to be baptized, then came out to start His preaching mission.

Joseph sustained Egypt with bread; ... And the Lord Jesus sustains the whole world with the bread of life.

Joseph took the daughter of an evil priest to be his wife; ... And the Lord Jesus betrothed for Himself the church out of the evil Gentiles.

Joseph died and was buried in Egypt; .... and Jesus died and was buried in Jerusalem.

Joseph's bones were taken over by his brothers from Egypt; .... And Jesus was risen by His Father from the dead; and, clothed by His uncorrupted body, He ascended to heaven<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Aphrahat, The Persian Savant)**

***“He sent a man before them – Joseph, who was sold as a slave” (17)***

If Joseph was sold because of the envy of his own brothers, Yet it was God who allowed it to happen that way, that, according to the psalmist, it was God who sent him with an important mission to the account of himself, his brothers, and of their descendants. Being the whole Goodness, God uses the evils of men to do good.

According to St. Augustine, the psalmist says: *“He (God) sent a man before them”*, although that man – Joseph -- went to Egypt because of the wickedness of his brothers; Yet God turned their wickedness into good; so that Joseph going to Egypt, was counted as a mission by God Himself. St. Augustine says: [We are committed to meditate in this very important issue; in how the evil and wicked works of men could be used by God in a good way. And on another aspect, how the good works of God could be used by the wicked in an evil way<sup>2</sup>].

***“They hurt his feet with fetters, he was laid in irons” (18)***

Unjustly cast in prison because of the false claims of his master's wife, Joseph's soul, as well as his body were hurt; as though the iron chains shackled his whole being.

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<sup>1</sup> *Demonstrations, 21: 9.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 105 (104).*

According to the psalmist, “**He was laid in irons**”, a reference to that the bitterness that dwelt upon his soul, was worse than the iron chains into which his feet were put. This expression reminds us of what Simon the elder said to St. Mary the Mother of God: “*a sword will pierce through your own soul*” (Luke 2: 35); by the sword, he meant watching the passions of her Son and Lord, and the evil attitude of the Jewish leaderships against Him.

❖ Joseph was chained in fetters because he did not surrender to the seductions of the Egyptian woman. Despite his vulnerable young age (16 years). He refused to surrender to evil, for he feared more the danger on his own soul.

“**He was laid in irons**”. The iron shackles of sin that kills the soul. The verse probably means that he was facing a grave danger; a false claim by his master’s wife, who was burning with desire toward him; according to what is written: “The hearts of all adulterers are like a furnace”. “*Until the time that his word came to pass*” (19); the word of the Lord Himself who saved him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

“*Until the time that his word came to pass; The word of the Lord tested him*” (19)

By saying: “*Until the time that his word came to pass*”, he probably refers to the time designated by God to realize the dreams that Joseph has seen while in his father’s house; Or he probably refers to the time, two years later, after being forgotten by the cup-bearer of Pharaoh, whose dream Joseph interpreted for him. Anyway, everything has its own time in God’s mind, to fulfill His promises to His believers.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “*The word of the Lord burned him up*”.

❖ “*And the word of the Lord burned him up*”. Unless he is burned up by the Holy Spirit, he would not be able to overcome the lust. The Spirit of the Lord, his God, burned up the fire of lust<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

“*The king sent and released him. The ruler of the people let him go free*” (20)

When the time came for his salvation from the prison, and for his enjoyment of glory, the king sent and released him, to get to know him.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

How much we need to resort to the King of kings, He who promised us, saying: *“If the Son sets you free, You will be truly free”*. He alone can set us free from the bondage of the devil, and the chains of sin.

❖ *“The king sent and released him”*. Historically, the king sent and released him; But according to another interpretation, he who is tempted by a filthy lust, would not be able to flee from it, unless God comes to release him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions”* (21)

Pharaoh made Joseph the ruler of his kingdom, and even of the royal household (Genesis 41: 40). He did not just save him from his affliction, but turned his afflictions into glories and honors, that never came over his mind.

*“To bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his elders wisdom”* (22)

Joseph was given authority, not only to dispense the material issues of the state, like storing and distributing wheat during famine, but over members of the royal court and officials of the state; all of which attentively listened and obeyed his commands, for fear of firm retribution. Here, his amazing personality was demonstrated; Despite the bitterness he tasted for so long years, because of the envy of his brothers, he remained the man with love for everyone, even for the heathen elders in the royal household, whom he taught wisdom, without fear of losing his position in the king’s court. But the more he gave to others, the more riches of God’s free gifts were added to the storehouses of his heart and mind

❖ It often happens that pretence of perseverance, would stir up more anger than words; that silence would provoke more reviles; and that the wounds of enemies are more readily endured than the crafty scoff of flattery of false friends; which are meant by the words of the psalmist: *“to bind his princes at his pleasure”* (22); and those said by the wise Solomon: *“The words of the 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); and according to the prophet Jeremiah: *“Their tongue is an arrow shot out; it speaks deceit; One speaks peaceably to his*

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

*neighbor with his mouth, but in his heart he lies in wait” (Jeremiah 9:8)*<sup>1</sup>.

(Father Yousef)

#### **4- THE ISRAELI PEOPLE IN EGYPT:**

***“Israel also came into Egypt, and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham” (23)***

❖ ***“Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham”***. The righteous man cannot perpetually dwell on earth, where he is only a sojourner<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

***“And He increased His people greatly, and made them stronger than their enemies” (24)***

Despite being in bondage in Egypt, the more humiliation they suffered on the hands of the Egyptians, the greater they increased, and the stronger they were made by God; according to what is written in the book of Exodus: *“Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about 600,000 men on foot, besides children A mixed multitude went up with them also; and herds – a great deal of livestock”* (Exodus 12: 37-38).

❖ ***“He increased His people greatly”***. About 75 persons came down to Egypt; And 600, 000 came out<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“He turned their hearts to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants” (25)***

The more they increased in number, the more jealous, envious, and fearful from them the Egyptians became. Through God’s allowance the hearts of the Egyptian king and his men got filled with hatred toward the Israelites. Yet it was not God who put hate in their hearts; but He rather lifted His hands up from their hearts to reveal what is inside them, and to let them put their hatred practically into work.

***“He sent Moses His servant, and Aaron He has chosen” (26)***

Here, the psalmist shows that the reason behind the success of the mission of Moses and Aaron, was God’s call for them, each of whom had his own role to fulfill God’s plan for His people.

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 16: 18.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

<sup>3</sup> Homily 31 on Ps. 104 (105).

***“They performed His signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham” (27)***

***“He sent darkness, and made it dark, and they did not rebel against His words” (28)***

Here, the psalmist starts by the ninth plague concerning the darkness, contrary to their order in Exodus 7 to 11; and Psalm 78. Some interpret this, that ‘darkness’ generally refers to any unbearable calamity; While others believe that the psalmist started by this plague, on account of that it was so effective in provoking the people to abide to the commands of Moses and Aaron, whatever the cost is, to come out of their affliction. Yet, Pharaoh, after giving his consent to let the people go, he reversed his decision, the way he did with the plagues preceding it.

❖ He did not bring forth lions or tigers to devour them, but He scourged them gradually by successive plagues, increasing in intensity, for the following reasons:

1- To bring them forth to repentance, through the abundance of His mercy.

2- To demonstrate His power, that, by simpler and lighter ways He could confront strong enemies.

3- So that there would be no excuse for those who may say that, if He treated the Egyptians with the abundance of His mercy, and did not destroy them altogether, they would have become more lenient in their stand.

4- To let the Israelites, as well, realize His might, know how He loves them, and remember His grace toward them; And in case they are denied the divine gifts, they would feel their transgressions and repent.

5- To let all know that He is God, who created the world, made all elements obey Him; and to make this issue well known among all nations.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“He turned their waters into blood, and killed their fish” (29)***

That was the first plague, when nature itself moved to confront the adversaries to the divine command (See Exodus 7: 19-25).

Waters in the sea, river, wells, and drains, even those in their vessels, turned into blood; And lest they may assume that it is just a change of the color of the water, and not of its essence, He killed all fish in the waters.

***“Their land abounded with frogs, even in the chambers of their kings” (30)***

In Psalm 78: 45 it came as: *“He sent ... frogs, which destroyed them”*; The bad smell of the dead frogs so corrupted the air, that it led to the perdition of many. He also referred to the entrance of frogs into the chambers of their king, to confirm that even the royal guards could not keep them out.

***“He spoke, and there came swarms of flies, and lice in their territory” (31)***

Here he refers to the third and the fourth plagues.

***“He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land” (32)***

According to some, God allowed for a kind of hail not previously known in Egypt, which depend on the River Nile and not on rain for irrigation. Fire here refers to violent thunders and lightening.

In the book of Wisdom (Chapter 16), it came that there was a substantial change in the usual course of nature; and the hail that came down, did not quench the flaming fire, but made it more intense; and the stronger the fire became, the more hail came down.

***“He struck their vines also, and their fig trees, and splintered the trees of their territory” (33)***

Their gardens turned into barren wilderness, when God splintered all their trees.

***“He spoke, and locusts came, young locusts without number” (34)***

***“And ate up all the vegetation in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground” (35)***

That was the eighth plague (See Exodus 10: 12-15).

***“He also destroyed all the firstborn in their land; the first of all their strength” (36)***

That was the tenth and last of the plagues (See Exodus 12: 29-30); the most horrible plague, which happened at midnight amid utter darkness.

***“He also brought them out with silver and gold; and there was none feeble among His tribes” (37)***

God let them have favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, who hastened to give them whatever they asked for of gold and silver vessels.

The Lord brought them out with a strong hand and a mighty arm, that among them there was none too feeble nor sick to join the journey of exodus.

❖ God commanded the Israelites to borrow from their Egyptian neighbors silver and gold vessels; and made them come out of Egypt while the Egyptians were busy burying their dead. They came out rejoicing their freedom from the cruel bondage; while grief and weeping were the portion of the Egyptians for the perdition of their firstborn. Hence Moses said: “*This is a vigil to be kept for the Lord by all the Israelites throughout their generations*” (Exodus 12: 42)... All those things were secrets of the soul to be redeemed by the anticipated coming of the Lord Christ; on account of that, the word “Israel” is interpreted as (the mind) that beholds God, when it set free from the bondage of darkness; namely, spiritually from the Egyptians<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Maccarius the Great)**

❖ Having lost their natural weakness, their clothes and sandals, were not worn-out with time, their feet were not swollen from the long walk; and among them, there were no physicians, nor medications. The hot sun rays did not burn them, for a cloud formed a shade over their heads. A pillar of fire preceded their procession; which gave them light, and led them along the way through the wilderness, better than any human guide. They traveled on land, as well as in the sea; For contrary to nature, the roaring sea turned before them into dry land to cross over, And when the enemy chased them through it, it returned back to its normal status; Namely. for them it became a chariot, and for their enemy, it became a grave. The irrational sea, played for them the role of a guard, as well as that of an avenger; both in the same day<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Who among you are “*Theophilus*” (in Greek) (Luke 1: 3), are “*most excellent*”, and very strong. There is no (feeble) among you.

The Holy Book says about Israel: “*There was none feeble among His tribes*” (Psalm 105: 37).

I dare to say that every “Theophilus” among you, is active, zealous, and has strength from God; a perfect understanding of truth, and

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 5: 47.

<sup>2</sup> لا يستطيع أحد أن يؤذي إنساناً مل لم يؤذ هذا الإنسان ذاته.

of all the words of the gospel in Christ; to whom is the glory and dominion to the age of ages, Amen<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

***“Egypt was glad when they departed, For the fear of them had fallen upon them” (38)***

God kept His people safe by so diverse and amazing ways, that as much as Pharaoh and his men have previously opposed their departure, they became glad when they did; and they even supported them, and provided them with every possibility to do.

## **5- THE ENJOYMENT OF THE PROMISED INHERITANCE:**

In the last section, we saw how God provided His people with their material needs, of bread, meat, and water. Here, we see Him provide them with provisions for their souls; namely, with joy, and the gladness of heart.

***“He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night” (39)***

He let them need nothing; He cared for them day and night (Exodus 13: 21; Numbers 9: 16; 10: 34). He spread a cloud as a covering to protect them against the heat of the sun by day; And provided them with a pillar of fire to give them light in the darkness of the night. God became for them a Refuge and a Stronghold; as well as a Guide on the way.

❖ He reveals His work in us, and kindles a fire in our souls, if He finds them pure of the dampness of temporal lusts<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Joseph Saba)

***“The people asked, and He brought quail, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven” (40)***

God made the barren wilderness, flow on His people with bread, meat, and water.

Knowing what is for our benefit, the heavenly Father cares even for our carnal food; and intends to train us to enjoy the bread of heaven, and the food of angels. ... On our side, we are committed to ask Him to feed us with what He sees befitting to our edification.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on Luke 1: 16.

<sup>2</sup> الرسالة العاشرة: 2 (ترجمة الرب سليم دكاش اليسوعي).

***“He opened the rock, and water gushed out; It ran in the dry places like a river” (41)***

This episode is mentioned by the prophet Moses in Exodus 17: 6; and Numbers 20: 11.

What is that Rock, but the Lord Christ, by whose cross, He gushed for us springs of water of the Holy Spirit; and granted us to drink from the River that makes glad the city of God.

*“They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of your house; and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures” (Psalm 36: 8).*

*“There is a river whose stream shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High” (Psalm 46: 4).*

*“He turned the sea into dry land; They went through the river on foot. There, we will rejoice in Him” (Psalm 66: 6).*

*“He shall have dominion also from sea to sea; and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Psalm 72: 8).*

*“She (the mighty cedar trees) sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River” (Psalm 80: 11).*

*“He opened the rock, and water gushed out, it ran in the dry places like a river” (Psalm 105: 41).*

*“He shall drink of the brook by the wayside. Therefore He shall lift up the head” (Psalm 110: 7).*

Let us meditate in the words of the gospel before us. “The Jordan” symbolizes (going down). The word “Jared” (Genesis 5: 15), being literally close to the word “Jordan”, would mean the same thing (going down). “Jared was born to “Mahalalel”; in the days when the sons of God (came down), and took wives for themselves from the daughters of people (see Genesis 6: 1),

We should understand the word “Jordan” as being the Word of God who became a body and a temple among us -- Jesus, our main Cornerstone -- who gives us His Manhood, which He has taken as an inheritance; That, having been ascended to the Godhead of the Son of God, has got cleansed, and received in Herself the pure and innocent dove of the Spirit, has got bound to her, as she cannot, any more, fly away from her.

**(The scholar Origen)**

***“For He remembered His holy promise, and Abraham His servant” (42)***

After so long, as though in darkness, feeling bitterness, and confusion, the people were granted by God, the gladness of heart while departing from Egypt; that their souls got filled with joy and praise to God, for the sake of the richness of His grace.

***“He brought out His people with joy; His chosen ones with gladness” (43)***

***“He gave them the lands of the Gentiles; and they inherited the labor of the nations” (44)***

In the fullness of time, when the cup of the idol-worshippers got completely full, they were driven out of their own lands, lost the labor of their hands, to be inherited by the believers, holy to Him.

❖ That is why, those who are enjoying the goods of this life, should wisely think that what they have got should exhort them toward a better life, lest they may lead them instead to a bitter eternal curse. ... For this reason, God promised to give the land of Canaan to His people Israel, to exhort them, ultimately, to think about the eternal issues. ... On account of this, those people, who were still unlearned, having tasted some of the temporary things, promised to them by God, came to trust and hope in those far off promises in the eternities. This is testified by the psalmist, who after saying: *“He gave them the land of the Gentiles, and they inherited the labor of the nations”*, he added<sup>1</sup>.

***“That they might observe His statutes, and keep His laws”***  
**(45)**

The ultimate goal of God’s works and wonders, is to exhort His believers to observe His statutes, and to keep His laws, in order to be worthy of being His holy children.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pastoral Care*, 3: 26.

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 105**

**LET ME REVEAL MYSELF TO YOU, WHO KNOWS MY DEPTHS,SO THAT YOU WOULD REVEAL YOUR SECRETS TO ME; FOR I STILL DO NOT KNOW YOU AS I SHOULD**

- ❖ I confess to You all what I have in my depths;  
For I am a sinner, weak, and worthy of every chastisement  
Reveal Yourself to me, to make me perceive the secrets of Your love;  
I see You as the Forgiver of sins; and the Savior of my soul from corruption.
- ❖ I shall tell Your wonders to all the nations;  
For I love all mankind, and desire the salvation of everyone;  
My heart rejoices in You; and my depths sing praise to You;  
While asking for Your presence, and seek to recognize Your secrets;  
How much more would be the exultation of my whole being, when I see You dwell in me;  
And how much will be my joy, when all enjoy Your presence!
- ❖ I boast in Your name, O Holy One;  
Being a Christian, I am referred to You; For You are Christ, the Savior of the world;  
My depths seek You, Let the whole world experience Your amazing might.
- ❖ How exultant were the Jews, when they appeared before You in their feasts!  
Three times every year, they all went up to Your temple;  
While celebrating the feasts, they considered themselves as though in heaven;  
Now, having been incarnate, and counted as one of us;  
The whole world is exultant by Your perpetual presence in the midst of Your church;  
I do not wait for a feast to go up to Jerusalem;  
But I perpetually celebrate Your Kingdom inside me, as though in heaven;  
You are my unceasing and perpetual feast;  
I cry out in my depths that the whole world would experience the sweetness of Your presence;  
And all would enjoy unceasing prayers to You;  
And the heart of every man would be lifted up to the Higher Jerusalem.

- ❖ Together with the true humility, grant me the spirit of heavenly joy;  
I praise You; I sing to You; I thank You; and I confess to You;  
I supplicate to You; and unceasingly pray to You;  
I boast in Your holy name; and I meditate in Your works;  
I perpetually experience the sweetness of Your presence;  
I shall not cease to debate openly with You.
- ❖ Your dealings with me, and with all Your people are amazing!  
Your unceasing wonders make Your people unique;  
Your signs, are Your unceasing divine care;  
The judgments of Your mouth reveal Your exalted love for us;  
How shall we pay You back for the sake of Your amazing love for us?  
It is as though there are no one in heaven, nor on earth, except us!  
All creation marvel at Your love for mankind.
- ❖ You have made a covenant with our father Abraham;  
For us, his children, to enjoy that eternal covenant, as Your children;  
You have chosen our father Jacob, and made him firstborn;  
To set us as members in the heavenly church of the firstborns;  
All the covenants, the promises, and the vows, refer to Your incarnation and salvation.
- ❖ Our fathers were exultant by those joyful covenants with You;  
They perceived that they, in essence, are a revelation of Your love for all mankind;  
That they are eternal covenants, to be enjoyed by all generations through Your cross.  
To let them all experience the deposit of heaven; and the hope in the eternal glories;  
That they are personal covenants with every father;  
And that they are covenants for every believer along all generations;  
To let him taste Your exalted love.
- ❖ Our portion of inheritance is no more, land that flow with milk and honey;  
Which could be taken away from us; or we could be taken away from it;  
As it did happen when Israel and Judah were taken away by Assyria and Babylon;  
But our portion of inheritance became inside us;

The deposit of the heavenly inheritance that the enemy can never be taken away from us.

- ❖ Your care for us in the land of our sojourn, and all along our journey in this life, is exalted;  
You may allow for us to go through afflictions; but You keep us against any harm;  
Mighty and cruel enemies may stand against us; but You rebuke them, and make their plots to no avail.
- ❖ You are whole goodness;  
You even turn the evil of the wicked into the good of many;  
*“Out of the eater You (bring) something to eat; and out of the strong, You (bring) something sweet”*
- ❖ Your promises are true and faithful;  
And Your care is exalted and amazing;  
Yet, we often hasten their fulfillment;  
And do not wait for the designated time according to Your divine plan.
- ❖ You allow for us to pass through afflictions that may seem extremely bitter;  
And we do not realize that they are the way to the glory and honor prepared for us!  
That instead of the humiliation, weakness, and deprivation;  
You will grant us honor, strength, and mighty possibilities.
- ❖ You perpetually send leaders;  
Whom You choose to realize Your plans;  
And provide them with signs and wonders to support their mission;  
You even move the irrational nature to stand against Your opponents;  
Nature works to our account by Your command.
- ❖ You often let even Your opponents support us;  
You make them joyfully partake of the fulfillment of Your plan;  
And instead of oppression and violence, they become our helpers in our salvation.
- ❖ You personally guide the journey of our life to You;  
You protect and guard us against any strike;  
And guide us by Your light through the darkness of the world.

## **PSALM 106**

# **REJOICING IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS**

This psalm is considered a confession of the sins of the congregation, by the spirit of hope; For God is not only the Forgiver of sins, but He perpetually works on letting us unite with Him. He directs our sight toward the church of the new covenant, set upon the salvation work of the Lord Christ.

According to some scholars, this psalm is written by the same author of psalms 104 and 105; and, accordingly, they refer it to the prophet David; especially that certain of its verses are the same in (1 Chronicles 16). While others believe that it is written in Babylon during captivity, based on verse 47 in which the psalmist cries out in the name of the whole congregation, saying: “*Gather us, O Lord our God, from among the Gentiles*”.

This psalm, together with the one before it, cover the same period of time; Yet, while psalm 105 is a call to remember the dealings of God with His people, psalm 106 confirms God’s faithfulness with those who soon forget the abundance of God’s mercies along the generations....

While psalm 105 lifts us up, psalm 106 rebukes us.

This is the first psalm to begin and end with “Alleluia” (Praise the Lord); And it is the first of the “Alleluia” psalms (111, 113, 117, 135, 146-150).

### **Psalm 106 and (1 Chronicles 16):**

Some verses are the same in both, in which the prophet David praises the Lord through Asaf and his brothers (Compare 1 Chronicles 16: 34 with psalm 106: 1; and 1 Chronicles 16: 35-36 with psalm 106: 47-48).

<b>1- A call to praise the Lord</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- A prayer for he sake of the congregation</b>	<b>2 - 5</b>
<b>3- A confession and seeking the salvation of the Lord</b>	<b>6- 12</b>
<b>4- A rebellion in the days of the prophet Moses</b>	<b>13–33</b>
<b>5- A rebellion in the promised land</b>	<b>34 - 39</b>
<b>7- God’s chastisements and mercy</b>	<b>40 - 46</b>
<b>8- A supplication and a praise</b>	<b>47 – 48</b>

## 1- A CALL TO PRAISE GOD:

This call came conforming to a similar one in psalm 107 and 136.

***“Praise the Lord! Oh, Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (1)***

Such feeling of weakness, and confession of sins, instigates in the believer, as well as in the congregation, a feeling of humility before God; yet it does not make us lose the spirit of joy in God, the Merciful and the Forgiver of sins. That is why this psalm starts with the words *“Praise the Lord”* (Alleluia), although this psalm represents a cry-out to God: *“Visit me with Your salvation”* (4).

The word *“Praise”* is sometimes translated in the Arabic language as (Confess), and some other times as (Give thanks); as man’s weakness, together with his perception of God’s mercies, instigates in him a confession, with the spirit of hope, and thanksgiving to God, the Forgiver of sins. This word came 26 times in psalm 136, as no issue, nor work, suits the believer more than praising the Lord his Savior with the spirit of hope and joy.

**St. Augustine** often says that the word *“Praise”* is translated as (**confess**), whether man confesses his own sin, or confesses the mercies of God.

- ❖ It is befitting of everyone, confessing his sins, to do that together with praising God. For the confession of sins would not be an issue of piety, unless it is done without despair; and unless it is accompanied with a supplication for the mercy of God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

According to **St. Augustine**, the expression: *“For His mercy endures forever”* (1), means: endures to the end of time, or to the end of the world. Someone may even dare to say: to the day of judgment. Although, then, the wicked will be punished together with the devil and his hosts, yet, God may show a kind of mercy toward them, and His mercy would appear eternal.

- ❖ You, who have committed serious sins, despair in salvation, and assume that, on account of the gravity of your sins, you would never be pardoned by God;... I advise you, or it is rather the prophet David who advises you, to give thanks to the Lord, for He is merciful.... Yes, your sins are great, But Greater is the Lord who has compassion on you ... Confess your sins to the Lord, show remorse, and never

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

despair in your salvation; for the Lord is compassionate.... You, whose sins are great, give thanks to the Lord, ... Do not lean upon your own strength, but trust in the mercy of God<sup>1</sup>.

❖ **“For His mercy endures forever”**. The psalmist also says: *“In grave, who will give You thanks?”* (Psalm 6: 5). For it is impossible for anyone in the (pit) to show remorse on his sins

As long as you are still in the world, I beg you to repent.

Confess, and give thanks to the Lord; For He is only merciful in this world.

Here, He may show compassion on the repentant’ There, He will be the Judge.

Here, He is Merciful; There He will be the Judge.

Here, He stretches His hands to the fallen; There, He acts as a Judge.

I say all that for the benefit of those who assume that there will be a chance for remorse in Hell<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The guilty who confesses his guilt, would be punished by the earthly rulers; Whereas, if he repents, God would forgive him.

Although *“God is Good, and His mercy endures forever”*, yet He would punish him who does not confess his transgression.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## 2- A PRAYER FOR THE SAKE OF THE CONGREGATION:

Here, the psalmist binds himself to the congregation. If he asks the Lord to visit him with His salvation, yet he will not rejoice unless the congregation rejoice together with him; for they are the object of his pride and cherish.

***“Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Or can declare all His praise?” (2)***

Man is unable to utter the mighty acts of the Lord, or to declare all His praises, either due to feeling his own sins, according to what came in the psalm: *“To the wicked God says: ‘What right has you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth?’* (psalm 50: 16); or due to his feeling helpless to declare the works of God, particularly those concerning him personally; However much he would

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 32 on Ps. 105 (106).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 32 on Ps. 105 (106).

talk or praise, he would be short of declaring God's amazing dealings with him, as well as with the congregation (See Sirach 43: 28-31).

❖ ***“Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord?”***. No one is worthy to utter the mighty acts of the Father, except the Son; And no one can declare them except Him who, Himself, is Almighty, He who, being in the bosom of the Father, can utter and declare the works of the Almighty.

***“Or can declare all His praise?”***. Before our Lord came to declare the praises of the Father in the gospel, they were unheard of in the world.

According to the spiritual concept, all what is written of the old statutes, could be understood to apply to the Father<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ ***“Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord?”*** (2)... From death, we have become eternal! ... Do you perceive the extent of the conquest? and the way we achieved it, without labor, nor sweat? ... We did not stand in a battle; We were not wounded; Our weapons were not covered with blood ... Yet we won the battle!... The crown of victory is ours!... Now, as long as the conquest is ours, it is befitting of us, as warriors, to sing today, with joyful voices, the praises of conquest; ... Let us praise our Lord, saying: *“O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”* (1 Corinthians 15: 54-55) <sup>2</sup>.

❖ ***“Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Or can declare all His praises?”*** ... Who among the shepherds, feeds his flock with his own body members? ... Why should I say a shepherd? ... There are many mothers, who, right after going through the labor pains, and giving birth, send their newborn to other women to suckle. He, on the other hand, never does such a thing, but feeds us with His body and blood, and saves us in every way by Himself<sup>3</sup>.

❖ The Son, equal to the Father in essence, was like me! ... He walked on this earth, mixed with people; performed wonders among them; and provided them with the goods of this age, as well as of the age to come. What He presented on earth, was to confirm what He will grant in the age to come. By that, the Son fulfilled what has been written:

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 32 on Ps. 105 (106).

<sup>2</sup> De come. Et cruce. PG 49: 396 D-397 A.

<sup>3</sup> On Matt., Homily 82.

“Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Or can declare all His praises?” (Psalm 106: 2) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“Blessed are those who keep justice, and he who does righteousness at all times” (3)**

Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord, or can declare all his praises, but he, who receive our Lord Jesus as his Righteousness; he, in whose life, the mighty acts and wonders of the Lord are declared; and he who, himself, would be a true testimony to God’s works and wonders.

Keeping the divine justice, and doing righteousness, are one integral thing; While turning from the plural to the singular tense, is often noticed, especially in the book of psalms; For the believer would never separate himself from the congregation; talking sometimes, out of his personal experience, and some other times out of his collective experience as a member of the congregation. The fellowship with God, is likewise set upon the two levels together with no separation between them.

As to saying: “*at all times*”, or “always”; that could never be realized except through hiding in Christ, who, being alone without sin; would cover us by Himself, and would become for us righteousness and redemption.

According to **the scholar Origen**, the “Virtue” is Christ; Whoever acquires Christ in himself, acquires the Virtue, and bears the features of the Lord Christ.

And according to **St. Jerome**, as the Lord Christ is the “Righteousness”, it is befitting of us to be perpetually righteous; namely, should always acquire Christ who, for our sake, according to the apostle, has become Righteousness; and to have Christ, so conformed in us, that we become as though carrying Christ in our depths; namely, the soul becomes a mother and a father to the righteousness, conformed in us.

- ❖ He is praised, He “*who works in us, both to will, and to do His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2: 13) <sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ They are called “blessed”, those who keep justice (truth) in faith, and practice righteousness by work<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> *The Divine Providence.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 106 (105).*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 106 (105).*

❖ **“Blessed are those who keep justice, and he who does righteousness at all times”** (3). David has the right to utter such a prayer, for he, himself, obeyed the commandments of God, and did what is right.

Yes, because he did not obey, nor did the righteousness at all times, he fell.

To be blessed, you have to do righteousness at all times. For what would be your benefit if you lived twenty years in chastity, then fell?

This is the message of the words of the prophets, saying: *“The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him on the day of his transgression; as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall because of it in the day that he turns from his wickedness”* (Ezekiel 33: 12). Therefore, the righteous should not trust (in himself); nor the sinner should despair of his salvation; Both should fear and hope.

**“He who does righteousness at all times”**. ... Our Lord, being the Righteousness, Blessed is he who does righteousness, namely, he who gives birth to Christ.... How could we give birth to Christ or to righteousness? .... If we live by righteousness, conceive it in us, and give birth to it; to become a mother to righteousness. ... Blessed is he who is father and a mother to righteousness<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Those who keep the commandments and judgments of God, and persist on doing righteousness; would be able to utter and tell the mighty acts of the Lord, and can declare all His praises.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Let every man have an ark of the covenant, in which to keep the two tablets of the law, to be able to meditate in it day and night (Psalm 1: 2); he should have his mind like the ark of the covenant, and a (library) that embraces the books of God; For the prophets have blessed those who keep God’s commandments in their memory (See psalm 106: 3).

And let every man have inside his heart the pot of Manna; as a reference to the beauty and sweetness of the understanding of the Word of God.... And let him, as well, keep the rod of Aaron, as a reference to the teaching of priesthood, the rod that budded through upright chastisement (for the rod is for both instruction and chastisement)<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 32 on Ps. 105 (106).

<sup>2</sup> Origin: in Exod. Hom 9: 4 (Ronald E. Heine).

***“Remember me, O Lord, with the favor You have toward Your people; Oh, visit me with Your salvation” (4)***

This verse, and the one following it, reveal the heart-desire of men of the old covenant; when every believer, personally, yet not separated from the people of God or His church, sought to enjoy seeing the day of salvation on the cross; which he calls “*the favor God has toward His people, and visiting them with His salvation*”; a joy for all, as well as for every believer, and good for the chosen ones. It is an amazing practical flow of God’s love toward mankind.

If the psalmist desires to be blessed, by keeping the evangelic truth, and doing the righteousness, That would not be possible, except by joining the people of God, the object of His pleasure; through the Savior visiting him with His salvation.

That cry-out “***Remember me!***”, was presented by the repentant right-hand robber, crucified together with the Savior, and by it, he enjoyed the open gates of paradise; set, not upon personal worthiness, nor upon man’s boasting a certain deed; but through casting oneself into the bosom of the Savior, and taking refuge in His amazing mercies.

He seeks from the Savior to remember him, through his desire to become a member in the congregation of God, beloved by the Savior, and the object of His pleasure.

***“Oh, visit me with Your salvation”***. Namely, visit me with Your Only-begotten Son, the Savior of the world.

❖ ***“Visit me with Your salvation”***. with the Savior Himself, by whom sins are forgiven, and souls are healed, to be able to keep the justice (truth), and to practice the righteousness<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ These oracles were uttered by the prophets and righteous men, who came before Christ; by which they supplicate to God (the Father) to count them worthy to behold the ordinance of His Son, called “Pleasure” or “Good will”; as uttered by the angels on the day of His birth: “*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, good will toward men*” (Luke 1: 14); And also the voice of the Father, Himself, who said about Him: “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3: 17). This ‘pleasure’, called ‘favor’ or ‘visit’, and ‘salvation’; as it is said: “*Everyone see the salvation of God*<sup>2</sup>”.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

***“That I may see the benefit of Your chosen ones; That I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation; That I may glory with Your heritage” (5)***

Seeking from God to ‘visit’ him with His ‘salvation’, the psalmist asks to make him join His very beloved church, to become chosen, and to have the right to behold the good or goodness; namely, to enjoy the joy of the holy congregation, and to get the gift of the eternal heritage. In other words, He asks Him to count him as one of His chosen, to grace him with the goodness, the enjoyment of the membership in the exultant church, and the cherishment of the heritage prepared for him in heaven.

According to **St. Jerome**, by the “*chosen ones*” here, the psalmist means the apostles, and those who, although will come after him, yet they precede him in the Spirit. And like Abraham who “*rejoiced to see His day, saw it, and was glad*” (John 8: 56), he asked God to allow him to rejoice together with him in the heritage of the Lord.

❖ ***“That I see the prosperity of Your chosen ones; That I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation” (5)***; Namely, visit us with Your salvation! ... The word “*prosperity*”, here, came in some versions as (sweetness) ... As when God gives sight to the blind, not for their worthiness, but for the sake of the “*prosperity*” God grants to His chosen ones<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

### **3- A CONFESSION AND SEEKING THE SALVATION OF THE LORD:**

***“We have sinned with our fathers; We have committed iniquity” (6)***

Here, the psalmist accuses himself. If his fathers have sinned, have committed iniquities, and have disobeyed God; he, in his turn, followed their lead, and walked in their path. ... The way the prophet Daniel, in the land of captivity, cried out, saying: “*We have sinned and committed iniquity; we have committed iniquity and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments*” (Daniel 9: 5); And the way the prophet Nehemiah also cried out, saying: “*Both my father’s house and I have sinned . We have acted very corruptly against You ...*” (Nehemiah 1: 6-7)..

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the cry-out of confession here, is in the name of the Jews who rejected the Lord Christ, and became partners of their father since the days of the prophet Moses, and the rest of the prophets, who, despite the multitude of good deeds done by God, and His wondrous gifts to them, they were continuously grumbling, and rebelling against Him.

❖ *“He uttered His voice, the earth melted”* (Psalm 46: 6). ... Who then, can endure looking at His face?! No one can utter a voice in His presence; ... Our inner man cannot even endure seeing Him in a vision; *“No strength remained in me; my vigor turned to frailty”* (See Daniel 10: 8). ... For fear, our mouths would turn mute; and in case we retain a little strength to speak before Him, our consciences would rebuke us, knowing that *“We have sinned with our fathers, and we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedness”* (6) in His presence. And if we imagine that we have become in a better condition, *“all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth”* (Isaiah 64: 6); For victory is His alone, while blame and the shame of face is ours<sup>1</sup>.

**(Martyrus – Sahdona)**

*“Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; they did not remember the multitude of your mercies, but rebelled by the sea – the red Sea”* (7)

Despite all the wonders that God did with His old people, yet the human nature of denial prevailed upon them. They often rebelled against Him, as well as against Moses His prophet (Acts 7: 27, 35), and Aaron His priest.

The Red Sea got its name through the myriads of certain tiny planktonic creatures in its water, or due to the reflection of light red color from the mountains in some region along its course; or still, according to some, because the land of Edom (meaning blood) was between it and Palestine.

❖ *“Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders”*. Which they have seen, but as though they did not see; they saw them by their physical eyes, and not by those of the spirit. ... The prophet does not say that they did not see, but says: *“They did not understand”*. The way our fathers saw the wonders God did, but did not perceive the depths of their secret meaning; is the same regarding the gospel;

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<sup>1</sup> .10، كتاب الكمال

Whoever reads and listens to it in a physical way, yet without spiritual insight, is counted as spiritually blind. That is why, blessed are we who, although we did not see, yet we believed, more than those who saw and did not believe.

They watched how the Red Sea was split open, and how Pharaoh and his army drowned in its water, Yet they only understood what they saw with their physical eyes. We, on the other hand, who did not see, perceive that Pharaoh is the devil, and his army are the demons; and the whole incident was a symbol of baptism.

By experience, while going through the wilderness, they knew the bitter water of Marah, and passed through it; While we know the false baptism of the heretics in the bitter water.

They raised a bronze serpent on a pillar in the wilderness. And we, as well, hang the ancient serpent in the wilderness<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power known" (8)***

God saved them through the Red Sea, a reference to baptism, not because of their own worthiness, but for the sake of His holy name, by which they were to be called.

***"He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it dried up; So He led them through the depths, as through the wilderness" (9)***

That work, namely crossing the Red Sea, a symbol of God's salvation work through the water of baptism, will remain the object of interest of the believers, and of their faith in the work of God (Exodus 15: 8; Psalm 33: 7; 78: 13); According to what is written: "*Who led them ... with His glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make for Himself an everlasting name*" (Isaiah 63: 13).

❖ We did not hear, that a certain voice has come down from heaven to rebuke the Red Sea; Yet the prophet called the divine power with its activity "a rebuke". It is as though the sea was secretly rebuked; and its water heard what humans could not hear; God's authority is deep and secret; made what has no sense, obey His will.

***"He led them through the deep, as through the wilderness" .*** Here he calls the waters "the deep"; that dried up like the wilderness<sup>2</sup> .

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 32 on Ps. 105 (106).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

***“He saved them from the hand of him who hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy” (10)***

Here, he talks about the adversary who hates us in the singular tense; for we have no enemy but the devil; who was symbolized by Pharaoh.

- ❖ What price was paid for that salvation? ... It is a prophecy; For that work was a symbol of baptism, through which we were saved from the hand of Satan by a great price – the precious blood of Christ. It is a harmonious analogy, not realized by any sea, but by the Red Sea, which turned red by His blood<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“The waters covered their enemies; There was not one of them left” (11)***

Although the enemy is one, namely, the devil, yet the oppressors are many; the army of Pharaoh; The devil provokes his wicked angels against the believers.

***“Then they believed His words; They sang His praise” (12)***

This refers to the song of praise by the people after enjoying salvation, through crossing the Red Sea, and the perdition of their enemy; when the Lord made a way for them in the depths of the sea (See Exodus 15); Yet, they soon got back to deny His works with them, and to grumble against Him..... They were slow to express their faith, and only for a temporary period.

#### **4- A REBELLION IN THE DAYS OF THE PROPHET MOSES:**

The rebellion against Moses the prophet and Aaron the priest is actually directed against God Himself, He who has chosen Moses to lead His people, and who called Aaron “His saint”(106: 16). The first was a symbol of Christ, the Word of God, for he was the one to receive the law; And the second was His symbol, as well, being the heavenly High Priest, our Redeemer by His blood.

***“They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel” (13)***

As slow as they were to express their faith after their salvation through crossing over the Red Sea, they hastened to forget His wonders He has done with them.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

It is befitting of us to give thanks to God while we are in the midst of affliction, and not to wait until we pass through it, as the children of Israel did. It is also befitting of us to remember perpetually, God's dealings with us in the past, and never forget them, so as not to deny Him.

❖ It was befitting of them to perceive that those great works done by God for their sake, were not without a goal, to call them to an endless happiness; But they hastened, instead, to seek happiness in the temporal things which do not give man a genuine satisfaction, nor quench their thirst; according to the words of our Lord: *“Whoever drinks from this water will thirst again”* (John 4: 3, 13) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert” (14)***

Sin starts by a lust in the heart or mind, which would motivate man to non-faith and denial, and would bring him forth to a condition of murmur and rebellion against God.

God turned the bottom of the sea for them into a wilderness or a dry land. Yet after walking exultantly over it, instead of being satisfied with God's love and care, they tested Him, and desired what is unfitting. Despising the Mannah that come down from heaven, they sought to smell the pots of meet, as they did in the land of bondage.

***“And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul” (15)***

Persisting on his lust, God gives man his heart's desire. When the people of God persisted on their request for a king to reign over them, God listened to them. Then, *“all the people said to Samuel the prophet: ‘Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves’”* (1 Samuel 12: 19).

They desired and sought meet, and God gave them their heart's desire. Yet, as they did not get with it the blessing of the Lord, God sent to them, spiritual, mental, and physical leanness; and they suffered much on all aspects.

***“When they envied Moses in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord, the earth opened up and swallowed Dathan and covered the***

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

***faction of Abiram. A fire was kindled in their company, the flame burned up the wicked” (16-18)***

❖ In the book of Numbers it came that, when Dathan, Abiram, and their company, enviously sought for themselves the privileges granted by the compassion of God to Moses and Aaron, the earth opened up and swallowed them, to go down alive with all their possessions into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the congregation, Having been preoccupied with the earthly things, the nature of the punishment that dwelt upon them, came to testify to their criminal works. “*And a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense*” (Numbers 16: 32-35) <sup>1</sup>.

**(Cassiodorus)**

***“They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molded image” (19)***

It did not stop at their denial of the gifts and wondrous works of God with them, but they made for themselves a calf and worshipped it, denying the Creator Himself.

***“Thus they changed their glory into the image of an ox that eats grass” (20)***

The Jews, having carried with them from Egypt a hidden desire of idol-worship, they found in the absence of Moses a chance to fulfill what they had in their hearts (See Exodus 32).

Some of the recent Jew scholars claim that the few Egyptians who were among those who came out of Egypt, have deceived the Jews, and drew them to worship the calf. But history witnesses to their continuous perversion, and that they have been persistent partakers of the idol-worship and abominations of the pagans even in the promised land.

***“They forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt” (21)***

The children of Israel have not benefited from the amazing things done to their account when they got out of the land of bondage, and crossed over the red Sea. It was befitting of them to enjoy God’s awe with reverence, trust, and the spirit of piety; together with a feeling of exultance in his amazing care.

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<sup>1</sup> Cassiodorus: *Exposition of the Psalms 105: 17.*

***“Wondrous works in the land of Ham; Awesome things by the Red Sea” (22)***

***“Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses, His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroys them” (23)***

The psalmist did not forget to commend the prophet Moses, who, with the spirit of contrition and compassion, he managed to turn away God’s wrath from his people. If that is how a pious leader should be, how much more would the Son of God, the Philanthropic One, do for the sake of the salvation of His people from the eternal perdition.

Moses did not fear the justice of God, who would never “*blot his name out His book which He has written*” (Exodus 32: 32); He stood before Him in the breach, seeking His mercy, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroys those who were worthy to be destroyed<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe His word” (24)***

❖ How could they despise the land they have not yet seen?, except that “*They did not believe the Word of God*” ... He rebukes their lack of faith in God who were leading them to major things (the High Jerusalem), through minor things (the promised land), and gave them temporary things they physically tasted. ... But “*They did not wait for His counsel*” (13) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“But murmured in their tents, and did not heed the voice of the Lord” (25)***

When the men sent by Moses to spy the land of Canaan, came back with their bad report, “*The congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people murmured against Moses and against Aaron,.... So they said to one another: Let us select a leader and return to Egypt*”

(Numbers 13; 14).

***“Therefore (God) lifted up His hand in an oath against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness” (26)***

Lifting the hand is in an act of oath (Numbers 14: 21-23, 28).

***“To overthrow their descendants among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands” (27)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

The psalmist also says: *“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. You sell Your people for naught, and not enriched by their price.*

*You make us a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and a derision to those all around us”* (Psalm 44: 10-14).

***“They joined themselves also to Baal Peor, and ate sacrifices made to the dead” (28)***

“Baal” was a common name for the majority of male gods among the Gentiles of the east; whereas ‘Ashetoreth’ was the common name of the female goddesses. Each of them was called after the place of worship; as for example “Baal Peor” refers to the god “Baal” that was on the hill of “Peor”.(where Balaam offered sacrifices (Numbers 23: 28-30)

*“Sacrifice made to the dead”*. ‘Jehovah’ is called “the living God’, while the idols were called “the dead gods”.

***Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds, and the plague broke out among them” (29)***

That came in the book of Numbers 25: 1-3, when *“the people began to commit adultery with the women of Moab, who invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods”*.

***“Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and so plague was stopped” (30)***

That jealousy of Phinehas the priest on the holiness of God in His people, as well as on His sanctuaries, will remain everlasting and remembered by the ages. For in the midst of darkness, the holy work and jealousy would never be forgotten.

***“And that was accounted for him for righteousness to all generations forevermore” (31)***

Someone may marvel, how could what Phinehas be counted as righteousness, when he killed the guilty priest, and the adulteress Medianite woman. .. That deed was under the guidance of the Spirit of God. For what the guilty priest has done was a perversion to the pagan worship, that could have led to the corruption of the whole congregation, and provoked them to reject the faith in the living God, and worship the idols even in the temple of God. That does not mean that it was the Spirit of God who commanded Phinehas to do what he did, but received

what was in his heart of a wish to walk according to the spirit of holiness.

❖ God counted that for Phinehas for righteousness “*forevermore*”; for He knows how to weigh the love in the heart of His servant<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ If Phinehas, by his holy jealousy, appeased the wrath of God by killing the evildoer; ... The Lord Jesus, who killed no one, but “*gave Himself a ransom for all*” (1 Timothy 2: 6), has appeased the wrath of God (the Father) against humanity<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

❖ If we are conformed by the death of the Lord Jesus, the sin in us becomes a dead corpse, stabbed by the spear of baptism; the way the adulterer was stabbed by the jealousy of Phinehas<sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ God, through His prophet Isaiah, says: “*This is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest*” (Isaiah 28: 12 LXX). This is the rest of the Lord. ... O man, You may be in no need to pray, saying: “Forgive me”; if you give rest to the weary, and give alms to the poor; for these deed are truly a prayer.

Every time you practice “*the rest of the Lord*”, is a prayer. When Phinehas the son of Eleazar saw Zimri committing adultery with the Medianite woman, he went after the man into the tent and thrust his javelin through both of them (Numbers 25: 6-8). That killing was counted by God as a prayer; according to the words of the prophet David: “*Then Phinehas stood up and intervened (prayed), and so the plague was stopped; and that was accounted to him for righteousness, to all generations forevermore*” (Psalm 106: 30-31). killing them was for the sake of the Lord was counted as a prayer<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Aphrahat, the Persian Savant)**

**“*They angered Him also at the waters of Meribah, so that it went ill with Moses on their account*” (32)**

If God did not forget what Phinehas did with jealousy; despite His great love for Moses and Aaron, having lost their humility because of the resistance of the people against them, He denied them the physical

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

<sup>2</sup> Catechetical Lecture 13: 2.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Genesis 1: 17.

<sup>4</sup> Demonstrations 4 on Prayer, 14.

entrance into the promised land, as a lesson of His impartiality to anyone who ever he is (See Numbers 20: 2-13).

❖ Suffering greatly from the continuous and fierce opposition of the people, because of the water issue at Meribah, “*Moses spoke rashly with his lips*” (33). He said “*Hear now, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?*” (Numbers 20: 10). They so embittered his spirit, that he did not silently minister to God as he used to do. God rebuked and chastised him by not letting him enter into the promised land for the following reasons:

a- To teach us humility, and to avoid being angry.

b- To teach us not to think, that anything could be out of the ability of God.

c- To let that foolish people know that God applies His justice even to His closest chosen ones.

And as a symbol of the fact, that the ultimate (promised land) – namely the kingdom of God – will not be entered by the people, by the law of Moses, but by the law of the lord Jesus Christ, through baptism. That is why God ordained to bring the Israelites forth into the earthly promised land under the leadership of Joshua, the son of Nun, across the Jordan. Hence Moses said to the people: “I was denied entering into the promised land because of you;... I supplicated to the Lord, who told me “Enough of you”.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Because they rebelled against his spirit, so that he spoke rashly with his lips” (33)***

❖ “*He spoke rashly with his lips*”. What did he utter with doubt?! ... It is as though God, who has already performed so many great wonders, is not able to bring forth water from a rock. ... Striking the rock with doubt, this was different from the rest of the wonders that God did through him; by which he was worthy to be told that he will die without entering the promised land (Deuteronomy 32: 49-52). He got disturbed because of the murmur of those non-believing people, and did not trust in God they way he used to. ... Yet, God granted him – being His chosen – a good testimonial even after his death; for us to realize that Moses, because of such temporary hesitation in faith alone, was punished by not allowing him to enter into the promised land, despite being the leader of the people<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ There is no need for us to be told how Moses and Aaron have angered God at the waters of Meribah, and how they were punished by not allowing them to enter into the promised land (Numbers 20: 13), For the blessed ‘Job’ tell us that even the angels may commit sin<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Moses just said to the people: “*Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?*” (Number 20: 10). For such little hesitation, he got the punishment not to be allowed to enter into the promise land, which was at the time the main covenant given to the Jews. When I see how such a great man, despite his many works of righteousness; for the sake of so few words, asked for forgiveness, and did not get it, I perceive the extent of the severity of God (Romans 11: 22); and perceive the truth of the apostle’s words: “*If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?*” (1 Peter 4: 18) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Basil the Great)

## 5- A REBELLION IN THE PROMISED LAND:

According to God’s promise to His servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the people of Israel entered the promised land to inherit. Yet, instead of obeying God, they rebelled against Him, mingling with the pagans, partaking of their worship of idols, offering their sons and daughters as sacrifices to Satan, as well as of adultery and uncleanness.

***“They did not destroy the peoples, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them” (34)***

The Israelites had a strange tendency to pervert toward idol worship, having worshipped the golden calf after coming out of Egypt; And, whenever they got in contact with a certain people, they hastened to partake of worshipping their idols. Hence, God’s commanded them to destroy the nations in the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7: 1-5, 16; Judges 2: 2); Yet they did not heed His command, and made covenants with the pagan nations (Joshua 9: 3-15).

- ❖ That divine command was not for lack of compassion on God’s part, but was because He feared lest the pagans would give their children to them in marriage, and would provoke them to worship their idols.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> *Against Jovinianus, Book 2: 4.*

<sup>2</sup> *Preface on the Judgment of God.*

***“But they mingled with the Gentiles, and learned their works. They served their idols, which became a snare for them” (35, 36)***

If “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5: 6), and if “evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Corinthians 15: 33), how much more would it be, when the people of God enter into marital relationship, into a fellowship of unclean abominations, and idol worship, with the pagan peoples?!

***“And even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons” (37)***

According to some, the word ‘demons’ here, in plural tense, refers to the unclean spirits, namely, the angels submitted to Satan.

Some Gentile nations used to sacrifice their children to pagan gods: the father or mother used to present his or her child to the pagan priest, who in turn, would put the child on a statue red hot with fire, as a sacrifice; an action called by the name of “passing through the fire”. Therefore the divine commandment came: “*You shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God*” (Leviticus 18: 21). “*You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods*” (Deuteronomy 12: 31).

❖ Mankind perverted to the worship of demons; Unfortunately, the fruits of the earth, beautifully created by God, were presented to demons; on whose altars they used to put bread, wine, oil, animals; and even their own sons and daughters, as sacrifices (37) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Maccarius the Great)**

***“And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood” (38)***

***“Thus they were defiled with by their own works, and played the harlot by their own deeds” (39)***

As harlotry was considered as the worst of uncleanness, the Holy Book counts the perversion from the worship of the living God to idol-worship, as harlotry and uncleanness (Psalm 73: 27; Exodus 34: 15-16).

## **6- GOD’S CHASTISEMENTS AND MERCIES:**

These verses concern the condition of the people in the days of the judges; when fell, every now and then into bondage by the

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<sup>1</sup> عظة :11 .50

surrounding nations; then, they would cry-out to God, who sent judges to save them.

***“Therefore the wrath of the Lord was kindled against His people; So that He abhorred His own inheritance” (40)***

❖ The Holy Book often refers to God, certain human expressions and terms, as for example: *“The wrath of the Lord kindled...”* (40); and, *“The Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel”* (1 Samuel 15: 35);... beside talking about His sitting, standing, etc<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa).**

***“And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles; and those who hated them ruled over them” (41)***

When the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the Jews, He gave them into the hands of their enemies; to those who hated them to rule over them (41), and there were no more feasts nor offerings in Jerusalem. The same happens to the human soul, when the wrath of God is kindled against her because of her disobedience to His commandment; He gives her into the hands of her enemies, namely, the demons and the evil lusts, to seduce her, to utterly corrupt and destroy her, so that, in her, there would be no more feasts no joy; no incense, nor an offering to the Lord.; but only the terrifying beasts and the evil spirits dwell<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Maccarius the Great)**

❖ When Goliath was struck by a stone, he was struck by the power of Christ. He was struck in his forehead, on which there was no sign of salvation; he was struck in the place where there was no grace for the Savior. ... A man who defiles the sanctuaries of the Lord, in whom Christ is absent; and on whose forehead there is no sign of salvation, his end will not be different from that of Goliath<sup>3</sup>.

**(Maximus, bishop of Torin)**

***“Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand” (42)***

Although the pagan nations were under their dominion, and they could have kept themselves from having any fellowship with them, Yet, for the sake of the pleasures of lusts, or of material benefits, they, contrary to the commandment of God, entered into covenants with them; and were , accordingly humiliated and brought into subjection under

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<sup>1</sup> Answer to Eunonius' second Book.

<sup>2</sup> عظة 10 :28

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 85: 3.

their hands; and came to taste the bitterness of sin, and their disregard of evil.

- ❖ That was through the allowance and ordinance of God, to make His people hate them, together with their idols and works, and return to God, their Savior.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Many times He delivered them, but they rebelled against Him by their counsel, and they were brought low for their iniquity” (34)***

Whenever man disregards evil, and partakes of the iniquity of the wicked, God allows the wicked themselves to chastise him by their horrible violence. That is what happened when the Assyrians and the Babylonians captivated Israel and Judah; And what would happen to us if we become slothful with sin..

- ❖ ***“But they rebelled against Him by their counsel” (43).*** Man’s counsel would be destructive to him, *“if he seeks his own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2: 21)*<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard them cry” (44)***

***“And for their sake He remembered His covenant and relented according to the multitude of His mercies” (45)***

- ❖ ***“Relented”*** here, means He stopped striking them.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“He also made them to be pitied by all those who carried them away captive” (46)***

God is a Father even while chastising; He shows His wrath to reform; And once we respond to reform, He opens to us wide the gates of His mercies.

## **7- A SUPPLICATION AND A PRAISE:**

Supplication here came as a prayer that brings pleasure to God. Together with a confession of sins, prayer carries the spirit of hope for salvation, and of praise to God as a Savior. The psalm ends with a collective praise to God, considered as a glorification by which the psalmist ends the fourth book of psalms

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 106 (105).

***“Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the Gentiles, To give thanks to Your holy name, and to triumph in Your praise” (47)***

The secret why the Jews receive the anti-Christ, is their material way of thinking, and their literal interpretation of the prophecies. According to **St. Augustine**: [It so seems that the carnal Jewish people assume that the prophecy saying: “*Save us, O Lord, and gather us from among the Gentiles*” (Psalm 106: 47), will be realized by, and under the leadership of the anti-Christ<sup>1</sup>].

❖ How could they be gathered from among the Gentiles, unless they be saved<sup>2</sup>?!

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, ‘Amen’. Praise the Lord” (48)***

I wish we use every chance to give thanks to God, praise Him, and instigate the others to join us in praising Him

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps.107: 33.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon 198: 2.*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 106**  
**I PRAISE YOU, O FORGIVER OF SINS**

- ❖ I confess to You my sins, O my Savior;  
I reveal my depths to You;  
To You, who know them more than I do;  
I confess to You that I am a sinner;  
That I need You, O Forgiver of sins;  
To reveal Yourself to me;  
To let me get in touch with Your abundant mercies;  
Grant them here to me;  
And let me live them in heaven forever.
- ❖ Your works are mighty and amazing;  
They turn my heart, from a trash can, to Your joyful kingdom;  
You set out of my depths an amazing place;  
So that my life would testify to Your exalted salvation;  
And I would become a praise singing the songs of Your mercies.
- ❖ Indeed, Who can testify to You?!  
Except him who keeps the evangelic truth?!  
And who practice the righteousness all the time;  
You are the Truth and the Righteousness;  
Let me acquire You in my depths;  
To become truly a witness to the works of Your divine love.
- ❖ Gather me together with Your people;  
To become a member in Your body;  
Visit me with Your salvation;  
For You are the Savior  
You are the Forgiver of sins;  
The Grantor of healing to the souls;  
To make them keep Your Truth, and practice Your righteousness.
- ❖ In the richness of Your grace, You pour happiness and sweetness  
over Your people.  
You fill them with gladness, and exultation;  
I do not seek this, out of my own worthiness;  
But I seek it from the riches of Your mercies, O Lover of Your  
people.
- ❖ I confess to You that I have sinned, together with my fathers;  
Grant me to get in touch with Your love, and enjoy Your mercies;

You rebuked the Red Sea, and turned its water into dry land;  
Through which Your people crossed with exultation;  
And in which the enemy drowned forever;  
Utter a word, And I will cross over to You in the midst of the waters  
of this world;  
And the devil will fall down, together with all his hosts and evil  
plans;  
The affliction will turn into an amazing salvation;  
And instead of the sufferings, I would enjoy the joy of praising You.

- ❖ In a language not understood nor perceived by men, you commanded  
the sea  
The waters, without mind nor sense, heard Your voice and obeyed;  
Whereas men heard nothing;  
The depths turned into a dry wilderness, for the people to cross by  
foot;  
You are God of the impossibilities;  
You are the wonder-Maker for the sake of Your chosen ones;
- ❖ You provided them with more than they asked for;  
Yet, in their denial, they rebelled against You;  
And resisted Moses, the great among the prophets;  
And Aaron the High Priest.
- ❖ Grant me to understand the secrets of your love;  
And to perceive the secrets behind Your dealings with Your people;  
Blessed are You, O Lord, forever, and ever Amen.

*THE FIFTH BOOK OF PSALMS*

**THE LIVING WORD OF GOD**  
**(Psalm 107 to 150)**

In the introduction to the Book of psalms, we showed that the fifth book of psalms corresponds to the fifth book of the Pentateuch -- the five books of the prophet Moses, namely the book of Deuteronomy, which is considered as the book of the law, or the book of the Word of God.

This book, which starts with psalm 107, presents to us the key of the fifth book of psalms; namely, "*He sent His words and healed them*" (20).

It embraces:

1- The great psalm 119, which is considered as the diary of the prophet Moses about the Word of God, which He loved, and found pleasure to practice.

2- The psalms of Ascents (Psalm 120 to 134), sung by those ascending to the house of the Lord, where they enjoyed hearing the commandments and promises of God.

3- The Egyptians Hallel (Psalms 113 to 118).

4- The psalms of "Alleluia" (Psalms 146 to 150).

## **PSALM 107**

### **THE WORD OF GOD, THE HEALER**

This psalm presents to us a living portrait of the incarnate Word of God, the Forgiver of sins, who gathers His church from the ends of the earth; the divine Physician, the Healer of both the soul and the body.

<b>1- A call to confession and thanksgiving</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>
<b>2- Salvation from getting lost in the midst of the wilderness</b>	<b>4 - 9</b>
<b>3- Salvation from bondage</b>	<b>10 - 16</b>
<b>4- Salvation from sickness</b>	<b>17 - 22</b>
<b>5- Salvation from the dangers of sailing in the great waters of the world</b>	<b>23 - 32</b>
<b>6- The divine care</b>	<b>33 - 43</b>

#### **The title:**

Thanksgiving to the Lord for His great works of deliverance.

❖ **“Alleluia”**: Although we sing it in certain days, but, in truth, we think of it every day. By this word we mean to praise God, if not by the physical mouth, but surely by that of the heart: *“I will praise the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth”*<sup>1</sup> (Psalm 34: 1).

**(St. Augustine)**

#### **1- A CALL TO CONFESSION AND THANKSGIVING:**

The psalmist calls the holy congregation to present a confession of their sins, and a thanksgiving on the faithfulness of God in His promises to them; confirming His goodness and love for those He redeemed, whose debts He paid back by His precious blood, whom He set free from the bondage of the devil, and gathered from the whole world, as a holy people for Himself.

*“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His mercy endures forever”* (1)

The words *“Give thanks”* here, came to mean “Confess”. For, according to many fathers, like **St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom**, and others, we are committed to confess to the Lord: first, for the sake of His good works with us, especially His grace working in us; by practicing goodness as a gift from Him; And secondly, by confessing

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

our sins, to be forgiven. The two aspects are integral; interpreted by **St. Augustine** as: “Confess to the Lord, for He is sweet, For His mercy endures forever”; And says that he who does not taste the sweetness of God, would not be able to confess.

❖ Because His mercy is not just for some time, as though it does not endure forever; His mercy on men, is to let them live together with the angels forever<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ Confess your sins to Him, for He is Compassionate, and the Forgiver of sins. If He is not good, the prophet David would not counsel you to confess, and to give Him thanks. His compassion is eternal: In This world, He is wholly merciful; and in the world to come, He is Just ... As long as you are in this world, confess to Him, and give Him thanks<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ There are two kinds of confession: Admitting our transgressions, and giving thanks for His goodness; We are committed to present both to the Lord, for His is good, and His mercy endures forever.

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

*“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy” (2)*

*The redeemed of the Lord*” has been a favorite expression to the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 35: 9-10; 62: 12; 63: 4). The secret of the cross was so revealed to Isaiah, that he anticipated the church of the new covenant, gathered by the Lord from all the Gentiles, as a church redeemed by His precious blood, and set free from the bondage of the devil. Hence he says: “*No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; It shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away*” (Isaiah 35: 9-10).

❖ “*Let the redeemed of the Lord say so*”. Here, the prophet directly refers to the call to the Gentiles, which represents the main issue of this psalm.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 33 On Ps. 106 (107).

Having been captives in the hands of the devil, the Lord came and redeemed us from his hands. The enemy held us in his hands, not on account of that he loves us, but because he hates us<sup>1</sup>.

How great is the power of the blood of the Lord, to liberate us from the hand of the devil ... The Lord poured His blood like the oil of mercy to set us free<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ What came in the verses 2 to 5, concern us ‘Christians’, whom the Lord, glory be to Him, gathered in one church from all the nations of the world, binding us by one faith. Before we believe, we were away from God, lost in a barren way of life, devoid of virtues, and of the water of baptism, short-sighted toward God; And with no way to lead us to the dwelling place of the righteous, namely, the kingdom of heaven. Our souls were miserable; hungry for the bread that strengthens the heart of man, namely, the divine teaching; and thirsty for the water, for the sake of which, our Lord, Glory be to Him, said: *“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”* (John 7: 38).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“And gathered us out of the lands, from the east and from the west; from the north and from the south”* (3)

According to the Arabic version, it came as: “... from the east, from the west, from the north, and from the sea”. (The sea is to the west of Jerusalem).

The redeemed of the Lord, who came from the east, the west, and the north, are the Gentiles who received faith in the Lord Christ. The prophet Isaiah says: *“Surely these shall come from afar, Look! Those from the north and the west, and those from the land of Sinim”* (Isaiah 49: 12). And the Evangelist Luke says: *“They will come from the east and the west, from the north and south, and sit down in the kingdom of God”* (Luke 13: 29).

According to **St. Jerome**, the prophet does not mention the south, which represent the land where Christ was born *“God came from Taman; The Holy One from Mount Paran”* (Habakkuk 3: 3). *“Many will come from the east, the west to the bosoms of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out”* (Matthew 8: 10-12); The Gentiles came from the east, the west, and

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 33 On Ps. 106 (107).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 33 On Ps. 106 (107).

the north, but the Jews (in the south) have rejected the faith in the Lord Christ.

❖ From the text, it is obvious that this psalm does not concern the people of Israel, but it is the song of the (catholic) church all over the world<sup>1</sup>.

❖ We understand that “*the redeemed of the Lord*” refer to the people of God, who are liberated from the land of bondage, all over the wide earth, and are led through the Red Sea; namely through the holy sacrament of baptism, in which their sins are utterly cleansed; ... “*Now all these things happened to them as examples, and were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come*” (1 Corinthians 10: 11) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The Gentiles were honored, much more than the Jewish flock, who were condemned of rebellion, and of crucifying the Lord; Whereas the Gentiles received faith in Christ, by whom, and to whom, together with the Father, be the praise and the dominion , together with the holy Spirit, Amen<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great)

## **2- SALVATION FROM GETTING LOST IN THE MIDST OF THE WILDERNESS:**

Losing the way in the wilderness is very dangerous, leading mostly to death of travelers through loss of the secure way, hunger, thirst, and utter exhaustion. As there is no city secure from danger, the travelers are exposed to the wild beasts, and to the robbers. That is why the Lord presents Himself to His people, being the Way, in whom He carries them forth to the bosom of the Father; the heavenly Bread, the living Water, the Grantor of rest, the Satisfier of all needs, and the secure Refuge.

***“They wondered in the wilderness in a desolate way; They found no city to dwell in” (4)***

This applies to the Jews who lost the way in the wilderness for forty years, and did not cross over to the promised land, with the exception of Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh. ... And it also applies to all humanity, that lived as though in a maze, since

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

<sup>3</sup> تفسير إنجيل لوقا، عظة 99.

the time of the falling of Adam, until the Word of God came incarnate, to bring them forth into the bosom of the Father, to enjoy the heavenly Jerusalem, as their home in which to settle down forever.

According to **St. Jerome**, the Gentiles, as well, have lost their way in the wilderness, and found no city to dwell in. The great philosophers Socrates, Plato, and others, searched for such a city, but lost the way, as though in a barren wilderness; for the teachings of Philosophy without seeking the grace and help of God, do not provide the true food, nor the living water. They were like the woman who had a flow of blood, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any (Luke 8: 43-49; Mark 5: 25-35; Matthew 9: 20-23); But, once she cried out to the Lord, and touched the border of His garment, she was healed.

❖ Out of the system of monastic fellowship (Koinonia), emerged some other kind of the seekers of perfection, called the 'Hermits', namely, those who live in seclusion; who, not being satisfied by their conquest, having trampled upon the hidden tricks of the devil under their feet, while living among people, they longed to enter into an open war and an exposed battle against the enemy. They did not fear going deep into the wilderness, following the lead of St. John the Baptist, who spent his whole life in the desert; and the prophets Elijah and Elisha, about whom the apostle says: "*They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth*" (Hebrew 11: 37, 38).

About them, the Lord talked to the righteous 'Job', saying: "*Who set the wild donkey free? Who loosed the bonds of the onager, whose home I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwelling? He scorns the tumult of the city, he does not heed the shouts of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searches after every green thing*" (Job 39: 5-8).

The prophet Jeremiah describes them, saying: "*It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him*" (Lamentations 3: 27-28).

And the book of psalms also says: "*Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy*" (2) ; Then he goes on to say: "*They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way; they found no city to dwell in. hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses*" (4-6). And from the heart, the words come

out of the psalmist's mouth, saying: "*I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert*" (Psalm 102: 6-7) <sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Beamon)**

***"Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted in them" (5)***

God proclaims His care for His believers in the wilderness of this world. The prophet Isaiah says: "*When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongues fail for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the Lord of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry lands springs of water*" (Isaiah 41:17-18).

If the Gentiles came to be like wilderness with no water, having not enjoyed the law, the fathers, or the prophets; Yet the God of all mankind, has opened in those wilderness the springs of faith in Christ Jesus; and the wilderness turned into a fruitful paradise of God.

***"Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses" (6)***

According to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, the pagan nations, called "the Greeks" in the New Testament; ... While being in the old covenant, having not perceived the extent of misery which they have reached, they did not cry out to God to seek deliverance from it. Yet, the prophets and the righteous cried out to God on their behalf, with bitterness and sighs. It so happened, when the Lord Christ came, and those with spirits of mental weakness did not come to Him for help, nor sought salvation, but it was their close rational relatives who came to ask Him on their behalf. It is therefore, befitting of the pious people not to cease asking and supplicating, and even wrestling for the sake of those prone to perdition, for the Lord to work in them.

❖ The pious men of God were always longing with compassion for the sake of the salvation of their brethren; crying out, seeking the coming of the Son of God to the world, as inspired to them.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***"And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for habitation" (7)***

❖ Having not found the way to a city of habitation, the Lord led them forth by the right way; He revealed the way for them, for they they have previously found all the ways perverted and not straight. The

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 18: 6.

Way led them to the right way; The Lord Himself, the Savior, the Way, and the Leader at the same time, led them to the way, and let them walk along it, to enter into the church, He established upon Himself, He, the Rock, the Way, and the Guide<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works for the children of men” (8)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “Let us give the Lord thanks for His mercies and wonders for the children of men”.

Man may marvel how the prophet – in the old covenant – could offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for the sake of His wonders to the children of men; namely, for to Gentiles; unless he is swallowed into the love of God, proclaimed on the cross; and saw how the Word of God stretches His hands to all mankind in the east, west, north, and south; an expression that came four times in the same psalm (verses 8, 15, 22, and 31). The psalmist repeated the expression: ***“Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for the wonderful works for the children of men”***, three times in verses 8, 15, and 31; by which, according to **St. Jerome**, he gives honor to the Holy Trinity, as proclaimed by the gospel.

Confession of praise, and thanksgiving is presented to the evangelic Truth, who *“satisfied the longing soul, and filled the hungry soul with goodness”* (9), and heavenly bread. For *“He has broken the gates of the pit, and set us free of hell”* (16); And for He, as well, has granted us the spirit of praise in an exultant church atmosphere (32).

❖ About our Lord Himself, it is said that He is the Way; for He leads those who follow Him to the knowledge of His Father, and to a city of habitation, namely, to His kingdom, the dwelling place of His saints. To that city, arrive those who come out of the temporal disturbances and confusions. And like the Jews, intending to come to the city of God, walked through a barren, rough, and tiresome way; So it is for us; we are committed to walk along a narrow way, in order to reach the city of God – the heavenly Jerusalem. We therefore offer Him thanks for His mercies and wonders for mankind; We do that to let the others follow suit; learn His wonders from us, and put their ways right.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 33 On Ps. 106 (107).

- ❖ He promises the wine of joy for the Gentiles; using the shadow to refer to the secret of the new covenant of Christ, open now before the Gentiles to celebrate<sup>1</sup>.

(Eusabius of Caesarea)

*“For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with good things (bread)” (9)*

God cares to provide His believers with all their needs, to satisfy their hunger, and quench their thirst; And according to the prophet Jeremiah: *“I shall satiate the soul of the priest with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 31: 14).

And, according to the psalmist: *“They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures”* (Psalm 36: 8).

- ❖ About him, who lacks goodness, and is empty of righteousness, it is said that his soul is desolate and hungry. So were the Greeks (the Gentiles) before they believe in Christ, who satiated them with His abundance, when He taught them the work of righteousness.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

### **3- SALVATION FROM BONDAGE:**

Sin humiliates man and deprives him of freedom, to live, as though in a dark prison, with bronze gates, that no one can destroy, and iron bars, that nobody can break; where man is shackled with chains, heavy on the body and soul.

*“Those who sat in the darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons ...” (10)*

In his previous talk, the psalmist likened men to nomads traveling in the midst of a barren wilderness, with neither food nor drink, whom the Lord, Himself sustains. Now he talks of them as captives and prisoners who live in humiliation, shackled with iron, cast in darkness, and in need of the Lord to enlighten their darkness (Psalm 18: 28).

God longs to liberate the captives, and to set the prisoners free from prison; For freedom is the greatest gift given to man; *“For the Lord hears the poor, and does not despise His prisoners (Psalm 69: 33); “Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You”* (Psalm 79: 11).

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<sup>1</sup> Proof of Gospel, 1: 10.

❖ The Greeks (the Gentiles), by their natural wisdom, should have perceived the Maker of such beautiful creation; according to the words of the apostle, saying: *“For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse”* (Romans 1: 20, etc.). But our Lord Jesus Christ, for the abundance of His mercy, has satiated them with goodness, saved them from the vanity of death, and loosed their chains, saying to the captives: “Get out”, and to those in darkness: “Be seen”.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Because they rebelled against the words of God, and despised the counsel of the Most High” (11)***

There is no darkness to prevail on man, like that of sin and rebellion against God; And there is no way to captivity and deprivation from freedom, like despising His counsel. For whoever breaks the commandments of the divine Liberator, will cast himself in the bitterness of humiliation, and deprive himself of the inner freedom and the peace of heart.

***“Therefore, He brought down their heart with labor; They fell down, and there was none to help” (12)***

A heart, proud and disobedient to his God, cannot receive peace inside it; but would live in inexpressible labor; he would fall down, and there would be none to help; For God of the humble, alone, can help and lift up to perfection.

❖ Strive against lust; for in case God ceases to support you in your strife, you will not be able to overcome. And when the pressure of your evil increases on you, your hearts will be brought down with labor. That is why, learn to cry-out with a humble heart, saying: *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?!”* (Romans 7: 24)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses” (13)***

Once the fallen turns his face toward God, he will find Him waiting to save him from his distresses, to shine on him with His light, and to take the darkness away from him.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

*“He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces” (14)*

*“Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men” (15)*

*“For He has broken the gates, and cut out the bars of iron in two” (16)*

If sin and rebellion would bring man or the congregation forth, as though into a prison with bronze gates and iron bar; God, the Philanthropic, counts Himself as though a fellow prisoner, intends to give them back their freedom, and to bring them back to Himself; as expressed by the prophet Micah, saying: *“They will break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it. Their king will pass before them, with the Lord at their head”* (Micah 2: 13).; and by the prophet Isaiah, saying: *“I, the Lord, has called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand ... to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house”* (Isaiah 42: 6-7); And by the prophet Zechariah, saying: *“Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope”* (Zechariah 9: 12).

- ❖ How were the gates of bronze broken, and how were the bars of iron cut? ... by His body; ... He appeared the first time as a body to be eternized, and to destroy the dominion of death<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Those who have been under the old ordinance, when death not yet put to death, the bronze gates were not yet broken, nor the iron bars were cut; If their body has met their end; What would be our need, if we, having got such a great grace, and to us, death came to be just a name, without actuality, no more than a sleep, a comfort, a journey, a calm port, an escape from labor, and a liberation from the present troublesome life<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ The prophet says bronze gates and iron bars about the entrances to death, from which it is impossible to exit. Yet, even those were broken and cut by our Lord, when he came down to Hades, and set the captives free.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

#### **4- SALVATION FROM SICKNESS:**

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<sup>1</sup> *On St. Matt. Homily 36.*

<sup>2</sup> *Concerning the Staues, homily 7: 1.*

Those who disobey the divine commandment, and rebel against God, are ignorant and fools; or let us say they are sick and in need of the heavenly Physician to heal their souls; that no one can do except the incarnate Word of God.

***“Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted” (17)***

The rebellious sinners are often called ignorant, and the righteous are often called wise; For the righteousness of God is bound to the divine wisdom; and the rebellion to ignorance.

The psalmist calls us to look attentively into our depths; to realize that what dwells upon us of affliction, is mostly because of our sins.

❖ Having given honor to themselves and not to God, and having established their own righteousness, and did not know the righteousness of God, they became afflicted, and found themselves with no help; because they lean upon their strength alone<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Their soul abhorred all manner of food; and they drew near to the gates of death” (18)***

Man, in his sins, often gets bored of life, and no more enjoys the taste of food, as he loses his inner goal. In such a case, being denied good health, man’s body and soul wither. On the contrary, by returning to God, man’s soul exults, and his body rejoices.

According to **St. Augustine**, they ate with no limits, even against their own discretion, when their soul abhorred food, with the wrong assumption that overfeeding would not kill them.

❖ They suffer from overfeeding, they are sick and in danger because of it. They assumed that hunger may kill them, but not overfeeding<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses” (19)***

❖ Their transgression afflicted them, brought them down into lowliness instead of up to honor; and made their soul abhor all manner of food; namely every teaching that would edify the soul. ... The Greeks (the Gentiles) used to reject any counsel, not even from their own savants

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

They condemned Socrates to horrible death; persecuted the followers of Phthagorus, ground Anacsarchus in a crucible; and tormented and killed many others who intended to keep them away from their addictions of horrible ungodliness.

The prophet says that to show the power of our Lord; For those who used to reject even the teachings of their savants, have miraculously and readily received the preaching of the illiterate apostles; undoubtedly through the might of God, who responded to the cry-outs of His pious for their sake.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them of their destruction” (20)***

The Word of God, who created everything from nothingness, is the divine Physician capable of bringing both the body and soul forth to health. He is the only heavenly Instructor and Physician who can heal our spirits from the darkness of ignorance and corruption; delivering Himself to us, being the Truth, the Medication, and the Righteousness.

The Word of God incarnated and took over a body, so that by His blood, shed on the cross, He would give us back the lost image, and grant us His goodness and righteousness.

If sin is a sickness that afflicts and corrupts the soul; the Word of God is the Physician, capable of uprooting the sickness; and, instead of the sin, of granting His righteousness working in the believer. Salvation from sin is a complete healing on the hand of the true Physician, who, at the same time, is the medication. Christ heals the sinners<sup>1</sup>.

❖ By so saying, the prophet openly prophesied the incarnation of the Word of God, and His coming to the world in flesh; As the ‘uttered word’ would not be said to be “sent”, It is therefore His “essential Word”..... He is called the “Word”, for He is born from God the Father, without pain nor corruption. The way the ‘uttered word’ is born from the mind, and is not separated from it at the same time; the Son is sent to the world, and, at the same time, is still in the bosom of the Father. By His coming, He healed us from our deadly sicknesses, and saved us from our corruption.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Once the Physician came, He gave support to man, who got tired of his long search for healing, and of the pains of treatment. So knew the

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<sup>1</sup> Origin: Comm. On Matt. 11: 18; Contra Contra Celsus 8: 72; 3: 60.

centurion when he said to the Lord: “*Only speak a word, and my servant will be healed*” (Matthew 8: 8)<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Peter Christologos)**

❖ Within the Godhead of the Word, there is power, not only to help and heal the sick, but to reveal the secrets to the pious in body and mind.

The Word was sent as a Physician to the sinners, and as a Teacher to those who, already, are pious and without sin<sup>2</sup>.

❖ There is no way before those who seek healing other than to follow Jesus<sup>3</sup>.

❖ Come now to Jesus, the heavenly Physician.

Enter into this clinic, which is His church.

There, you will see a multitude of weak patients. You will see a woman seeking purification (Mark 5: 25; Leviticus 12); and a leper, isolated “*outside the camp*” because of his uncleanness (Mark 1: 40; Leviticus 13: 46).

They seek to be healed by the divine Physician...Jesus, Himself being the Word of God, prepares the medications for His patients, not out of herbs, but of the holiness of His words.

Looking into these uttered medications scattered in the holy books, without knowing the power of the individual words, one may disregard them as cheap and lacking eloquence; But he who knows that the medication of souls lies in Christ, will certainly understand from those books, read in the church, how everyone is committed to collect useful herbs from the fields and mountains; for him whose soul is tired to be healed, not by the power of the outer branches (the medical herbs), and the outer cover, but rather from the activity of the inner sap<sup>4</sup>.

❖ There are, as well, things that are hidden from us, not known except to the Physician of our souls. As far as our physical health is concerned, we sometimes have to take bitter and abhorrent medications to cure ailments, we have brought upon ourselves through our wrong practices of eating and drinking. ... And it so happen that the nature of our ailment necessitates burning with fire, or even an invasive painful treatment of cutting by the scalpel of a surgeon. ... How could we perceive then, that God, our Physician, intending to cleanse the ailments of our souls, brought on us by the

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<sup>1</sup> *Peier Chrostologus; Selected Sermous. 112.*

<sup>2</sup> *Contra Celsus 3: 61, 62.*

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on Matthew, Book 13: 2 (Cf. ANF).*

<sup>4</sup> *HOMILIES ON Leviticus 8: 1 (See Frs. Of the Church).*

multitudes of sins and crimes, may resort to similar ways of treatment, that may reach to the extent of condemning those who lost the wellbeing of their souls to be cast in the fire<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

*“Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (21)*

*“Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing”.(22)*

It is befitting of the believers, not only to give thanks to the Lord, but to offer it as a sacrifice to Him, with rejoicing, praise, and joy.

- ❖ The prophet teaches us to thank God for such an amazing salvation, and to offer to Him, not the types of animals mentioned in the Mosaic law, but the sacrifices of praise, pure of blood; called by ‘Aquila’ as “the sacrifice of Eucharist”, namely, (of thanksgiving). As we call the divine Liturgy in Greek “the Eucharist”, during which we read the holy gospel that proclaims His works with rejoicing.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## **5- SALVATION FROM THE DANGERS OF SAILING IN THE GREAT WATERS OF THE WORLD:**

Our life in the world is a risky journey on board a ship sailing in the sea, exposed to dangerous tempests and mighty waves. But the Lord Christ alone has the authority, being the King of peace, the Creator of the universe, and the Savior of mankind, to guide the ship of our life, through an exultant journey, full of praise.

*“Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters” (23)*

- ❖ Indeed, faith started to stagger, and the body began to drown; It is not wrong to say that the body is the ship of the soul; as it is written: *“Those who go down to the sea in ships<sup>2</sup>” (23).*

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ Our present life is said to be like a sea; the ships are said to be the churches of Christians; And those who do much business on great waters, are said to be the apostles who performed works of salvation among the multitudes of people.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> *De Principiis 2: 10: 6 (Cf. Butterworth).*

<sup>2</sup> *The Payer of Job and David, 5: 15.*

❖ Why would we be so preoccupied with those who have fallen down, and those who despaired? ... We should look instead to those who managed to complete their journey with daring, confidence, and success.... As for you, sail in the gentle breeze of the Holy Spirit; and let Christ lead you in glory to the good portion. For “*those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters*”, would not let the sea sickness that affects others, keep them from reaching the good portion, but would rather support their hearts by succeeding in their fabulous work. The most ridiculous thing in this life, is for you to follow the lead of those who failed, and have gone astray from a system that needs accuracy<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

*“They see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep”*

(24)

*.” For He commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves of the sea” (25)*

The depths of the seas and oceans testify to the limitless works and wonders of God. By His word, He commands the air, which is lighter than water, to create wind that lifts up the heavier waves of the sea, with mighty power.

*“They mount up to the heavens. They go down again to the depths. Their souls melt because of trouble” (26)*

Here he talks about the sailors whose souls melt when they see how the mighty waves mount them up to the heavens, then bring them down again to the depths of the sea or the ocean.

❖ No one can sail through the evil sea, the sea of the hosts of darkness, and the waves of bitter temptations; according to what is written: “*They mount up to the heavens; they go down again to the depths*” (26), without the Lord Christ, as a capable Skipper, who has perfect knowledge of the wars and temptations, to bring the soul forth through the evil waves; for: “*In that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted*” (Hebrew 2: 18)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Maccarius the Great)

*“They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man; and are at their wits’ end” (27)*

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<sup>1</sup> دير السريان: التولية، 1966، ص 150-151.

<sup>2</sup> عظة 7: 44.

Before the violence of the waves, all their experience would flee away, and they would become overwhelmed with fear.

***“Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses” (28)***

Feeling that they have lost every knowledge, and their control of their ship, the sailors’ souls melt with fear; and would have no other refuge but the Lord Himself, who alone is capable of saving them.

***“He calms the storm, so that its waves are still (29)***

***“Then they are glad because they are quiet; So, He guides them to their desired haven” (30)***

There is no greater joy for man, than to see calm after a strong storm; when there is no more danger; and they are finally heading to the desired haven.

If the sailors exult in the calm that follows the storm, through the divine intervention, How much more it is befitting of us to praise God for granting our souls calm and peace after the multitude of disturbances dwelling on them.

***“Oh, that man would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men” (31)***

❖ Everywhere, with no exception, I wish we confess to the Lord for His mercies, not on account of our worthiness, nor of our strength, or our wisdom. Let Him be beloved by us in every salvation we get, He who cares for us in every affliction<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Let them exalt Him also in the congregation of the people, and praise Him in the assembly of the elders” (32)***

❖ Let the peoples exalt and praise him; Let the elders, the traders, and the sailors exalt Him. In such a congregation, *“God resists the proud, He gives grace to the humble”* (James 4: 6)... The proud are the Jewish people, who glorified themselves, leaning on being the descendants of Abraham, *“to whom is committed the oracles of God”* (Romans 3: 1). Yet that did not prepare them for the sound things, but, in the pride of their hearts, they became, not great, but arrogant. What then has God done; He who *“resist the proud, but gives grace*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

to the humble”? He cut the natural branches, because of their pride, and grafted the wild olive branches, because of their humility<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ By saying “*Let them exalt Him*”, he means (Let them proclaim His greatness and majesty).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## 6- THE DIVINE CARE:

The authority of the Mighty Savior is limitless, He works to the account of His believers. It is in His hand to change, even the laws of nature, if necessary.

*“He turns rivers into a wilderness, and the water springs into dry ground” (33)*

It is in God’s authority to command the rain to cease; then the rivers would dry up, and the water springs would turn into dry ground. ... Without the grace of God, He sends upon us like rain, we would not bear the fruits of the Spirit; and our depths would dry up.

According to **St. Augustine**, the rivers refer to the Jews who used to have the waters of prophecies; But now, they have no more prophets; the rivers are dried up.

The water springs turned into salty marshes; where you search for faith in Christ, for a prophet, a sacrifice, or a temple, and you find nothing. Why?! “*For the wickedness of those who dwell in it*” (34).

*“A fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of those who dwell in it” (34)*

The wickedness would take away the blessing of the Lord, even from the land where we live.

*“He turns a wilderness into pools of water, and dry lands into water springs” (35)*

If God allows for the rivers to turn into a wilderness, He may, as well, allow for a wilderness to turn into pools of water, and fruitful lands.

❖ At the beginning, the church were without much water, But now, rivers of the divine teachings, and sound dogmas, gushed in it; and whatever is planted on them, would become like a tree that gives its fruits in due season, and its leaves would never scatter.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

***“There He makes the hungry dwell, that they may establish a city for habitation” (36)***

***“And sow fields and plant vineyards, that they may yield a fruitful harvest” (37)***

Our Vinedresser seeks fruit. If He has cut off the natural branches, for they were barren, we shall be treated likewise if we are not fruitful. The fruits are not only those of the body, but of the soul as well, for both of them minister to the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“He also blesses them, and they multiply greatly, and He does not let their cattle decrease” (39)***

God gave men blessings with abundance, to grow and multiply greatly; But, instead of giving Him sacrifices of thanks, they, unfortunately, got more preoccupied with the blessings, plunged in the pleasures, and disregarded the One who gave them.

- ❖ That applies both to the Jews and to the Gentiles, who resisted the apostles and their followers, and persisted on destroying the faith in Christ.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“He pours contempt on princes, and causes them to wander in the wilderness where there is no way” (40)***

Knowing that, by striking the Shepherd, the herd will be scattered, the devil does his best to lead the princes and leaders astray. The psalmist says: *“He pours contempt on princes, and causes them to wander in the wilderness where there is no way” (40)*.

People of authority, sometimes assume that they are above the divine justice. *“King Herod killed the apostle James with the sword; Then he seized the apostle Peter to kill him” (Acts 12: 2)*. *“On a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne, and the people shouted: ‘It is the voice of a god, and not of a man’; Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12: 22)*.

- ❖ In the present days, prevailed by the oppression of the wicked, when men fight each other, and love is no more among the majority; the word “priest” became an empty term; according to what is written: *“He pours contempt on princes” (40)*; Their awe is no more in the souls; ... We have opened before all, not the gates of righteousness,

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 33 On Ps. 106 (107).

but those of reproach; ... We gave the first place, not to him who fears the Lord, and who utters no vain word, but gave it to him who can oppress his brother by the eloquence of his tongue, hiding behind it the venom of serpents.

**(St. Gregory the Neizianzen)**

*“Yet He sets the poor on high, far from affliction, and makes their families like flocks of sheep” (41)*

- ❖ That means, O brethren, that the rulers will be reproached, and the poor will be helped; ... the proud will be driven out, and the humble will be supported; ... The poor will have many houses, and will become a multitude of nations; ... At the same time many churches will become one church, one nation, one house, and one flock<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

*“The righteous see it and rejoice; and all iniquity stops its mouth” (42)*

The children of God will exult for the divine work that mutes the mouths of the haughty, blesses, and supports the humble.

- ❖ The upright, seeing what the prophets and the righteous, before Christ, longed to see, they rejoice for God’s works of mercy and justice. Whereas those of iniquity, namely, the devil and his followers, will have their mouths shut

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ The Groom commends his bride, saying to her: *“You have dove’s eyes”* (Songs 1: 15). *“Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart”* (Matthew 5: 28). He who looks at a woman, and does not have the dove’s eyes, is an adulterer. He who lacks the simple eye, and enters into his brother’s house, would be breaking the commandment written in the book of proverbs: *“Do not go to your brother’s house in the day of your calamity”*(Proverb 27: 10). Whereas he who has the dove’s eyes, would see the truth and deserves the mercy; *“The righteous see it and rejoice”* (42) – He who sees the truth, is he who has the chaste and pure eye! ... Do not apply this only to the physical eye, but go deep into your heart, and search with your spirit for the other eyes that draw their light from the commandments of God; Then strive to acquire what you are told. He who has the simple eye can perceive the Spirit coming down from heaven in the image of a dove ... If you

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 107 (106).

understand the law spiritually. You would have the dove's eyes; and the same if you understand the gospel according to the spirit of the gospel, and preached it. Meditate in the gospel, and you will find Jesus healing every weakness, and all kinds of disease" (*Matthew 4: 23*); not only in the days of His incarnation, but even today; You will find Him come to men, not only in those days, but even today; For He is present among us, according to His words: "*I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" (*Mathew 28: 20*).

**(The scholar Origen)**

***"Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the loving kindness of the Lord" (43)***

It is befitting of the believer to be reasonable and wise, to be able to perceive God's plan, recognize His mercies with understanding, and meditate in His works.

- ❖ As these oracles include a prophecy, the prophet says that understanding them needs a wise man to understand and to keep..

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ He, who is wise, takes these things into consideration, and understands the mercies of the Lord ... He will understand, not his own worthiness, nor his own strength or authority, but the mercies of God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 107 (106).*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 107**  
**GLORY BE TO YOU, O MIGHTY SAVIOR**

- ❖ Together with my brethren I praise You for Your exalted mercy;  
I confess my sins, and expose myself before You;  
You are the Forgiver of sins, and the Saver of souls from perdition;  
On the cross, You shed Your precious blood, a propitiation for my sins;  
You paid my debt back on my behalf;  
Together with my brethren from the whole universe;  
You gathered us together as one holy church, to enjoy the eternal wedding.
- ❖ My life in this world is like being lost in the wilderness;  
You have presented Yourself to me, a Way, You carry me in You, to present me as a son to Your Father;  
I shall have no fear of hunger nor thirst in the wilderness;  
For You have given me Your body and blood to partake for the eternal life;  
I shall not fear of labor of the wilderness, as Your yoke is sweet, and Your burden is light;  
Instead of being exhausted in the wilderness, I enjoy comfort in You;  
Instead of the dangers of the wilderness, I find You a Refuge full of compassion;
- ❖ How would I fear the humiliation of bondage, when you opened before me the gates of baptism?  
And granted me the spirit of sonhood to God Your Father?  
Life is no more a dark prison;  
But an enjoyable journey in Your company, O the true Life;  
The gates of Hades cannot lock me in;  
For You, O the Resurrection, have destroyed the gates of the pit; and, by Your death, You have put death to death.  
The heavy burden of the bronze chains, weighs no more on my body;  
Nor of worries that may destroy my soul;  
My soul, together with my body, set forth by your Holy Spirit;  
They cross over from glory to glory.
- ❖ I confess to You that, foolishly, I have disobeyed Your commandment;  
In ignorance, I rebelled against You, O Whole Love;  
Sin has afflicted me as a deadly sickness;

You are the heavenly Physician;  
You are the Medication that grants health;  
For my sake, You were incarnated, crucified, and risen;  
Resurrect me from the death of sin; Heal me of the wounds of disobedience.

- ❖ My life has become like a ship, sailing in the seas of this world;  
Behold, the violent waves mount me up, then brings me down again to the depths;  
Behold, the storms are never still;  
Who has the authority over the storms and waves, but You?  
Say a word, O King of peace, Creator of nature, and Savior of humanity;  
Say a word, to make the ship of my life sail by Your word;  
Say a word, to turn my journey into unceasing praise;  
Say a word; to let me have fellowship with the heavenly creatures.
- ❖ Your care is exalted. O Good Shepherd;  
By Your word, You turn the wilderness into pools of the water of the spirit;  
By Your word, You move nature to the account of the salvation of Your people.  
By Your word, You set the poor on high far from affliction;  
And out of the weak, You set holy nations;  
O Lord, grant me wisdom and understanding;  
That my soul would be filled with joy in You;  
That my whole being would never stop praising You.

## **PSALM 108**

### **GOD IS OUR REFUGE**

This psalm embraces two sections: the first a praise (1 – 5), conforming to what came in psalm 57: 7 – 11; and the second a prayer (6 -13), conforming to what came in psalm 60: 5 – 12. The difference between this psalm and what came in the two psalms 57 and 60, is that in this psalm we find no tune of sorrow or despair, but only hope, trust, thanksgiving, and joy<sup>1</sup>.

In this psalm, some see a praise and a prayer for the sake of the setting and growth of the kingdom of Christ in all nations.

#### **Its occasion:**

This psalm was most probably written for the priests to sing praise in the tabernacle of meeting, during a war; by which they proclaim their trust in God, the Grantor of conquest, and the Defender of His people.

**1- God, a Refuge in affliction**

**1 - 5**

**2- God, the Hope of His people**

**6 – 12**

#### **The title:**

A song. A psalm of David

❖ “**A song of praise**”, perpetually refers to the work of the mind; Whereas “**A psalm**”, refers to that of the body. More clearly, “The praise” applies to the theoretical aspect, while “The psalm”, applies to the practical aspect. According to what came in the title of this psalm, that it is “A song. ... A psalm”, the verse to follow, saying: “***I will sing and give praise, even with my glory***”<sup>2</sup>, is sound and logic.

#### **1- GOD IS A REFUGE IN AFFLICTION:**

The psalm starts by a praise to God, when the psalmist finds a refuge and steadfastness in the heart of God. It is the praise of conquest over all the troubles of danger.

***“O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory” (1)***

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<sup>1</sup> Plumer, Ps. 108.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as:  
***“My heart is steadfast, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make melody, with my glory”.***

❖ ***“O God, my heart is steadfast; my heart is steadfast”.*** I am ready, not only by work, but also by heart and mind. My heart is ready as far as desire is concerned; and ready as far as the ministry by work<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“I will sing and make melody with my glory”.*** I simply say that, when I praise You with a melody, O my Lord, When I sing to You, I give no benefit to You; the benefit is all mine. In another psalm, the psalmist says: “You are in no need for my goodness”. What I do, I do for my own good. Ministering to You is glory for me.

When we fast, do we give anything to God? ... We fast for the sake of our sins.

When we lie down over sackcloth; what has that to do with God? ... It is only that, when our souls are saved, it brings pleasure to God. Like when a physician rejoices to see that his patient is healed<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ The psalmist repeated ***“My heart is steadfast”*** twice. For he, who intends to receive a king in his house, does two things: He first, cleans his house of all dirt; and second, he adorns it with precious and luxurious furniture. Similarly, he who intends to receive Christ to dwell in his heart, is committed to cleanse it by confessing his sins; and to adorn it with the good works. *“For blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* (Matthew 5: 8). They will praise Him and sing in their glory; namely, in their mental and practical virtues, that glorify and honor them, both in their present life, and in that to come. Besides, their glory will be Christ who, having taken what belongs to us, we, His image, and partakers of His glory.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Awake lute and harp! I will awake the dawn” (2)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as:  
***“Awake, O my glory. Awake, flute and guitar I will awake at dawn”.***

The psalmist, intending to praise God at dawn before sunrise, confirms that, as the night did not keep him from meditating in the dealings of God with His people, as well as with him personally; he will offer the firstfruit of his day to praise God, and to give Him thanks.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

According to **St. Jerome**, the talk here is also directed from the incarnate Son to God the Father. The Word of God proclaims that He bears the guitar of His incarnation, on which to play the tune of the divine love toward the whole humanity. His soul descended into Hades, playing the melody of conquest, to set free the souls of those who departed on hope; to liberate them from bondage, and to bring them forth to paradise.

- ❖ As the harp has many strings, and if one of them is broken, the whole instrument would be useless; it is likewise in our works, If we disobey one commandment, our whole harp would be useless<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ If you are a harp, if you are a guitar, why are you silent, and do not praise God? ...**Wake up at dawn** ... There is no blessing, nor praise to God in the darkness, but in the light. I would say that even if we wake up during the night, let us bless God in the light; For the Christian has no night, but, for him, the Sun of Righteousness perpetually shines<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ According to another interpretation, the Lord Himself says: **“O God, My heart is steadfast; My heart is steadfast”**. ... It is steadfast here, and steadfast in the world to come. I am the Savior here, and the Savior in heaven. I grant the eternal life both to angels and to men... **“Awake, lute and harp”**, ... Here, the Lord instigates His body: the lute and the harp to praise the Father<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ By saying: **“Wake up, my glory”**, the psalmist instigates the spirit of prophecy in him, to glorify God by the spiritual glory. And by saying: **“the lute and the harp”**, he instigates the powers of his soul and body; So that the two would join together to praise God, and to receive the Holy Spirit. ... He also instigates the two Testaments: the Old and the New, so that, in one accord, they would proclaim the works of the incarnation of our Lord. For the Old Testament tells beforehand about what is to happen; whereas the New Testament tells about the consummation of the prophecies. ... Saying: **“at dawn”**, he refers to the time when the Sun of Righteousness – our Lord Jesus Christ – shined; namely, the time of His incarnation; For David, since that

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

<sup>3</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

time on, kept on praising and singing to God, together with us, we, who are enlightened, and walk, as though in a good day.

According to Isitheos: Having instigated the Lord Christ, by saying: “**Wake up, my glory**”, It is as though the Lord responds by saying: [Yes, I shall wake up; I shall be risen from the dead; as though from a deep sleep.

**“I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples, and I will sing praises to You among the nations” (3)**

According to the Septuagint, and the Coptic versions, it came as: **“I confess to You, O Lord, among the peoples; And I will sing to You among the nations”**.

❖ For, as we, the believers in Christ, sing what the psalmist does, he would be praising and singing to God together with us, among the peoples, concerning the salvation, presented by the Lord Christ.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

**“For Your mercy is great above the heavens, and Your truth reaches to the clouds” (4)**

❖ There is no creature who does not lean upon, and in need of, the compassion of God. Gabriel, Michael; the cherubim, and the Seraphim; the hosts, and the principalities; although all of them are indeed holy, Yet they all stand in need of the mercies of their Creator. By this, I do not belittle the angels, but proclaim their Creator

We can also interpret this verse in another way, by saying: Your compassion, O Lord, lifts us up from earth to heaven. **“And Your Truth to the clouds”** ... How can God’s truth reach to heaven? ... The Son of God says: **“I am the way, the truth, and the life”** (John 14: 6). **“He appeared on earth and lived with humankind”** (Baruch 3: 37). ... How then could the truth of God reaches to the clouds? It is perfectly obvious that the psalmist refers here to the apostles and the prophets<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Saying: **“For Your mercy is great above the heavens, and Your truth reaches to the clouds”**, means that Your mercy is broader and wider than the heaven, covers all our sins from above. And that mercy begins on earth, and reaches up to heaven.

I mean to say that You have mercy on those on earth; As it is written that earth is filled with Your mercy; And those who have it will end up reaching heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

As to saying: “*reaches to the clouds*”, about the apostles and the prophets, it is because they are high and honored; and that God rains His teachings, to water men with His apostles and prophets.

And saying: “*For Your mercy is great above the heavens*”, the psalmist means to say that God’s Godhead is glorified by the angels above the heavens; and that His greatness and majesty were proclaimed to all when He ascended to heaven; ... For, when He was on earth, He was clothed with Manhood; namely, before He ascended to heaven, men could not recognize His Godhead; But now, they know for sure that He is the Great God, glorified in heaven.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and Your glory above all the earth” (5)***

By the spirit of prophecy, the psalmist, seeing the Lord Christ ascending to heaven, his soul exulted, joining the disciples who returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem with great joy. He perceived that, having a deposit in heaven, he joins men of the new covenant in praising Christ.

By the ascension of the Lord Christ, Head of the (catholic) church, the whole body, namely, the men of God in the old and the new covenants, all came to have the right to set forth up to heaven.

The psalmist perceived that he is in an amazing glory; raised from the ashes and the trash, to sit together with the elites of His people; namely, with the heavenly hosts.

❖ This saying includes a prophecy about the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ to heaven.

❖ By His ascension, and sending His Holy Spirit, He saved His beloved; namely, those, for whose sake, He has come down, incarnated, and whom He saved from the devil.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

## **2- GOD, THE HOPE OF HIS PEOPLE:**

Despite the dangers through which the people pass, their hope in God pours on them the spirit of joy, not only at the time of conquest, but at the onset of the calamity. God, as the Leader of His people, brings them forth to a sure conquest, to find comfort, and to hide amid the dangers in the heart of God, wide with love.

***“That Your beloved may be delivered. Save with Your right hand, and hear me” (6)***

❖ Hence, the church, on the tongue of the chosen ones, say: “*His left hand is under my head, and His right hand embraces me*” (Song 2: 6). The church supports its head under the left hand of God; namely, it supports it by the exalted joy of love, with the goods of the earthly life; While the right hand that embraces her, means that the eternal joy surrounds her on all sides. About that Solomon also says: “*Length of days is in her right hand; In her left hand riches and honor*” (Proverb 3: 16).

Here, Solomon shows that the riches and honor are as though recorded on the left hand; while the psalmist says: “*Save with Your right hand, and hear me*” (6), meaning he seeks the eternal salvation. ... As it is written: “*Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces*” (Exodus 15: 6), this means that the enemies of God may enjoy the goodness by the left hand of God, but His right hand will dash them to pieces. For we often see the enemies of God exalt in the earthly life; whereas on the coming of the eternal glory, they will be cursed<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory the Great)

**“God has spoken in His holiness: *I will rejoice; I will divide Shechem, and measure out the valley of Succoth*” (7)**

Salvation will not only bring joy to the hearts of believers, but God Himself says: “*I will rejoice*”. He rejoices in the salvation of humanity; finds glory in the conquest of His believers by Him.

According to **St. Jerome**, the secret behind the praise of the psalmist, and the exultation of his heart, is the rejoice of God in the salvation of His believers. Nothing would bring joy to the Father like the cross of His only-begotten Son, Jesus, the Lord of glory; in whom the divine love was magnificently realized.

The works and the activity of the cross will remain the secret of our perpetual praise. We find our pleasure in partaking of the passion of love of the Crucified, and in being raised, by the cross, above any temporal care.

According to St. Jerome, the several fruits of the cross, came to be the song to be sung.

a- “***I will divide ‘Shechem’***. According to **St. Jerome**, ‘Shechem’ means “ (shoulders). If the Lord Christ, by His love, has readily bowed His back to carry the cross on His shoulders for our sake; He granted us, as well, to carry the cross on our shoulders, together with Him, as a sweet and a joyful yoke.

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<sup>1</sup> Pastoral Care, 3: 26.

b- *“And measure out the valley of tents (Succoth)”*. Christ grants His saints who enjoyed His cross, the knowledge of His secrets, while still on earth, Yet each according to his own stature or measure.

❖ *“God has spoken in His holiness”*; whether in the temple, or in one of His saints, or in the prophet; He was heard in Moses, He was heard in the apostle; and I say in truth, that He has spoken in His Son. What did God promise? ... *“I will rejoice! I will divide Shechem”*. For this goal, I was crucified, to divide Shechem... In our language, ‘Shechem’ means (shoulders); and shoulders, on another aspect, are used for carrying loads; it means then, that I let My saints partake of My work. ... My goal of being crucified is to put my sweet yoke, and light burden on the people’s shoulders.

Do, O Lord, according to Your promise; be glorified and divide Shechem<sup>1</sup>!

❖ *“And measure out the valley of Succoth”*. Our Lord and Savior has truly entered into that valley of tears of our humility in this world. And yet, the saint in this world still does not know what is befitting of him; *“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part”* (1 Corinthians 13: 9) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Spiritually, ‘Shechem’ is interpreted as (the One high above). The ‘One high above’ the worldly things is the Holy Spirit, who has divided his gifts among the believers, after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ to heaven, measured, and estimated them for each one according to his worthiness.

As to the ‘Valley of Succoth’, it is said about the whole universe, over which, countries are set like tents, which He made into divisions, He allotted to the heads of churches, for each to dispense in his designated division..

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“Gilead is Mine; Manasseh is Mine; Ephraim also is the helmet for My head; Judah is My scepter”* (8)

According to **St. Jerome**, the Lord Christ rejoices in the fruits of His cross, through which He came to have great riches, not that He is in need of anything, but for the sake of the salvation of humanity, and its enjoyment of the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

a- **“Gilead is Mine”**. As the word ‘Gilead’ means (migration), the Gentiles have (migrated) to Him, or have returned to Him, after living so long in the humiliation of bondage to the devil. Returning with the spirit of exultant freedom, their Savior, in turn, exulted in them.

b- **“Manasseh is Mine”**. ‘Mannasseh’, means (forgetfulness). After having (forgotten) God’s fatherhood, Now , they return to Him, remembering His love for them.

c- **“Judah is My scepter”**. Humanity, in royal glory, came to belong to the King of kings; when “Judah’, meaning (confession), came to confess the mercies of God, the Forgiver of sins.

❖ **“Gilead is Mine, Manasseh is Mine”**. Our Lord and savior exults for having so much riches. **“Gilead”**, meaning (migration), or . He rejoices because the Gentiles have (migrated) back to Him. And **“Manasseh”**, meaning (forgetfulness); we understand that the son who took his inheritance and scattered it, forgetting all about Me, his father, Now he remembers me, he return to his father.

**“Ephraim is the helmet for My head”**. **“Ephraim”** is interpreted as (fruitfulness). The helmet here is used instead of the crown to be put on the head, for which the Holy Book uses many names.

Notice what the psalm means to say: Having become Gilead and Manasseh; ... Having (migrated) or departed away from the Lord, and forgotten all about Him, you return to your Father. Now, be **“Ephraim”** as well; namely be (fruitful), and practice the good works, to become a crown of the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

❖ **“Judah is My scepter”**. Think about the greatness of glory, awaiting the repentant. For “Judah” means (confession) or repentance<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The word **“Gilead”** is interpreted as (migration) or (departure); **“Manasseh”**, is interpreted as (forgetfulness)’ **“Ephraim”**, is interpreted as (fruitfulness); and **“Judah”**, is interpreted as (confession) ... Namely, the Lord Christ after ascending to heaven, says: [He who moves forth from non-faith to faith; forgets his prior evil works, will submit to Me. ... He, who fruitfully practice virtues, will reign over his enemies; And he who confesses his sins, will become a king like Me. ... As to the children of Moab, banned from entering into the temple, will end up being My own, through being cleansed by the holy baptism.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“Moab is My washpot, Over Edom I will cast My shoe, Over Philistia I shout with triumph” (9)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: *“Moab is the vessel of My hope”*.

**Moab**, together with Ammon, and Edom, were the worst of the enemies of Israel. And, according to the law, *“An Moabite or Ammonite shall not enter the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation”* (Deuteronomy 23: 3-6). But the psalmist, raising his eyes up to the cross, saw the children of Moab enjoy the water of baptism (the washpot or laver) of the Lord, to become children of God, and the object of his pleasure.

‘Moab’, the fruit of Lot’s sin with his two daughters (Genesis 19), and being the symbol of defilement, representing the devil, has enjoyed reconciliation with God, and has forsaken his sonhood to the devil, to live in the bosom of the Lord. That is the (chosen vessel) for which the Lord (hopes) by the power of his cross.

The word ‘**Edom**’, meaning (blood) or (earth); and referring to the first Adam, fallen because of his rebellion against God, who enjoyed the coming down of the Word of God incarnate, and His living among mankind, to embrace him.

As for ‘**Philistia**’, that was in a continuous conflict with the people of God, opposing the worship of the true God, having believed in the crucified Christ, became a shouting Choir.

So the holy church of Christ, has become; established of all the peoples, nations, and tongues.

According to Eusebius, the ‘shoe’ here (9), refers to the incarnation. Hence St. John the Baptist said that he is not worthy to loose the sandal’s straps of the Lord (Luke 3: 16); namely, not worthy to explain the secrets of His incarnation.... *“Over Edom He casts His shoe”*, means that the Lord Christ, by the preaching of His holy gospel, will walk over the Gentile lands, and the foreign tribes, like ‘Edom’, which means (land).

❖ *“Moab is My washpot or laver”* (and the vessel of My hope). ...

What great secrets we learn from these few words! ... ‘Moab’ is a word derived from “the Father” (in Arabic) ... Who is ‘Moab’? the enemy of the Lord, who is banned from entering into the house of the Lord, even to the tenth generation? ... Who is ‘Moab’ who was born out of an impure union of ‘Lot’ with one of his daughters? He who is born in the darkness of a cave, and not in sun and the light? ... Not

think about his father; just like ‘Absalom’, who persecuted his father David, ‘Moab’ is another name for the devil.

But, in what sense does ‘Moab’ called “A ‘washpot or laver’, and “a vessel of hope for the Lord”? ...

The apostle says: “*Whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme*” (1 timothy 1: 20). ... It so seems, here, that Satan is a tool used by the Lord for chastisement. Those who do not walk toward God in righteousness, are delivered to Satan, until they return to the Lord.

“*Over ‘Edom’ I cast My shoe*”. As the word ‘Edom’ means (earth) or (blood), God of love and compassion seeks, not only the heavenly, but the earthly creatures as well; ... He turns even the Philistines to friends. So He refers to us, the Gentiles, who ultimately believed<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ To them, ‘Moab’ submits; and becomes like a washpot to cleanse their feet; ... Under their feet, even the land of ‘Edom’ will submit; ... and all the surrounding foreign nations.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*Who will bring Me into the strong city? Who will lead Me to Edom*”? (10)

The psalmist longs to see the church of the new covenant, the strong city; and to be led to ‘Edom’, who was sojourning through worshipping the idols, then became a carrier of preaching the divine incarnation, in whom the Lord Himself (the Secret of her strength), finds pleasure, and says: “*Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the noon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?*” (Song 6: 10).

And according to **St. Jerome**, the “*strong city*” is ‘Hades’, ‘Sheol’, or ‘pit’ ... Into which men of the old covenant entered, and could not come out ... It is said about Jacob: “*He refused to be comforted, and said, ‘No, I shall go down to ‘Sheol’ (the pit) to my son, mourning’. Thus his father bewailed him (Joseph)*” (Genesis 37: 35). ... The ‘pit’ had an entrance, but it had no exit. ... Only One entered, and came out of it, a Vector – our Lord Jesus Christ.

Like all men of the old covenant, the psalmist David feared death, for it was the ‘Sheol’ waiting for them. But the cross of Jesus, the

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

Lord of Glory, broke down the gates of Sheol, and brought out of it, those who died in the hope of the amazing salvation of God.

***“Is it not You, O God, who cast us all? And You, O God, who did not go out with our armies?” (11)***

It is good for man to work and to strive as a strong army; But, without the grace of God, he would be rejected, and would, in vain, enjoy conquest.

God is a Refuge for us in our afflictions; He turns our hearts to Jerusalem, like *“an army with banners”* (Song 6 4); that all the hosts of darkness Could not overcome.

❖ Notice that the prophet David does not say: “You go out”, but says: *“You did not go out with our armies”*. The prophet teaches us, that when we do our best, God will help us; that *“It is not for him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy”* (Romans 9: 16). He means to say, that, on our side, we are committed to will and to seek, so that God would have compassion on us. ... Once the wrestler falls asleep, he will not conquer<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“Give us help from trouble, For vain is the help of man” (12)***

We often grumble in the time of trouble... And wonder why does God allow for His saints to have troubles!

According to St. Augustine, trouble (affliction) happens through an allowance of God, for the sake of our edification. We taste the mercies of God, and His care for us; and get in touch with His love for us, more; when we cry out to the Lord, and realize that He is our only refuge in the time of trouble.

❖ Do you wish that God listens to you with compassion? ... When in trouble, call Him. He will certainly responds with compassion. Unless man is going through trouble, he would not call God for help; *“For vain is the help of man”*; and, *“Cursed is the man who trusts in man”* (Jeremiah 17: 5)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“Through God, we will do valiantly; For it is He who shall tread down our enemies” (13)***

Through the literal law, man did not enjoy salvation, but came to be in trouble. But, once the Word of God came incarnate, He gave us the

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).

spirit of strength and conquest over the devil and his hosts, our real enemies.

❖ ***“Through God, we will do valiantly”***. Let us put our trust in God alone ... You have Christ on your side; Are you still afraid? ... If he feeds the birds of the sky, Do you doubt His ability to feed you as well? ... The devil feeds his followers; Will Christ not feed His ministers? ... Let us then drive all worries away from our hearts, and say: *“Through God we will do valiantly”*.

*“He will tread down our enemies”*. He will crown us; He will fight on our side; And He will overcome in us. The Holy Book does not say: “He will fight, nor kill”, but *“He will tread down our enemies”*<sup>1</sup>

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Homily 34 on Ps. 107 (108).*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM (108)  
THROUGH PRAISING YOU, MY WHOLE BEING WILL BE  
FILLED WITH YOUR GLORY**

- ❖ In my trouble I resort to You, For You are my faithful refuge;  
My heart will be filled with Your peace; and my depths will exult by  
You;  
My body will set forth to work and to minister by Your Holy Spirit;  
I truly perceive why the heavenly creatures live in an unceasing feast;  
You are in no need of the praise of anyone;  
But praising You would fill the being of Your creation with  
unutterable joy.
- ❖ Together with the psalmist I say: *“O God, my heart is steadfast, my  
heart is steadfast”*;  
By Your grace, my heart hates every uncleanness and defilement;  
And would become a royal palace for You to dwell in;  
To pour on it an abundance of Your grace, and to let it smell of Your  
holy fragrance;  
To fill it with the riches of Your glory, and to adorn it with Your  
amazing splendor;  
Allow me to proclaim strongly Your glory;  
For Your dwelling fills my tongue with praise;  
And pour your glory on my depths;  
You are my glory, satisfaction, and unceasing joy.
- ❖ Meditating in Your love, the darkness of the night would turn into an  
amazing light;  
While my body sleeps with comfort, Your light fills my depths with  
splendor;  
At dawn, before sunrise, I hold my lute and harp;  
I play on the strings of my soul, exultant in You;  
Everything in me would find pleasure in Your praise.
- ❖ By Your incarnation, dawn dwelt upon us, O Sun of Righteousness;  
Our souls, together with our bodies, set forth to praise You in an  
amazing harmony;
- ❖ By Your incarnation, You came down to us, and turned our life into a  
unique harp;  
On which You play with the spirit of divine love;  
To grant us the resurrected life, perpetually exultant and praising.

- ❖ The psalmist, amazingly enjoying the spirit of prophecy;  
 Saw You standing, and embracing all peoples together in Your  
 exultant church;  
 And he set forth singing among the peoples coming to You;  
 When he saw Your church become a new heaven;  
 He perceived that Your mercies have lifted the earthly creatures up  
 high;  
 Where men partake of Your praise together with the heavenly hosts;  
 He proclaimed Your glory among men, who became like the  
 heavenlies.  
 Those who were raised up from trash, to sit together with the  
 heavenly hosts in heaven.
  
- ❖ Your cross is the fountain of praise and joy;  
 God the Father rejoices when He sees humanity restore her beauty;  
 When He hears them praise, saying, together with the apostle Paul:  
 : *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but  
 Christ lives in me”* “;”  
 When He sees them enjoy the secrets of heaven, each according to his  
 measure;  
 When He sees them (migrate) to Him, being liberated from the  
 bondage of the devil;  
 When He hears them remember again the goodness of their heavenly  
 Father;  
 After having forgotten His fatherhood, and scattered their inheritance.  
 When He sees them confess His mercy, and find their glory in Him;  
 When He sees them cleansed in the water of baptism, and enjoying  
 the spirit of sonhood.
  
- ❖ By Your cross, You acquired Your church from all peoples;  
 From the tribes of Israel, like Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah;  
 Those who, having perceived the prophecies, (migrated) to You.  
 Those who have forsaken the letter of the law, and received it by the  
 life-giving Spirit;  
 Those who became kings of authority;  
 Those over whom, the devil, the oppressor of truth, cannot prevail;  
 From the Gentiles: Moab, Edom, Philistia, and others;  
 Have enjoyed the membership in Your holy body;  
 From them, the spirit of animosity was taken away, and was replaced  
 by the flaring holy jealousy;  
 They have forsaken the vain idol-worship, and, by Your cross, have  
 received the divine truth;

Your cross turned 'Sheol' into an amazing scenery;  
Its gates were destroyed and collapsed;  
From it came out those who were, as though, in an eternal imprisonment;  
They came out exultant in You, O Conqueror of 'Sheol', and Grantor of eternity

- ❖ Your cross has strengthened our arms  
Have turned our hearts to the awesome Jerusalem, like an army with banners;  
You became the Leader of the battle against the devil;  
And granted us the spirit of strength and assurance in Your conquest;  
We, no more fear the enemy, for the devil falls like lightening from heaven;  
You gave us the authority to trample over the serpents and scorpions, and all the enemy hosts;  
Glory be to You, O Crucified, O Grantor of Glory and power.

## ***PSALM 109***

### **OUR CRUCIFIED CHRIST**

This Messianic psalm, in truth, reveals the secret of the cross. It is a prophecy about the Lord Christ, against whom His own sought to get rid of Him; and about the betrayal of His disciple Judas by his evil tongue and false kiss. This prophecy came in the form of a lamentation, presented by the psalmist on the tongue of the crucified Christ, who endured the passion with true Manhood. And, at the same time, it reveals what are inside His heart of wounds, not because of His physical sufferings, for He has come to the world to deliver Himself a sacrifice on behalf of humanity; but because of the non-repentance of those who crucified Him. By this psalm, the psalmist teaches us the sweetness of love, even for our oppressors; without disregarding the bitterness of the suffering.

- ❖ By elaborately reading the Book of Acts, man would know that this psalm includes a prophecy about Christ, particularly, what is written here: “*Let His days be few, and let another take his office: (8)*”, which is a prophecy about Judas who betrayed his Lord<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

According to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>2</sup>, this psalm would probably confuse some, if taken according to its apparent meaning; on account of that, in its wholeness, it is a psalm of curse, that reveals the anger of the speaker, whose heart burns with bitterness toward his oppressor. He, who does not stop at seeking his punishment, but wishes that another would take his office, that on him God’s mercy would not dwell, that he would die in an early age, and that all calamities would be poured on his household.... It is difficult to imagine such an intense hatred to be in the heart of David, the son of Jesse, against his enemies, however great is their animosity toward him. ... But this psalm is actually a prophecy about what is to come over Judas who delivered His Lord by a bitter betrayal, confirmed by the apostle Peter in His talk on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 1: 20).

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that what the psalmist presents here, is similar to what Jacob did just before he died, when he prophesied about what would dwell over certain of his sons of curses, and over others of blessings (See Genesis 49).

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 109 (108).*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalm 109.*

Nothing confirms the historical circumstances during which this psalm was written, which, as some believe, were when king Saul persecuted him; or when his own son Absalom rebelled against him, helped by Ahitophel his closest counselor. In all those cases, David revealed practical love from his whole heart toward the three of them, paid back by hate and plots to kill him for no reason whatsoever. What Ahitophel did, conformed to what Judas was going to do against his Lord Christ.

The fathers have not preoccupied themselves with the historical background of this psalm, as much as they saw it as a prophecy about the betrayal of Judas against the Lord Christ, and the hatred of the Jews, and in particular of their religious leaderships.

The talk of the apostle Peter to the disciples, concerning choosing another apostle instead of Judas, as it came in the Book of Acts (1: 15-20), testifies to the following:

- 1- The author of this psalm is the prophet David (Acts 1: 16).
- 2- This psalm was inspired by the Holy Spirit Himself.
- 3- What came in it was literally realized in Judas, the traitor.

<b>1- A lamentation or a praise</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- A cheating tongue and an evil behavior</b>	<b>2 - 5</b>
<b>3- The destiny of the wicked</b>	<b>6 - 20</b>
<b>4- “I have become a reproach to them”</b>	<b>21 - 25</b>
<b>5-.Rejoicing in the cross</b>	<b>26 – 31</b>

**The title:**

**To the Chief Musician. A psalm of David.**

According to the Septuagint, it came as: “A psalm of David to completion”. About this expression, “to completion”, we already said that it is a prophecy about the Lord Christ; That the goal or the completion of the law is for the Lord Christ to reign spiritually over the world; And probably because this psalm bears an ‘eschatologic’ atmosphere, namely, (of death, judgment, and after-life), the goal of our existence or our whole human history, is for the Lord of Glory to come, and bring us forth to His eternal kingdom.

❖ The expression, “**to completion**” or (to the ultimate end), was written in the title of this psalm, because by the death of Christ we came to have salvation, which was the goal of the coming of the Savior in flesh, and about which the apostle Peter wrote, saying: “*receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of*

*the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1: 9-11) <sup>1</sup>.*

**(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)**

- ❖ This psalm, uttered by our Lord Jesus Christ; is not a prayer against the traitor Judas, or the Jews who crucified Him, but it is a prophecy about what is to happen to them; That is why its title included the words “... to completion”; namely, (until it happens in the designated time).

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

## **1- A LAMENTATION OR A PRAISE:**

Beside the grief of the Lord on His disciple who chose the way of betrayal; Although the cross is apparently shame and reproach, yet, in its depths, it is a praise of love He presents to God the father, and a gladness of heart for those, for whose sake He delivered Himself a sacrifice.

***“Do not keep silent, O God of my praise” (1)***

In His capacity as the Second Adam, instead of the disobedience of the first Adam; the Lord Christ has proclaimed His obedience to the Father, and proclaimed His love for humanity in the language of the work in silence. Now, He seeks from God to receive His sacrifice as a praise glorifying the Father. He seeks from Him not to keep silent, but to listen to Him, and to receive it, counting the salvation of the believers as His own salvation; for they are the members of His body.

He starts by saying: ***“O God of my praise”***. In the midst of the bitterness he was feeling because of the oppression by those he loved, did them good, and prayed for their sake; we see the eyes of David concentrate on ***“God of his praise”***. In truth, the secret of the strength of David, and the purity of his heart, is that his heart has been so fully preoccupied with God, Beneficent to him, that it turned into a harp, and his whole life turned into an unceasing praise, even in the midst of his suffering.

- ❖ ***“Do not keep silent, O God of my praise”***. According to another interpretation, ‘Do not disregard punishment, but avenge what is

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<sup>1</sup> *Onsemius of Jerusalem, Ps. 9.*

going on. You are glorious, mighty, and able to put everything in order<sup>1</sup>,

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ Here Christ says: ‘Judas betrayed Me; the Jews persecuted Me, crucified Me, and thought that they managed to get rid of Me. But You should not keep silent, O God of My praise’. The church all over the world praises the Lord, every day, and consummates the Lord’s prayer. ;... To perceive the honor of priesthood, The priests pray, and in them God the Father is praised in His Son<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Our Lord says: O Father, I came to this world to proclaim Your name to the people, and to set Your praise on earth. So, Do not let the wicked shut it up, or abolish the faith in You.

The prophet calls Satan “**the mouth of the sinner**”, which was the cause of the crucifixion of Christ, and of the other sins. He also calls the traitor ‘**Judas**’ “a sinner”, for he said to the Jews: “*What will you give me, if I deliver Him to you?*”; And he called him “a cheater”, for, through the craftiness of his heart, he said to the Lord: “*Greetings Rabbi*”.

The scribes and the Pharisees, as well, have ‘sinning and cheating’ mouths; for, in craftiness and flattering, they opened them with blasphemy on Christ, when they said to Him: “*Rabbi, we know that You preach the truth*”..

And the high priest also talked against Him with a cheating tongue, when he vowed on Him, saying: “*Tell us if You are the Christ the Son of God*”. For his intention was to hold His own words against Him, in order to accuse Him of blasphemy.

False witnesses surrounded Him in the assembly of the Sanhedrin, without a cause for their hatred. Instead of loving Him, for healing their sick, raising their dead, satisfying their hungry and quenching their thirsty, they delivered Him to Pilate to be killed. Although He prayed for them on the cross, saying: “*Father, Forgive them for they do not know what they do*”, they falsely claimed, before and after His crucifixion, that He is a tyrant, a rebel, and is raising a stir-up against the authorities; They paid His love for them, and His care for their salvation, back with hate.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 109.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

## 2- A CHEATING TONGUE AND AN EVIL BEHAVIOR:

The psalmist suffered the deceit of his enemies, whose words were characterized with three features: evil, deceit, and lying. As for their hearts, their main feature was hatred. The psalmist gave love and compassion, and got hate back. In all this, David has been a symbol of the Lord Christ, the Love itself.

***“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” (2)***

According to the Evangelist: *“The chief priest and all the council sought testimony against Jesus, to put Him to death, and found none. For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. And some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, ‘We heard Him say: ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands’. But not even then did their testimony agree”* (Mark 14: 55-59). ... The Roman ruler, himself, testified: *“I am innocent of the blood of this just Person”* (Matthew 27: 24) <sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“The mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me”***. Their hatred, covered by deceit, exploded into words; ***“They have spoken against me with a lying tongue”***. That clearly happened when, with a deceitful flattering, they commended Him as being a good teacher. And then soon *“They cried out saying, ‘Crucify him, crucify him’”* (John 19: 6); ***“They have surrounded me with words of hatred”*** (3).

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“The mouth of the deceitful and the mouth of the wicked have opened against me”***. In Judas, who dared to come to the Lord to betray him, calling Him “Rabbi”, namely, (Master) (Matthew 26: 49). we find a typical example of the deceitful tongue.

In My compassion I longed and intended to save him; ... I responded to his kiss,; but he persisted on his deceit and betrayal.

That was the story of Judas, and generally, of the Jews. When they cried out, saying: ‘Crucify him, crucify him’ (John 19: 6), their lips were deceitful against their Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

❖ *“They have spoken against Me with a lying tongue”* (2). While I prayed for them, they slandered Me. My wounds were for the sake of healing them, and they ridiculed Me<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“They have surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause”* (3)

The oppressors against the Lord Christ bore animosity against Him without a cause; and found no comfort until they shed His blood.

❖ *“They have surrounded Me with words of hatred”*. They did not intend to believe in Me, but only to attack and crush Me. *“They fought against Me without a cause”*.

For what excuse did they fight Me? Is it because I healed their sick? Is it because I brought their dead back to life?

When someone plots with hatred against another and does not succeed, he persecutes him without a cause<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“In return for my love, they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer”* (4)

The love of the Lord Christ for humanity has been obvious through His works among the people, and His care to heal all their body weaknesses, for the salvation of their souls. They in return paid His love back with animosity. The more He did them good, the more in them the fire of envy and hatred burned up.

He often spent the whole night praying, to make us do the same in the midst of our affliction; so that the oppression of the wicked would motivate us to take refuge in the throne of His grace; and we would consequently enjoy the spirit of love toward the oppressors.

Saying: *“But I give myself to prayer”*, reveals the nature of David’s heart and his system. As the oppression surrounded him on every side, he found his refuge in prayer, not only that the Lord would give him the wisdom, but to give him the spiritual understanding in dealing with those oppressing him, to make them forsake the evil in their hearts.

❖ *“In return for my love, they accuse me”*. tells that the oppression against David came from those whom he loved, to whom he did

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

good, and from whom he would deserve love and good in return; But he has got what completely contradict that.

**“But I give myself to prayer”** .Do you see the meekness? Do you see the piety of spirit? He says: I did not use weapons, nor stirred up a battle; but, instead, I was a refuge to you, And with the most effective weapons, namely, with love and prayers, I gave you an unconquerable help<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ For my compassion that I gave abundantly to them, they slandered and offended me. But my response was to pray for their sake. This is the Lord’s weapon, and should be ours as well... If someone persecutes and hates us, let us pray for his sake ... What did the Lord say in His prayer: *“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do”* (Luke 23: 34) <sup>2</sup>

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ The following are different modes of behavior, to put in our consideration:

- 1- Paying evil back with good.
- 2- Not paying evil back with evil.
- 3- Paying good back with good.
- 4- Paying evil back with evil.
- 5- Not paying good back with good
- 6- Paying good back with evil.

The first and the second, concern the good men, yet the first is better than the second.

The last two (5 & 6) concern the wicked men, yet the very last one is worst than the one preceding it.

The two modes of behavior in the middle (3 & 4) concern those in the middle, between the good and the wicked.

In the Holy scripture we notice that the Lord Himself pays good back for evil, *“He justifies the ungodly”* (Romans 4: 5); And when He was hanged on the cross, He said: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”* (Luke 23: 34) <sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“Thus they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love” (5)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 109.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

The oppressors found no evil in Christ, to pay Him evil back for evil, with the spirit of vengeance; But as He presented good to them, they paid Him back with evil, not with the spirit of vengeance, but with that of viciousness and Satanic behavior.

Here, **St. Augustine** discerns between him who pays evil back for evil, and the judge who puts punishment on the wicked; For he does not pay evil back for evil, but pays justice back for oppression. Justice is certainly good and of benefit, even for the wicked man.

❖ **“Thus they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love”**. That was their great crime. How could the persecutors harm someone who chooses to die with His complete freedom of will?! ... But it is hatred that is their greatest crime, which He made clear enough by saying: *“for my love”*... And in the gospel, he referred to this love, saying: *“How often I wanted to gather your children ..., but you were not willing”* (Matthew 23: 37) <sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ Do you see the extent of evil of the wicked? ... Do you see the extent of his contribution in plotting the snares? ... Do you see his persistence on doing evil?... To do an offense if one is surprised by an unexpected situation, or a deception, that will be different from when the criminal commits his crime intentionally, and in a well measured and studied way, according to long experience, whose action will bring on him the wrath of God<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

❖ **“They have rewarded me evil for good”** (5). When I was hanged on the cross, I prayed for my crucifiers, while they scoffed at me, saying: *“You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself!... If He is the Son of God, let God deliver Him now, if he will have Him”* (Matthew 27: 39-44).

For their sake I resurrected from the dead; And they claim: *“His disciples came at night and stole Him away”* (Matthew 28: 13).

**“And hatred for My love”** (50. Think deeply, O Christian! ... If the Lord responded to his betrayer’s kiss; and if He prayed for the sake of His persecutors; What would be our duty toward our brethren<sup>3</sup>?

(**St. Jerome**)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 109.

<sup>3</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

### 3- THE DESTINY OF THE WICKED:

If the destiny of that traitor came as a response to a prayer, yet the Lord Christ, the whole love, “*who desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2: 4), does not wish such for such a miserable destiny, even to the one who betrayed Him; But the later chose to be in the company of Satan, and under his authority. What dwelt on him and on his household is nothing but a natural corrupt fruit of what he has chosen by his own free will, for he chose the curse for himself, and to be clothed with evil.

**“Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand” (6)**

As the spirit of betrayal crawled into Judas’ mind and heart, because of his love for money, or because he did not have his heart’s desire to occupy a prominent position among his fellow disciples; he gave Satan the chance to take over the leading position in his depths; And instead of seeing the Lord on his right hand to sanctify him, he gave that position to the devil to direct him wherever he wishes. He was said to be “*a devil*” (John 6: 70); and, “*Satan entered him*” (John 13: 27). He delivered himself to the enemy, who hastened to lead him to his destruction; made him dare to practice evil; And after his fall, he utterly destroyed him with despair.

❖ He who refuses to submit to Christ, deserves to be under the authority of Satan (the evil one) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ “*Set on him a wicked man*” (6). I prayed for them while on the cross; they saw my wounds; and I gave them the chance to repent, which they rejected. They did not want me to reign over them; So, let Satan reign over them instead; let ‘Barabas’ be their king instead; ‘Barabas’, whose name means (the son of his father; namely, the son of Satan) <sup>2</sup>.

❖ In the book of Zechariah, Satan intended to oppose the right hand of Jesus (Zechariah 3: 1-3). But here, he has actually prevailed on the right hand of ‘Judas’<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome).**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>3</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

- ❖ What the prophet David says here, is not a prayer against the traitor 'Judas', or against those who crucified Christ; but it is rather a prophecy and a prior knowledge of what was going to dwell upon them because of their wickedness.

As to saying, "*Let Satan stand on his right hand*", It means that, if 'Judas' had some privileges to boast of, and apostolic gifts, which are the honors of the right hand; on those privileges Satan stood, corrupted, and destroyed.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***"When he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer become sin" (7)***

Judas had no excuse for what he did, on the day he stands for judgment; For even if he was not aware of His Godhead, yet he saw the wonders He performed; and enjoyed the gifts He granted to all the apostles, him included; and he was in no material need, for the treasury was in his hands. Having daringly committed his sin, he stood before his conscience to judge himself, and was found guilty. And instead of raising a prayer of remorse and repentance, together with hope in his Savior, he was overcome with despair, to fall into a worse sin, namely, not believing in the Savior.

- ❖ Every believer in Christ, who, while praying, remembers in his heart the evil of those who did him harm, curses himself in his prayer; for whenever he prays, he sins. About such a man, David says: "*Let his prayer become sin*" (7). When, in his prayer he says: "Forgive me, the way I forgave those who do me harm", he is lying, for he, actually, does not forgive them<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)**

- ❖ "*Let his prayer become sin*". A prayer would not be righteous, unless it is by Christ; For it does not wipe out the sin, but would, itself, be a sin... If, after his betrayal, 'Judas' prayed with remorse by Christ to seek forgiveness, he would have gotten hope, would have gotten mercy; and would have not hanged himself in despair<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ Let us beware not to seek from God what we should not seek... What would be your benefit, if you seek from the heavenly Father the death of your enemies?! ... Haven't you read what came in the psalm, prophesying the dreadful end of Judas the traitor; saying: "*And let his*

<sup>1</sup> تفسير تك :27 :41-45.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

*prayer become sin*” (7). If you seek evil for your enemies, your prayer would become a sin on you<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ He, who prays should be cautious not to seek what he should not; and not to seek it from anyone he should not seek from. You should seek nothing from Satan, from the idols, nor from the evil spirits; but you should seek everything from the Lord Jesus Christ, God of the prophets, the apostles, and the martyrs; and from God the Father, the Creator of heaven, earth, sea, and all what are on and in them. ... And you should beware, not to seek anything you should not; for what would be your benefit if you seek life from the idols that neither hear nor speak? ... And what would be your benefit if you seek from the Father, who is in heaven, the death of your enemies?! Haven't you read what the psalm prophesied about the end of Judas the traitor; saying, “*Let his prayer become a sin*” (7)?! If you seek evil against your enemies, your prayer will become a sin<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Let him not enter into the court of justice, but let him enter into judgment; For, in the court of justice, where there are certain judicial procedures remaining, the matter would still be pending. But in case there is judgment, the verdict would be already issued and declared. ... Judas remorse has been worse than his sin. How is that? ... By hanging himself ... he actually opposed the Lord more than he did by his betrayal... His prayer should have been one of repentance, but it turned, instead, into another sin<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ He who practices remorse without an attempt to correct the sin, would have no benefit. .. He who does wrong against his fellow man, in a way that could be corrected, would probably be forgiven. But if traces of the sin remain, his remorse would be in vain. This fact, the psalmist applies concerning the miserable Judas, saying: “*Let his prayer become sin*”<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ How could we dare, during our prayer in the church, not to stand aright before the King of kings, in humiliation and subjection, and

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<sup>1</sup> الصلاة الربانية للمستعدين للعماد.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 6: 2.

<sup>3</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on Matt. 4: 27: 5.

walk here and there; or watch those coming in and going out?! ... O man, you should know that “*your prayer have become a sin*”<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ “Pilate, mingling the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices” (See Luke 13: 1) has a symbolic interpretation; For it may refer to those who, under the authority of the devil, offer an unclean sacrifice; “*whose prayer becomes a sin*” (7). The same thing is done by Judas the traitor, who, in the midst the sacrifices in the temple of God, plotted to betray the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

**“*Let his days be few, and let another take his office*” (8)**

We do not know how long Judas lived after delivering and betraying his Lord. Did he hang himself on the same day, the Lord Christ was crucified; or was it a few days later?. All we know is that, not able to endure life after committing his horrible crime, he hastened to give back the silver he took, and hanged himself; ... In him, the words of the psalmist were realized: “*Let his days be few*”. ... Judas became a serious example of the evil man; who, however long he lives, his days would be counted as few; for, not realizing a fitting mission, he would exit this world empty-handed, with nothing to present before the divine Judge on the day of judgment.

He expelled himself by himself from the apostolic work, and left his office to be taken by another, according to what came in the book of Acts (Chapter 1).

- ❖ As the days of man are those days on which the Sun of Righteousness shine, those days have become few in Judas’ life.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ His days became few, but his nights increased in number. Having been taken out of life in the middle of his days; the sun set on his life, and darkness dwelt over him.

“*Let another take his office*”. That was clearly shown in (Acts 1: 20)...

If Judas has lost his office as an apostle, Let every bishop and priest beware, lest they may, as well, lose their ministry. If Judas -- an apostle -- has fallen, a monk may easily fall<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 109.

<sup>2</sup> Exposition of Luke 7: 159.

<sup>3</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

(St. Jerome)

***“Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow” (9)***

We know nothing about Judas’ family; ... Most probably he was not married, and had no children. So, what does the psalmist mean by his fatherless children, and his widowed wife? ... According to some scholars, the children refer to the fruit of the body and the spirit. Judas, having borne no fruit of the living faith, for he gave his back to God, rejected His fatherhood, and was deprived of the heavenly throne, he became fatherless, and his soul became a widow.

Children here, might refer to those who were attached to him, and dependant on him like a father; Whereas his wife might refer to the assembly of the Sanhedrin, to which he volunteered to deliver the Lord Christ.

If God confirms that every man is responsible for his own sins. A son does not bear the guilt of the father (Ezekiel 18: 19); Why would the curse dwell upon the children and wife of Judas the traitor? ... According to **St. John Chrysostom**, [The Holy Book used to call those bound to man in evil, or those who partake of his evil – his ‘children’, even though they are not so by nature; as for example, when the Jews are called “*children of the devil*” (John 8: 44); although they could never be as such, on account of that they are clothed with human bodies, while the devil is a spirit without a body! Yet, they have certainly acquired such a relationship through partaking of his evil. ... The Lord, rejecting to refer to the Jews, as children of Abraham, says: “*If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham*” (John 8: 39).

...

Indeed, according to the law, the son is not to be punished for the iniquities of the father, nor the father for the iniquities of the son, but the exception is if the father raises his son on evil, then the father would be punished, not for the iniquities of the son, but for his slothfulness in raising his son the proper way, like what happened with ‘Eli’ the priest (1 Samuel 3: 13)].

According to **St. Jerome**, [it was not anywhere mentioned that Judas has been married, nor had any children; but his wife could be the Sanhedrin, who collected from him as a dowry – thirty pieces of silver – the price of betrayal; And, the Jews, who did not believe in the Lord Christ, and did not repent after His crucifixion, have become the children of that traitor].

❖ Who do you think Judas’ **wife and children**?!

His wife is the Sanhedrin, representing (Israel) who has been previously the bride of God; about whom it was written: “*I have put away, and given her a certificate of divorce; Then I got her back, and said to her: ‘Return, backsliding Israel’*” (Jeremiah 3: 8-12). That Sanhedrin was divorced by the Savior, and became the widow of the traitor Judas<sup>1</sup>....

(St. Jerome)

❖ His children, namely, his thoughts, have been sojourned from their Father, namely, Christ; and have become fatherless. And having lost her matrimony with Christ, his soul has been widowed of God’s care.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Hypocrisy has so prevailed upon the world, that it moved virtue from its place, and almost wiped it out of existence. Hypocrites commit their transgressions mostly out of greed and ugly profit. As an example we have Judas Escariot, who, when he sought to sell the fragrant oil, his heart was on stealing its price for himself (See John 12: 6); And before kissing the Lord, pretending to love Him, he intended , with that kiss to deliver Him to His enemies (Luke 22: 47-48); to become worthy of the curses from the mouth of the prophet, saying: “*Set the wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer become sin*” (Psalm 109: 6-19) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“*Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg; let them seek their bread also from their desolate places*” (10)**

What does the psalmist mean by those children who would become vagabonds, and beg?

a- He probably means the children, not according to the flesh, but those to whom he previously preached; who were offended because of his betrayal to his Lord; who became as though spiritually vagabonds, and in need.

b- This prophecy came as a warning to every believer, that what he does, whether for the sake of the Lord, or against faith in Him, will have its activity in the life of his sons and daughters. For man, usually, does not fear any affliction that may dwell upon him, as much as its dwelling upon his children; who are the apple of his eyes, even though he is wicked.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 109.

According to **St. Jerome**, his children are the Jews who have lost their spiritual riches, have got no more prophets, priests, or sacrifices; and have become “fallen” in the full sense of the word.

***“Let the creditor seize all that he has, and let strangers plunder his labor” (11)***

Who is the creditor who would seize all what the wicked man has; and who are the strangers who would plunder his labor, but the devil and his hosts, who attempt to use all man’s gifts, capabilities, even his emotions, to the account of the kingdom of darkness.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the ‘creditor’ of the Jews are the Roman soldiers who plundered their labors, and divided them among themselves, as they did with the garments of the Lord Christ at His crucifixion.

***“Let there be none to extend mercy to him, nor let there be any to favor his fatherless children” (12)***

Having no mercy upon himself, and disregarding his eternity, the wicked would not expect to find someone to extend mercy on him; ... And following his lead toward evil, his children would become fatherless to whom no one would give favor.

❖ ***“Let there be none to extend mercy on him, nor let there be any to favor his fatherless children”***. ... Tell me, O Jew; you have been in Babylon, where you had the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel, and you were no more than an idol-worshipper!; then, after seventy years in captivity, you returned back home; ... Now, ask yourself: Why no more prophets are sent to you<sup>1</sup>!?

**(St. Jerome)**

***“Let his posterity be cut off, and in the generation following, let their name be blotted out” (13)***

Cutting posterity off, refers to that, although the wicked may quickly prosper, yet his equally wicked fruit would not last long; For truth is stronger than vanity, and light scatters darkness. According to St. Jerome, this prophecy was realized on the hand of ‘Titus’ the Roman leader who invaded and destroyed Jerusalem.

***“Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord; And let not the sin of his mother be blotted out” (14)***

A man, sanctified in the Lord would not fear the ancient sin, nor groan because of the iniquities of his fathers; For, on the cross, he sees

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

the forgiving power of the sacrifice. Whereas the wicked, would never benefit from the work of redemption, for his evil and disobedience are an extension of those of his fathers.

❖ They sinned in the wilderness, and the Lord forgave them; but now, He holds it against them because they crucified the Lord.

***“Let not the sin of his mother be blotted out”***. ... Who is Judas’ mother? It is Jerusalem who rejoiced in the blood; who murdered the prophets, and the Lord Himself<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“Let them be continually before the Lord, that He may cut off the memory of them from the earth”*** (15)

Not showing mercy, there will be none to extend mercy to him. Indeed, our Christ longs to extend mercy on everyone, even to His persecutors; Yet, those who bear no mercy in their hearts, would not expect to receive mercy from Christ, nor to react to it.

❖ ***“Let them be continually before the Lord”***. By saying “continually” he means them to become without forgiveness, here, and in the life to come<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“Because he did not remember to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man; That he might even slay the broken in heart”*** (16)

Who is the “*poor and needy man, and the broken in heart*”, but the Lord Christ, who, for our sake, chose to be poor, and had no place to rest His head; in order to make us rich by His poverty, and to let us live by His death. According to **St. Augustine**, the Lord Christ became a needy man, seeking from the Samaritan woman: “*Give me a drink*” (John 4: 70; And, on the cross, he says: “*I thirst*” (John 19: 28). All that for the sake of our salvation.

❖ ***“Because he did not remember to show mercy”***. It is to be understood that “*he did not remember*”, concerns the Jewish people; Having killed the Lord Christ, it was befitting of them to remember that with repentance, and deal with His members with mercy, whom they persist on persecuting<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

❖ **“Because he did not remember to show mercy”**. ... Think about the compassion of the Lord! Seeing Judas coming toward him, together with the temple guards; Seeing him coming to betray him with a kiss, the Lord kissed him back!

**“But persecuted the poor and needy man”**. Who is “the poor and needy man”?, but He who, *“though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor”* (2 Corinthians 8: 9). If the Lord called Himself poor and needy, Who has the right to boast his riches? ... Have comfort, O poor man, for the Lord is your partner.

**“That he might even slay the broken in heart”**. That conforms to what is said in the gospel: *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death”* (Matthew 26: 38); and, *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me”* (Matthew 26: 39).; Or it may mean: [I was sorrowful, and in deep pain for the sake of My persecutors who persist on not repenting. I was hanged on the cross, and by My blood I cleansed their uncleanness; and they still persist on not repenting. That was the cause of My sorrow and heart-break, not to be able to save those who persecuted Me<sup>1</sup>].

(St. Jerome)

❖ That is the sign of limitless cruelty, and of utmost viciousness, for man, not only to make evil plots, but to practice them against someone who needs to have mercy and compassion. Such man, actually goes down to be like wild beasts, or even worse. The wild beasts usually follow their natural instinct, But such a man has forsaken his noble nature to practice evil. .. The wild beasts have compassion on those belonging to their kind and race, and in relationship with them; But such a man has no regard to nature, but takes a stand contradictory to it; when he should have shown mercy and compassion<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“As he loved cursing, so let it come to him; As he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him” (17)**

The divine principle, as it came in the psalms: *“May the Lord give you according to Your heart”*. He who delights in blessing, will get it; Whereas he who loves cursing others, will treasure it for himself, more than for the others.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 109.

If this psalm is counted as one of cursing against the wicked who persists on his wickedness; Yet this cursing is not the heart desire of the psalmist, but it is rather a natural fruit of the corruption brought forth by evil. So we would not marvel to read about the wicked: “*As he loved cursing, so let it come to him. As he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him*” (17).

Sin indeed, has its pleasure and appeal for the wicked, to love it, and to receive its cursing; He would not find pleasure in the intimate relationship with God, but finds it burdensome; He would not delight in the divine blessing that intends to acquire him; But, as he rejects it, it does not commit him, but be far from him.

- ❖ Judas loved the cursing; whether in stealing from the treasury, or in his betrayal of the Savior. And the Jewish people, as well loved the cursing, when they cried out, saying: “*His blood be on us and on our children*” (Matthew 27: 25).

“*And did not delight in the blessing, so let it be far from him*”. So was Judas who, having no love for Christ, in whom is the eternal blessing. And so were the Jewish people, who because of their rejection of the blessing, as they were told by him who was enlightened by the Lord: “*Do you also want to be His disciples?*” (John 9: 27) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Their views, thoughts, and works, were all cursed, and they clothed themselves with the cursing as with a garment that covers the whole body, and with a belt which girds it. That has been since the time they crucified Him, and will last forever, unless they repent and return to God with faith.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ “*As he loved cursing, so let it come to him; As he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him*”. The psalmist intends to show, that it is not according to his heart wish, that he sought all those cursing to come over the wicked, but it is actually the wicked man himself, who, through rejecting, by his works, the grace of God, he brings those cursing upon himself<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrisostom)**

- ❖ O my children, lest anyone of you would object to the exalted might that God has given to Satan, but He has initially decided to give it to

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 109.

him, and He has never got it back from him. He who has got such an exalted might, has let it go, and replaced it with an evil might. It is not written that he rejected the blessing, and that God let it be far from him, but: *“He did not delight in the blessing, so it got far from him”* (17). You, therefore, should not think that God is the source of evil; for that would be for your judgment, But it is Satan himself, who has chosen for himself that evil might, and God did not come in his way; Hence it is written: *“He loved cursing, and it came to him”* (17); and it was not God who gave it to him.

(St. Parsnovius)

***“As he clothed himself with cursing as with a garment, so let it enter his body like water, and like oil into his bones”* (18)**

He who is preoccupied with cursing, and seeks evil for others, thinks that it is like a garment he is able to put on, and to take off whenever he likes. Here, the psalmist warns us that whoever clothes himself with such a garment, will have it, not only be so attached to him, that he would not be able to take it off whenever he likes, but it will crawl into his depths, like oil into his bones. It will not separate from him, unless he seeks the grace of God to help and to rescue him.

- ❖ He showed that he delights in doing evil, and that he stores cursing for himself, namely, the eternal judgment, the way it is with the eternal blessing ...He so delights in the evil works now; that they flow in his body like water, and like oil into his bones. They are actually cursing designated by God to torture such kind of men<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ ***“He clothed himself with cursing as with a garment, so it entered his body like water, and like oil into his bones”*** (18). By this verse, the psalmist refers to the seriousness of sorrow, and to the perpetuity of punishment, proclaiming that evil comes from them, through their rejection of the good works, through their own works and behavior<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

***“Let it be to him like a garment which covers him, and for a belt with which he girds himself continually”* (19)**

When cursing dwells over man who persists on his evil and wickedness, it attaches to him like a permanent garment, as it happened to Satan and his angels. When he takes it off, he thinks of himself as

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 109.

being naked; as though cursing for him has become a cover, as well as an honor, which he does not intend to forsake, nor does it intend to forsake him.

According to **St. Augustine**, the garment mentioned in verse 18, is the inner garment, namely, ‘the tunic’, whereas the one mentioned here (19) is the outer garment, namely, ‘the cloak’. It is as though the cursing dwells upon him inside and outside.

❖ Man usually girds himself with a belt so that he can work without being hindered by his clothes. So this man girds himself with cursing, and sets plans of evil to elaborately practice, and not as a casual kind of motive. He learned to do evil in such a way, to be perpetually ready to practice<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ *“Let it be to him like the garment which covers him, and for a belt with which he girds himself continually”* ... what he means is that evil holds fast to the wicked, in such a way that it would be difficult for them to do any change; but, on the contrary, it become so attached to them, that it could not be detached<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

*“Let this be the Lord’s reward to my accusers, and to those who speak evil against my person”* (20)

The wage (reward) of sin is death; The evildoer, hating the Lord Himself, what will he acquire but his own perdition? Having hated and disregarded the precious blood of Christ, Judas did not find the blood to forgive his sins.

According to **St. Augustine**, this is “**work**”, and not “wage” (or reward); By speaking evil against others, cursing will continually flow into his body like water and oil, and he will be girded with it like a belt; all of which refer to that they are eternal cursing.

❖ The psalmist added that, to show that it is a punishment for evil, a reform for the evildoers; and that this verdict does not concern a particular evildoer, but concerns all those who commit what we mentioned. This punishment will dwell upon those who oppress him, plan evil ploys, and those who talk evil against him<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> On Psalm 109.

#### 4- “I HAVE BECOME A REPROACH TO THEM”:

That is a portrait of Him, who became poor by His own free choice, to make us rich, and was wounded to heal the wounds of our souls; He, who chose to become a reproach and the subject of ridicule, for us to enjoy the fellowship of His eternal glories.

*“But You, O God the Lord, Deal with me for Your name’s sake, because Your mercy is good, deliver me” (21)*

Here, it is the Son Word, who talks to God the Father in our name and to our account, being our Intercessor.

If the wicked knows nothing but wickedness, lying, and cruelty; and finds pleasure in realizing his desire; The Good God, on the other hand, finds His pleasure in love and mercy.

Having received the cross through His own free will, the Lord Christ, although capable of resurrecting from the dead, seeks from God the Father to save Him; so that, in Him, we would also resort to the Father to resurrect us together with our Christ.

According to **St. Augustine**, the Talker here is the Son, who says to the Father: “*Deal with Me*”, although the Father and the Son work together with mercy “*on the vessels of mercy*” (Romans 9: 23). It also means: “Help me”. Having taken the form of a servant, the Son seeks help from the Father. ... Being Himself God, He needs no help, But while in the form of a servant, He seeks that.

❖ As the one who seeks forgiveness would say to the one against whom he transgressed: ‘I am guilty, I have sinned toward you; Forgive me’; Our Lord, has taken, by His own free will, the human form, was circumcised, suckled, took over all what concern man, except for sin, fasted, prayed, and offered sacrifices to God.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Look at His humility! Although David, as a king, has the capacity and the right to avenge Himself against those who are fond of planning snares, Yet, he does nothing of the kind, but resorts to God’s compassion, saying; “*Deal with Me for Your name’s sake*”; Namely, not because of my worthiness, but “*for Your name’s sake*”, for the sake of Your love and mercy<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

*“For I am poor and needy, and My heart is wounded within Me” (22)*

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 109.

David's heart was crushed with sorrow; And David's Lord also came "A man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53: 3); Nobody was wounded like Him, for, although He is the Righteous, and the Holy One, He carried all our wounds; "He was wounded in the house of His friends" (Zechariah 13: 6).

❖ The Lord calls Himself "poor", to give comfort to the poor among us. He became poor, so that no one would despair of salvation because he is poor.

"My heart is wounded within me" ... My heart is torn apart with sorrow<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Do not you see Him supplicate to be saved; not for the sake of His own worthiness or righteousness, but because He fell under limitless evil schemes.

(St. John Chrysostom)

***"I am gone like a shadow when it lengthens; I am shaken off like a locust" (23)***

The prophet David has been like a nomad with no place of dwelling for a long time; And his Lord "had nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8: 20).

When the Lord, on the cross was examined to have His legs broken, like what they did with the two robbers, they were astonished to see how He died so soon. He was shaken off like a locust which has no dwelling place of comfort, nor a nest, which move in swarms, carried and directed by the wind, that ultimately cast it out to the sea, or to the wilderness to perish.

In his birth, the Lord Christ had no proper place where he would be born; and in His death, likewise having no tomb, Nicodemus offered his new tomb for His burial.

According to **St. Augustine**, the locusts here refer to His disciples, namely, His body members, who, like locusts, fled away in the moments of His crucifixion.

❖ ***"I was shaken off like a locust" (23)***. How was that? ... Persecuted, despised, and expelled out of Nazareth, I went to Capernaum, out of which I was expelled out to Bethesda; then to Jerusalem, where I intended to live together with My people, yet they expelled Me out of there! I was treated by them like a swarm of locusts! ... What was my

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

guilt? ... Did I show anger? ... Did I defend Myself? ... Did I curse them? ... Did I forsake them? ... No, I did nothing of the sort; ... What did I do? ... I prayed for their sake<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“My knees are weak through fasting, and my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness” (24)***

This is a portrait of the Lord Christ who, on the day he was tried, was moved from one court of judgment to another, whether religious or civil; without food or drink, that He was so weak to carry His cross, and fell underneath it

❖ ***“My knees are weak through fasting; and my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness” (24)***. Have comfort, O monk in your fastness, for the Lord Himself has fasted.

Those who freely and readily fast, are loved by Christ. For fasting is their way of life. ... How is that? For by fasting, there is conquest, and by conquest there would be celebration. The apostle boasts, not of the abundance of goods, but of his own weakness, saying: *“When I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Corinthians 12: 10) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ From what is said, **we know that there are a multitude of ways through which we may be forgiven our sins, so that no one, longing for the salvation of his soul, would ever despair.**

If you have the weakness of body as an excuse for not being able to fast; and you cannot say together with the psalmist: *“My knees are weak through fasting, and my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness”* (34); nor to say together with him: *“For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping”* (Psalm 102: 9); You, therefore, instead of fasting, can give an abundance of alms<sup>3</sup>.

(Father Penovius)

***“I also have become a reproach to them. When they look at me, they shake their heads” (25)***

❖ ***“I also have become a reproach to them”*** Through the death of the cross, *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us”* (Galatians 3: 13).

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cassian, Conferences 20: 8.

*“When they look at me, they shake their heads”*. For they looked at His cross, and not at His resurrection; They looked at Him when His knees were weak, and not look at His body when it became glorified<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ That is the way of the wicked; they do not only let the righteous be in the depth of his spirit of dedication, but they keep on reproaching, despising, and oppressing him<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ *“I also have become a reproach to them”* . They ridiculed Me by saying: “You are a Samaritan (John 8: 48).

*“He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons”*  
(Luke 11: 15).

*“Is He not the carpenter’s son? Do we not know all His brothers and sisters? (See Mathew 13: 55, 56).*

*“Aha, You who destroy the temple and build it in three days!”*  
(Mark 15: 29).

*“Let us see if Elijah will come to save Him”* (Matthew 27: 49).

So they said when they heard Him saying: *“Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani, that is ‘My God My God, why have You forsaken Me’,* and thought He was calling the prophet Elijah.

Look how ignorant they were; Would the Son of God seek help from man<sup>3</sup>?!

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Concerning the two robbers who were crucified together with Jesus, it was written: *“He was numbered with the transgressors”* (Isaiah 53: 12). Although both were sinners, yet one of them was ultimately saved, while the other was not. Although both were hand-tied, yet they uttered blasphemy with their free tongues, joining the multitudes of Jews who while passing by, in reproach of the Crucified, *“When they look at Me, they shake their head”* (25) <sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

## **5- REJOICING IN THE CROSS:**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 109.

<sup>3</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>4</sup> .30 :13 مقال

There is no rejoicing like that of the Savior for the salvation of those who return to him. The psalm starts by a praise of love through the cross, and ends with a praise, for the sake of those who enjoy salvation.

***“Help me, O Lord, my God! Oh, Save me according to Your mercy” (26)***

❖ ***“Help me, O Lord, my God! Save me according to Your mercy”***. This verse refers to both the Head and the body. To the Head, the Lord, having taken the form of the servant, and to the body (the church), being, themselves the servants. ... Being one of them, He says to God the Father: *“Help Me”, and “Save Me”*; And said to Saul of tarsus: *“Why do persecute Me?”* (Acts 9: 4).

The following words *“according to Your mercy”*, refer to the grace, presented free, and not according to the worthiness by work<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ ***“Save me according to Your mercy”***. ... On another aspect He said: *“I have the power to lay it (His life) down, and I have the power to take it again”*; *“No one takes it from Me”* (John 10: 18). How then would He seek mercy? ... As Man, He seeks, But as God, He gives<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“That they may know that this is Your hand; That You, O Lord, have done it” (27)***

Thinking of David’s life since his childhood until his death, one could not fail to see the hand of God always support him, and save him from his enemies.

The events of the cross came so conforming to the prophecies along the eras, for all to perceive that it was according to an exalted divine plan; and could never have happened by chance, nor according to certain circumstances.

❖ ***“That they may know that this is Your Hand; That You, O Lord, have done it”***. He says *“That they may know”*, he refers to those for whose sake He prayed, while they were stirred up to cry out, saying: *“Crucify Hi, crucify Him”*. ... Actually, many of those who shook their heads in ridicule, have ultimately believed in Him.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

To understand that **“the hand of God”** refers to the Lord Christ; In another place it is written: *“To whom has the arm (the hand) of the Lord been revealed?”* (Isaiah 53: 1) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ To know the meaning of the words: *“This is Your hand”*, Your hand is Your help and Your support. It is as though the psalmist says: [I seek, not only to be saved, but, for their sake, to know who has saved me; to acquire for myself double rewards, a double crown, and an exalted reputation<sup>2</sup>].

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ **“That they may know that this is Your hand; that You, O Lord, have done it”**. Let the Jews know that they have not overcome Me, but that it is according to Your will to let me suffer, and according to My own will to suffer.... From the human aspect (of My Manhood), *“I delight to do Your Will”* (Psalm 40: 8). It is both according to Your will and Mine to suffer; and not according to their plans and authority ... Your wish is also Mine... *“Offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes”* (Matthew 18: 7<sup>3</sup>).

(St. Jerome)

**“Let them curse, but You bless. When they arise, let them be ashamed, But let Your servant rejoice” (28)**

What a magnificent portrait of the events of the cross! ... While they were pouring out reviles and slanders upon Him, the Father delighted in the sacrifice of the cross.... They arose to crucify Him, But once He resurrected, they were ashamed. ... The Lord of glory, descended to Hades, broke down its gates, and set the captives free, to exult in His amazing salvation; And heaven, as well exulted in them.

- ❖ **“Let them curse, but You bless”**. Vain and false is the curse of the sons of men, *“For they love worthlessness, and seek falsehood”* (Psalm 4: 2). Whereas God, while blessing, consummates what He says.

**“When they arise against Me, they are ashamed” (28 LXX)**. Because they imagined that they had dominion over Me, they arose against Me. But as I ascend high above heavens, and as My glory spread all over the earth, they will be ashamed.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 109.

<sup>3</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

*“But Your servant rejoices”*. Whether on the right hand of the Father, or in His members when they rejoice, in their hope during temptations, or more when temptations come to an end<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Here, the listener learn a number of values. It refers to that he should not care if they pour cursing on him, on condition that he is blessed by God; in which case, he would never be harmed by them, but their reproach and cursing will come back over them.

*“But Your servant rejoices”*. (by or in You). In You, on account of that the rejoice comes forth from the same source, from the abundant flow of goods. No troubles can afflict me, as long as the rejoice dwells on me from You<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ *“Let them curse, but You bless”* (28). That is what still happens today. They curse in their assemblies, but the Lord blesses in His church. ... *“When they arise, let them be ashamed; But Your servant rejoices”* (28 LXX). ... How does the Lord say: *“I, Your Servant?”* . *“For being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant”* (Philippians 2: 6-7)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

*“Let My accusers be clothed with shame, and let them cover themselves with their own disgrace as with a mantle”* (29)

By crucifying Him, they assumed that they have realized the gladness of their hearts; But by His resurrection, they became clothed in shame, and were covered with disgrace on every side, as with a mantle that covers man’s body.

- ❖ Notice again that He does not seek for them just the punishment, but the shame and disgrace, to let them have it as a lesson to reform themselves, and a chance to be in a better condition<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ *“Let My accusers be clothed with shame”* (29 LXX). Let those who revile Me, be clothed with shame; Yet that may be, as well, a blessing for them to get reformed.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 109.

<sup>3</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

<sup>4</sup> On Psalm 109.

*“And let them cover themselves with their own disgrace as a mantle (a double cloak)”*. Namely, let them be disgraced on both the inside and the outside, before God and men<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“Let My accusers be clothed with shame”*. He does not say: ‘Let them perish’, nor ‘Let them be destroyed forever’, But says: *“Let them be clothed with shame”*; Namely, to give them the chance to recognize their faults, and being in shame, they may repent.

He who is covered with shame, may come close to salvation, for he may get close to repentance.

Meditate deeply in this, O monks! In case you have something against a brother, You are committed to keep on supplicating to God for his sake. ... The Lord was crucified, yet He kept on praying for His crucifiers. ... You therefore, in case you hear a corrupt word, do not react with anger, *“Do not let the sun do down on your wrath”* (Ephesians 4: 26).

*“Let them be covered with their own disgrace as a mantle”*. A mantle is a kind of double cloak, called ‘a mail’ in Hebrew. It is double because it goes twice around the body.

I am interceding for them.... What do I seek for their sake? That they be ashamed, to be saved. ... They are naked, for they lost My ‘tunic’. Let them be clothed with a double mantle of shame and confusion. Let them not be disturbed on one aspect, but on two aspects, to present repentance on everything. He did not say that against the Jews, but for their benefit, ... Do you need a proof of this? Peter was one of them; So was Paul, as well as all the apostles, in whose root we were grafted as branches. Let us then pray to God to grant salvation to the branches as He did to the root<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth; Yes, I will praise Him among the multitude”* (30)

The sacrifice of the cross is offered for the sake of the whole world; It is a praise, sung by the believers coming from all over the world, who have nothing to offer to the Father and to His glory, except the salvation work of the Son on the cross.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

According to **St. Augustine**, it is the Lord Christ who talks here, who is present in His church, praising the Father in the name of the church, and to her account.

❖ He says: ***“I will greatly praise ... among the multitude”***, For He is with His church, ***“always, and even to the end of the age”*** (Matthew 28: 20).. By saying: ***“among the multitude”***, we understand that He will be honored by those same multitudes, among whom, in their middle, where He will have the main honor, like the heart in the middle of the body; ... He means to say: [I praise You in the hearts of the multitudes, For Christ dwells in our hearts by faith<sup>1</sup>].

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ ***“I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth”***. This is said after the resurrection, about which the church was previously been informed. ***“Yes, I will praise Him among the multitude”***, not only in Judea, but I will praise Him in the church, all over the world<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ The mouth of Christ is us – the believers in Him; For we are His body and His members, As our thanksgiving to God concerns Him, He says: ***“I will greatly thank (praise) the Lord with my mouth, Yes I will praise Him among the multitude”***. For He is still present among us, if we praise God by good works that brings Him pleasure.

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

***“For He shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those who condemn him” (31)***

The Son sits on the right hand of the Father; and the Father stands at the right hand of the Son. For “the right hand” is not a particular location, but is a symbol of power; Each of the Father and the Son are on the right hand of One Another; For there is no separation between the might of the Father and that of the Son; But the Son Himself is called “The power of the Father”.

❖ About Judas it is said: ***“Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser (Satan) stand at his right hand”*** (6). For he intended to increase his riches by selling Christ. ...But here, he says: “The Lord will stand at the right hand of the poor, namely, the Lord Himself will be the riches of the poor.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

He stands on the right hand of the poor, not to double the days of his life, which will eventually come to an end; to make his storehouses bigger, to make his body stronger, nor to give him security against the persecutors, to whose evil he does not conform. Such a conformity would not be, if God is on the right hand of the poor. Such help was granted to the body of Christ, in case of all the saintly martyrs<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Our Lord is called “**Poor**”, for He took over Himself the image of a poor man; on account of that He led, in this world, a life of poverty; and because the Jews looked at Him as a poor man. He, as well, calls him “poor”, who does works worthy of having the Lord stand on his right hand; He will save him from his persecutors, hidden and manifest.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ “*For He shall stand at the right hand of the poor*”. Satan stood at the right hand of Judas; Whereas the Lord stands at my right hand, “*to save me from those who condemn me*”. ...

If Christ is sorrowful, So He has emotions, for sorrow is an emotion. ... If they, the heretics, say to us: [On account of that He had no human emotions nor feelings, there was no chance to find sin in Him]; ... We shall ask them: [Did he have a body like ours, or not?. If they answer: ‘Yes, He had’, we shall say: Therefore He, definitely had emotions

If they deny that he had emotions or body desires, we shall say to them: ‘He, therefore, could not have a body’; We confirm to them: ‘He had a true body just like ours, yet without the sins of the body; And He had, as well a true soul, yet without the sins of the soul’. For, if the Lord has not taken a true whole human nature, body and soul, He would not save humanity.

If He has only taken a body, and not a soul, It would mean that he saved the body and not the soul; But since we wish for our souls to be saved, even more so than our bodies, the Lord took both the human body and soul, to save both, to save man as a whole, as He has created him<sup>2</sup>].

(St. Jerome)

❖ Seeing that It is a true sacrifice, a true offering; we should perpetually keep in our minds the goodness of God, inscribe them in our thoughts, and in our hearts; and preach them by the words of our

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 109 (108).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 35 on Ps. 108 (109).

mouth, to let the others hear about God's goodness. By so doing, whoever gets the goodness of His compassion, will enjoy a reward for his thanksgiving, and gains a greater grace from God. Moreover, those who hear about the goodness given to others, will become more zealous, when they count the goodness presented to others, a chance to follow their lead in virtue<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 109 MY HEART IS WOUNDED INSIDE ME

- ❖ What praise would be more sweet than the work of the cross?  
How could God the Father keep His peace, before the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son?  
The Lord opened His mouth by His practical love;  
He brought us forth into the bosom of His Father as holy children;  
By his own free will, Judas chose the way of betrayal;  
His words were evil, deceptive, and false;  
He paid the Savior's love, back with hatred;  
He presented evil in its worst forms;  
In exchange of the divine love in its most magnificent moments.
- ❖ Your heart, O Lord, is wounded by love;  
By the arrows of Your love, grant me Your healing wounds;  
By You, I would love the whole world, even those who oppress me;  
By Your cross, I will not be preoccupied with the evil of the wicked;  
But I will pray for their sake to taste Your love;  
The way You did with me, let Your grace work in them
- ❖ Judas hastened to flee away;  
He does not wish for You to stand on his right side, to experience the power of His love;  
With every new morning, grant me to sing, saying:  
*"I have set the Lord always before me,  
because He is at my right hand I shall not move"* (Psalm 17: 8) "
- ❖ Although Judas felt remorse, yet he did not lift his eyes up to You;  
His remorse, therefore became a sin;  
Instead of returning to You, he hanged himself;

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 109.

Instead of getting attached to Your cross, he cast himself under the bondage of the devil.

He lost everything, including his self-dignity;

He presented his soul with all its possibilities to the devil, his master;

He chose suicide instead of the true life;

He cast himself into despair, instead of hope;

He loved the curse of the devil, and kept himself away from the Source of blessings;

Your heart is wounded for the sake of all the fallen;

You are the whole love; Why would men flee away from You?

❖ On the cross You, the Rich, became poor!

For my sake You became poor, that I would not be ashamed of my poverty;

I see You closer to me than my own soul;

If I acquire You, I shall be rich by You;

You carried reproach and shame on my behalf;

To carry me forth to Your eternal glories;

Oh, how amazing and uniquely wounded You are!

By Your wounds, You heal the wounds of my soul.

❖ By Your cross You presented a fragrance of gladness to Your Father;

You let the heavenly hosts rejoice in our salvation;

You set for us a place in the eternal glories;

You turned our life into an unceasing praise;

Glory be to You, By Your cross, You unified heaven with earth;

And the heavenlies with the earthlies;

And set for us an everlasting wedding.

## PSALM 110

### THE MESSIAH

#### THE LORD, THE KING, THE PRIEST, AND THE JUDGE

This psalm is the most quoted by the New Testament, being the psalm concerning the Lord Christ. When the Pharisees and the Sadducees intended to test our Lord Jesus Christ, He responded by an answer that muted them. *“He asked them: What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He? When they said to Him: ‘The Son of David’, He said to them: ‘How then does David in the Spirit call Him Lord?’, saying: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”* (Matthew 22: 42-44). Here we find 4 facts:

- 1- This psalm is written by the prophet David
- 2- It is proclaimed to him by the Holy Spirit
- 3- It is a Messianic psalm.
- 4- The Christ is the Son of David and his Lord; He is the incarnate Son of God.

Commenting on this situation, the Evangelist says: *“No one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone question Him anymore”* (Matthew 22: 46).

, the apostle Peter referred to it in his sermon on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2: 34-35); And the apostle Paul referred to it in his epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 1: 13).

According to some scholars, this psalm is sung in the enthronement of any king of the descendants of David, with the following program<sup>1</sup>:

- a- The enthroned ruler, setting forth in a procession to the royal throne in the temple (2)
- b- *“The rod of strength”* presented to him is a sign of his royal authority (2)
- c- The centerpiece of his enthronement is anointing him with the holy oil together with prayers for sanctification (3)
- d- Shouting loud for the new king, and proclaiming him a king (4).
- e- The new king appearing before the whole people, as being chosen and supported by God (5-6).

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<sup>1</sup> *Stuhlmüller, p. 129.*

f- The new king drinking the water of life from a holy place , like the fountain of Gihon in the valley of Kedron, east of Jerusalem, where

Solomon was enthroned a king (1 Kings 1: 39-40), Or in the temple of Jerusalem, being the fountain that gives life to the whole city, and even to the whole kingdom.

1- The Messiah, the Lord	1
2- The Messiah, the King	2 - 3
3- The Messiah, the Priest	4
4- The Messiah, the Judge	5 - 7

## 1- THE MESSIAH, THE LORD:

*“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’*” (1)

I wish we are not among His enemies, not only among His non-believing enemies, but also among those with a defiled life. *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God”* (Romans 8; 7).

❖ The Savior proclaims the meaning of those words in the gospel, when He asked the Pharisees and the Sadducees: *“If the Christ is the Son of David, How then does David in the Spirit call Him Lord?”* (Matthew 22: 43) ... As far as we are concerned, He is not two persons: One as God, and another as Man; But He who is the Son of God, is Himself the Son of David.

God does not sit; but It is Him who took a body who sits; ... the incarnate Word<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Let us then believe that He is the Son of David, and the Lord of David as well. Let us not be ashamed that He is the Son of David, lest we would offend the Lord of David<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ How could He who reigns over all together with the Father, ascend to Him to get the Kingdom? To this I answer that God the Father gives the Kingdom to the Son who became Man; For when He ascended to heaven, He sat at the right hand of Majesty in the highest, until His enemies are made His footstool; as He is told by the Father<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 36 on Ps. 109 (110).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 110 (109).

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on Luke, homily 128.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- ❖ **“Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”** (1). When the Christ through His Manhood taken from us, sat at the right hand of the Father, we became worthy of having the Holy Spirit, by whom we destroy our enemies the demons, the sins, and the iniquities, We overcome the death and the Hades, and we ascend to heaven, where the Christ our head is, He who made us His body<sup>1</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

- ❖ **“The Lord said to my lord, ‘Sit at My right hand’”** (1). The Lord said this, not to a servant, but to the Lord of all, to His Son to whom He submitted everything. *“But when he says that ‘all things are put under Him’, it is evident that He who put everything under Him is excepted; ... that God may be all in all”* (1 Corinthians 15: 27).

The only begotten Son is the Lord of all; Yet the obedient Son of the Father did not get his Godhead (as something new to Him), but he is a Son by nature according to the will of the Father. ... For the Son says: *“All things have been delivered to me by My Father”* (Matthew 11: 27; Luke 10: 22). He says: *“have been delivered to Me”*, not as though it was not Mine before<sup>2</sup>!

- ❖ I have to remind you of a few of what is said concerning the sitting of the Son at the right hand of the Father. The psalm says: **“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”** (1). And the Savior confirms this in the gospels, saying that David has not uttered that on his own, but through an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saying: *“How then can David (in the Spirit) call Him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”* (Matthew 22: 43). Peter and the eleven apostles used this evidence with the same words of the psalm, in the book of Acts, on the day of the Pentecost (the dwelling of the Holy Spirit), in his sermon to the Israelites<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ He who was crucified on the Golgotha, after descending down to Hades, ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives on the East, where His Father said to Him: **“Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”**<sup>4</sup> (1).

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> تفسير خر 18-12:24.

<sup>2</sup> مقال 9:10.

<sup>3</sup> مقال 28:14.

<sup>4</sup> مقال 14:3.

- ❖ Being himself a king, Who is He whom he calls his Lord, who is to sit at the right hand of the Father, but the Christ the Son of God, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords<sup>1</sup>.

(Lactantius)

- ❖ In order to take away their faulty thoughts, And to make His Person and His Godhead known to them in a more clear way, the Lord brought David into the debate (Matthew 22: 41-4). Although they assumed that He is only a man, they said that the Christ is “*the Son of David*”. That is why He presented to them a prophetic testimony about His Sonhood, and His equality to His Father in honor<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ If all the creation worship the Christ, By saying “*Let the angels worship Him*” (Hebrew 1: 6), the apostle Paul means the highest of rational beings; according to the verse, saying: “*To which of the angels He ever said: Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’?*”, which means that he is more exalted than the angels..

The Holy Book forbids us to worship the creation, saying: “*Make heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the hosts of heaven, you feel driven to worship them, and serve them*” (Deuteronomy 4: 19). As it is forbidden for man to worship the heavenly beings, he is likewise forbidden to worship the other created beings, even if one of them is superior to all.

By that, man is committed to perceive that the Christ is the Creator, and not created; And although, for our sake He got united to a created body with a rational soul; yet he is worshipped by all creation for being God<sup>3</sup>.

- ❖ About what “*throne of grace*” (Hebrew 4: 16) is he speaking?... That royal throne, about which it is written: “*The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’*” (1).

What does the apostle Paul mean by saying: “*Let us therefore come boldly*” (Hebrew 4: 16)? We come boldly because we have a High Priest without sin, challenging the world, saying: “*I have overcome the world*” (John 16: 33); By which the apostle means that, although He, being a Man, suffers everything, yet He is pure of sins. Although we are all under sin, yet our High Priest is without sin<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Lactantius: *The Divine Institutes* 4: 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Matt* 71: 2.

<sup>3</sup> *On the Epistle to the Hebrews. 1: 6.*

<sup>4</sup> *On the Epistle to the Hebrews. 7: 6.*

❖ The psalmist prophesied beforehand what the Lord Christ will say on the cross, “My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?” (Psalm 22: 1) ... He described His burial, saying: “*I am counted with those who go down to the pit ... adrift among the dead*” (Psalm 88: 4-5)... About His resurrection he said: “*For You will not leave My soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption*” (Psalm 16: 10)... About His ascension he said: “*God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet*” (Psalm 47: 5)... And about the sitting on the right hand of God (the Father), he said: “***The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool***” (Psalm 110: 1).

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool*” (1), For His sitting at the right hand does not cancel making His enemies His footstool. Or as the apostle says: “*For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet*” (1 Corinthians 15: 25)..As, even when they are put under His feet, He will not stop reigning. But it is understood that he will reign eternally, and they will perpetually remain under His feet<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ It would be impossible for the human mind to perceive the fellowship and the equality between God the Father and His only begotten Son, But this was uttered by the prophet David by an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as said by our Lord in the holy gospel.

Saying: “***The Lord said to my Lord***”, refers to the equality of the Father and the son in the Godhead; while the sitting at the right hand refers to that His reign is well-established, and perpetual; And the right hand refers to honor and reverence.

❖ Saying “***The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at My right hand***”, refers to the fact that the Son did not take that honor and sitting by force, but, according to the apostle: “*Being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men; And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*” (Philippians 2: 6-8).

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on the Mount 1: 11: 30.

The Son was not downward then was arose up, nor has taken an honor which was not His in the first place; But while still in the bosoms of His Father, He humbled Himself; And after His passion, death, and resurrection, He took glory and honor, that were perpetually in Him as God; according to His own words: “*Now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was*” (John 17: 5). “*Sit at My right hand*” was said to Him by the Father after His incarnation.

Saying: The Son sat at the right hand of the Father, means that He, in His incarnation, was worshipped by the creation in an integral way; For we do not worship the Godhead of the Son, separately from our worship of His Manhood; But we worship the incarnate Son in His wholeness.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## 2- THE, MESSIAH, THE KING:

Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the King, and the Priest, at the same time; something that would never be realized if the king is from the tribe of Judah, and the priest is from the tribe of Levi; as none could have the two roles, or the two titles together. Our Christ reigns as the King of kings, through His exalted priestly love.

***“The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies” (2)***

❖ The psalmist did not say: {Kill Your enemies}, but “***Rule in the midst of Your enemies***”; Namely, Let Your enemies, who were strangers, become Your friends ... Be their Lord, and rule in their midst<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ His rod of strength out of Zion, is the preaching of the holy gospel that started from Zion, then spread all over the world. ... As the ‘rod’ is the sign of reign, The preaching of the gospel became the sign of the reign of Christ.

And because the apostles, preaching the gospel, as though with an iron rod, have destroyed the idols, and their temples, like earthen vessels.

And the honorable cross is also called ‘A rod of strength’; For, as the rod of Moses performed signs, saved the Israelites, and destroyed their enemies, So is the cross of our Lord, through performing great

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 36 on Ps. 109 (110).

wonders, saves the people of God, and destroys His enemies. That honorable cross, together with the preaching of the gospel, are sent by the Lord – the Holy Spirit.

By “*His enemies*” he refers to the idol worshippers, as well as to those who believed among the circumcised.

Behold, the prophet openly refers to the Holy Trinity, equal in essence and Godhead. For by saying: “*The Lord said to my Lord*”, he refers to the Father and the Son; and by saying: “*The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength*”, He refers to the Holy Spirit, the wonder-Maker, and the Giver of the rod of strength to the apostles, by which they could strike the heads of the adversaries, and instruct the believers.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ “*Rule in the midst of Your enemies*”. “*Rule*”; in the midst of the heathens, the Jews, the heretics, and the false brethren; We would not understand this verse in a perfect way, if we do not see that it was actually realized<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The Father says to His Son: “*Rule in the midst of Your enemies*” (2). It was their own evil, and not the will of Christ, that made them enemies. Here, we find a great gift from the Lord. Previously, the spiritual evil (Ephesians 6: 12), has been generally used to make our necks bow under the yoke of captivity; that even David wrote, in a certain way about the hands of those who conquered him., saying: “*The plowers plowed on my back*” (Psalm 129: 3). Now, the spiritual evil submitted to the conquest of Christ, and to His hands; that the evil that causes the bitterness of captivity, became subject forever in the behavior and works<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

***“Your people will offer themselves willingly in the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, you have the dew of your youth” (3)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “*You shall have the authority (the initiation) in the day of your power, in the splendor of saints, from the womb before the star of the morning*”

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 110 (109).

<sup>2</sup> The Patriarchs, 4: 17.

According to **St. Jerome**, the day of His power is the day of His crucifixion, when He poured His splendor on His saints. ... When He said:

*“Father, into Your hands, I commend My Spirit”* (Luke 23: 46), He uttered those words as a Man; Yet, He did not say them out of weakness, For He is One with the Father; He is the beginning, the same as the Father. He opens the door for His saints, that when they seek from Him, they will get, and be in splendor.

**St. Jerome** says: [The view that ‘He gets, in order to give’ should not offend anyone; for it is just an expression that suits the Manhood of the Son;

Having taken the body of man, he had to talk the language of man; The incarnate Christ, is Man, a true Man ... Anyway, if the weakness of the body offends you; If the cross, the wounds, the scourges, and all the troubles of the cross, offend you, You should go back to the beginning, to His divine eternal birth, then you will not be offended. For the father, who did not take a human body, says about the Son: “From the womb, before the star of the morning, I gave birth to You” ... He says that in a human way; ... Though He has no womb, but He cannot refer to His Fatherhood in any other way, without the use of a human language. ... *“From the womb”*, namely, from My Being, My Nature, My Essence; from the Essence of My Godhead. Everything concerning the Godhead of the Father is for the Son whom He has begat<sup>1</sup>]

Saying: *“Before the star of the morning”*, the psalmist means to say, ‘before the creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars’, the true Light was born’. In another psalm he says: *“By Your light, we see light”* (Psalm 36: 9). This oracle is addressed to the Father: [Oh Father, in the light of the Son, we see the light – the Holy Spirit<sup>2</sup>].

According to **St. Augustine**: To those who asked Him: ‘Who are You?’. Jesus answered: *“I am from the beginning”*” (See John 8: 25). And as the Father is also ‘from the beginning’, from whom the only begotten Son is born, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1: 1). ... What then. If both the Father and the Son are from the beginning, Are there two beginnings? Far from it! ... As the Father is God, and the Son, as well, is God, both the Father and the Son are from one beginning.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 36 on Ps. 109 (110).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 36 on Ps. 109 (110).

- ❖ What does he mean by saying: “*In the splendor of the saints*”? ...not the splendor while the saints are still carrying their earthly bodies, and groaning in a mortal corruptible bodies.

“*From the womb, before the star of the morning, I have begotten You*”. The ‘womb’ and the ‘bosom’ refer to a secret place. “From the womb”, from what is secret, from what is hidden, from My being, My Essence, That is what the ‘womb’ means; for “*Who will declare His generation?*” (See Isaiah 53: 8). That is what we should understand from the saying of the father to the Son: “From the womb before the star of the morning, I have begotten You” ... What then is the meaning of “Before the star of the morning?” ... This expression could be taken according to the literal and the symbolic meaning. According to the literal meaning, it was actually realized, for the Lord was born by the virgin St. Mary at night, according to the testimony of the shepherds who saw His star while in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night” (Luke 2: 7-8) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Christ, the Sun of the resurrection, was born before the morning star; and with Him, the ray of life was granted. I wish therefore, no one despise the word, lest he would unintentionally despise himself<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

- ❖ See that unique birth which took place “Before the morning star”; before the creation of anything, even before the angels. For, “*All things were made through Him*” (John 1: 3) <sup>3</sup>.

(Father Caesarius of Arle)

- ❖ It is obvious that the Holy Book that knows more than anyone, concerning the nature of everything, says through Moses: “*In the beginning, God created the heaven and earth*” (Genesis 1: 1). But, as far as the Son is concerned, the prophet David says on the tongue of the Father: “*From the womb, before the morning star I gave birth to You*”; And, “*You are My Son; Today I have begotten You*” (Psalm 2: 7) <sup>4</sup>.

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- ❖ “*the day of His power*”, is said about the day of His crucifixion, when He quaked the earth, darkened the sun, opened the graves, split

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 110 (109).

<sup>2</sup> Exhort. To Heathen, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 142: 6.

<sup>4</sup> Defence of the Nicene Definition, 3: 13.

the rocks, broke down the everlasting gates of Hades, and set the captives free.

- ❖ ***“The day of His power”***, is also said about the day of judgment, when He comes in the glory of His Father, and proclaim His might to all. On that day, the authority will be His, namely, the cross He carried on His shoulders, as said by the prophet Isaiah, and as also said by Him:

*“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven”* (Matthew 24: 30); and then the saints will be in honor and splendor, shining like the sun.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

### **3- THE MESSIAH, THE PRIEST:**

*“The Lord has sworn, and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek”* (4)

- ❖ ***“The Lord has sworn”***; He presented a holy promise, not to Him who was born before the morning star, but to Him who was born from a virgin after the morning star: *You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek*. This verse was interpreted by the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews; about Melchizedek who has neither a father nor a mother (See Hebrew 7); According to all the church scholars, He has no father, concerning the flesh; and has no mother, being God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ How would God swear, He who forbids men to swear (Mathew 5: 34)? ... Because through the common habit of swearing, man is prone to break his vow, and his vow may be truth or vanity, he was forbidden by God to swear...Whereas God, when He swears, He would never break His vow<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ The sacrifice, offered nowadays by the Christians all over the world, which appeared a long time after that event (The offering of the sacrifice of Melchizedek), is said by the prophet to be realized in Christ, who comes in the flesh: *“You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek”* (4); in other words, not according to the order of Aaron; which had to come to an end, once the things referred to through the shadows, shine.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 36 on Ps. 109 (110).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 110 (109).

❖ Oh Pharisee ... If you are indeed a scholar in the holy Scriptures inspired by God, and has knowledge of the oracles and the prophecies of the saintly prophets, you would remember how the blessed David said by the Spirit about the Christ, Savior of the world: *“The Lord has sworn, and will not relent: ‘You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek’”* (4). ... Now, tell me: Was there any Pharisee, or a scribe, who ministered to the Lord according to the order of Melchizedek; He who blessed Abraham, and received tithes from him? ... and about whom the wise and blessed apostle Paul also wrote, saying: *“Beyond all contradiction, the lesser is blessed by the better”* (Hebrew 7: 7)... Therefore, Abraham, the father of fathers, the origin and the beginning of Israel, was blessed by the Priesthood of Melchizedek, whose Person and Priesthood refer to Christ our Savior, who became our High Priest, and the Apostle of our confession, who presents to God the Father, those who believe in Him, not through bloody sacrifices, and offerings of incense, but by consummating them to holiness through a ministry higher than the law; ... For *“We have such a High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens”* (Hebrew 8: 1) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

❖ Concerning Him, the Lord swears, saying: *“You are a priest forever”*; He truly said *“forever”*, for all the other priests are temporary, and all of them are subject to sin; Whereas He has an eternal Priesthood;, and without sin;... All are subject to death; Whereas He is living forever. For, how could He perish He who is able to save the others<sup>2</sup>?

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ How could Melchizedek be called *“The High Priest of God”*?; If, before the Levite priesthood, there had been no Levites to offer sacrifices<sup>3</sup>?

**(The scholar Tertullian)**

❖ This Priesthood will endure forever, and will never go away like the priesthood of Aaron, whose altar, was designated by God in one place in the world; And once that place was no more, and the altar was no more, their priesthood came to an end; and the people lost the offering and the forgiveness. ... The Priesthood of Christ, on the

<sup>1</sup> Comm.. on Luke, homily 132. ترجمة د. نصحي عبد الشهيد.

<sup>2</sup> Flight from the world, 3: 16.

<sup>3</sup> An Answer to the Jews, 2.

other hand, with bread and wine, according to the order of Melchizedek, and with an altar spread all over the world, will endure forever; And Christ the High Priest, is truly the King of Righteousness, and the King of Peace<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)**

- ❖ “After the return of Abraham from the defeat of his enemies (Genesis 14: 17), he was received by Melchizedek, the Priest of God Most High, with bread and wine; a banquet that portrayed beforehand, the secret banquet we enjoy nowadays. That Priest has been a symbol and an image of the Christ the true Priest of God Most High; About whom the prophet David says: *“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”* (4); And the bread and wine of that offering, were an image of the pure bloodless sacrifice, about which the Lord spoke on the tongue of the prophet, saying that it will be offered to Him *“from the rising of the sun, even to its going down”* (Malachi 1: 11)<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father John of Damascus)**

- ❖ Again, it is written in the Book of Genesis 14: 18: *“And king Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High; He blessed Abraham”* ...As to Melchizedek, being a symbol of Christ, the Holy Spirit proclaims in the book of psalms, a vow by God the Father to His divine Son, saying: *“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”* (4).

This rite referred to, is certainly drawn from that old sacrifice ... For who was Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, who offered bread and wine, and blessed Abraham, but a true symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ; who delivered Himself a sacrifice to God the Father; ... He offered what Melchizedek has offered; namely bread and wine; His body and precious blood.

The blessing that was given to Abraham, continued in the Christians. For, if *“Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness”* (Genesis 15: 6), Everyone who believes in God, and lives by faith, God will reckon it to him as righteousness.... ; and will be justified and blessed in the faith of Abraham; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness”* (Galatians 3: 6). ... Now, you who believe, will be reckoned as children of Abraham; As the Holy Book has

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<sup>1</sup> تفسير تك 14 : 1-24.

<sup>2</sup> الأرشمندريت أدريانوس شكور: المائة مقالة في الإيمان الأرثوذكسي للقديس يوحنا الدمشقي، مقال 86.

previously proclaimed that the Gentiles will be justified by faith (Galatians 3); and God has promised Abraham that “*in him, all the families of the earth will be blessed*” (Genesis 11: 3).

Therefore, the blessing given to Abraham by the priest Melchizedek, mentioned in the Book of Genesis, has been proclaimed as a portrait of the offering of Christ, of bread and wine, practiced, and consummated by the Lord Himself at the last supper, when He offered His disciples bread, and mixed wine and water.

- ❖ Who is the Priest of God Most High, more than our Lord Jesus Christ, who delivered Himself to God the Father a sacrifice, the same as that offered by Melchizedek, of bread and wine; namely, His body and blood<sup>1</sup>?

**(Cyprian, the martyr)**

- ❖ They rejected<sup>2</sup> the trumpet of Isaiah that declared the pure conception (Isaiah 7: 14).

They muted the harp of the psalms that sang about His priesthood (Psalm 110: 4)

They silenced the guitar of the spirit that sang about His kingdom (Psalm 110: 4)

And under huge silence, they shut up the news of the great birth that led the heavenly and the earthly creatures to cry out: [Blessed be Him who shined out of the utter silence<sup>3</sup>].

**(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)**

St. John the beloved saw Him clothed with the garment of priesthood, down to the feet, and girded about the chest (breasts) with a golden band (Revelation 1: 13)... According to St. Victorianus: [What is this garment of eternal priesthood but His body risen, uncorrupted, from the dead?

And what are His (breasts) but the knowledge, and of the pure spiritual knowledge, thumbing with life, granted to the churches<sup>4</sup>?] ...

#### **4- THE MESSIAH, THE JUDGE:**

***“The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath” (5)***

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<sup>1</sup> Letters 63: 4.

<sup>2</sup> أي ، الشعب اليهودي.

<sup>3</sup> Ephraim the Syrian: *HYMNS, The Classics of Western Spirituality*, translated by Kathleen E. McVey, 24: 14.

<sup>4</sup>Victorianus of Petovium (d. c. 4304) *Comm. On Revelation, 1: 4.*

Commenting on this verse, **St. Jerome** says: *“The devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to Him: ‘All this authority I will give You, and their glory, for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish;’ (Luke 4: 5, 6); .... ‘He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath’*

❖ The psalm starts by saying: *“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand’*”; and now he says: *“The Lord is at Your right hand”*. If the Son is sitting at the right hand of the Father, How does the psalmist say now that the Father sits at the right hand of the Son? ... This I say to confirm clearly that the Son is equal to the Father<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Those “kings”, He wounded by His glory; by the weight of His name, He made them weak, with no strength to realize what they desired. They strived with their whole strength to wipe out the Christianity from the earth; but in vain, because: *“Whoever falls on this stone will be broken, but on whoever it falls, it will grind him to powder”*<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ By saying *“The Lord is at Your right hand”*, this shows that the “right hand” mentioned in verse (1) was not a location; For, if the Son is at the right hand of the Father, how could the Father now, be at the right hand of the Son? ... The former “right hand” therefore refers to the fatherly honor; whereas the later “right hand” means company.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“He shall judge among the nations. He shall fill the places with dead bodies. He shall execute the heads of many countries” (6)*

Commenting on executing kings, judging nations, and the multitudes of bodies filling the place, **St. Jerome** says that in the cross, those who did not believe the apostles were offended; and as Simon the elder said: *“This child (Jesus) is destined for the for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be opposed” (Luke 2: 34).*

❖ He shall crush the heads of the nonbelievers, and the falterers, whose faith is not perfect; He shall execute heads in (many); For if he said ‘in all countries’, we would have no hope<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 36 on Ps. 109 (110)

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 110 (109).

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❖ Wherever you are, O who oppose Christ, you are rising up like a tower that is definitely destined to fall. It would be better for you to be humble; to cast yourself at the feet of Him who sits at the right hand of the Father, to build the ruins in you. ... For if you persist on your evil rising up, you will be cast down, and will never be built up; as it is written: *“He shall destroy them and not build them up”* (Psalm 28: 5). .. I dare say, O brethren, that it is better for you, to walk here with wounded heads, than to be with heads destined to fall under a verdict of eternal death<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“He shall drink of the brook by the wayside. Therefore He shall lift up the head”* (7)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: *“By the wayside, He drinks the water of the valley; Hence He shall lift up the head”*

According to **Josabius of Caesaria**<sup>2</sup>: [The brook or the river of which the Lord Christ drinks is the temptation of passion through which He passed; As He said to the Father: *“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, having drunk that cup in obedience even to death, He lifted His head up; And as said by the apostle Paul: *“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name”* (Philippians 2: 9).

❖ *“He shall drink of a brook by the wayside”* (7). Let us see what is “the way”, then see what is the “brook” (or the flood drain by the way side). “The way” is the way of this world, the way through which He walked ... He came to this world, walked along our way, and drank of the (flood drain) in this world. Those flood drains collecting water from rain, storms, and tempests, and not water of the springs, are not found on the tops of the mountains, but down in the valleys, and low places; and their water is not pure, but muddy and loaded with mire; So are the water of this world, always turbid and filled with temptations.

Do you wish to know how it is said that He drinks of such disturbed water?

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 110 (109).*

<sup>2</sup> *Proof of the Gospel, 5: 3.*

The Lord Himself said: “*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful*” (Matthew 26: 38); And the Evangelist says: “*He began to be sorrowful and deeply depressed*” (Matthew 26: 37).

Our Lord, therefore drank of the water of the flood drains of this world, the water of sorrow, in which there is no joy. He filled His cup of this muddy water; That is why He prayed, saying: “*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me*” (Matthew 26: 39). He drank of this muddy water, not in his house, but “*by the wayside*”, on His way to some other place... Now, if the Lord drinks of the water of this world, how it would be for His faithful ministers?

He who is the Head of all, lifted up His head, and not His soul, for He is always upright.

He lifted up our heads, we who were bowed down and unable to look up to heaven, but only down to earth. Do you want a proof that He lifts up the head of man? Remember when he loosed a woman whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way rise herself up (Luke 13: 10-17). He lifted the head of that woman who lived her whole life bowed to the ground, and she worshipped Him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ It is said “**flood drain**” about the brook filled with temptations and tribulations’ And “the way” about the present age through which we pass. Saying that the Christ had to drink from the “flood drain”, the psalmist means that He had to go through tribulations; As the apostle also says: “*For that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted*” (Hebrew 2: 18). Yet, after passing through the test, He lifts up the head; namely, that men would know that He is the King over all.

Our Lord drank of the “flood drain”, of the cup of death, when He was passing through the way of this world; Then He lifted up the head, namely, His glory and majesty.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 36 on Ps. 109 (110).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 110**

**LET ME ACQUIRE YOU**

**O MY LORD, MY KING, MY INTERCESSOR, AND MY  
CROWN**

- ❖ By the spirit of prophecy, the prophet David's soul exulted when he saw Your secrets;  
He desired to acquire You;  
For with You, he seeks nothing on earth.
- ❖ Seeing You, his Lord, sitting at the right hand of the Father;  
The gate of hope in heaven opened up before him.  
You alone, can reconcile the Father with humanity;  
Not by mere talk, but by the giving love;  
Your sitting at the right hand of the Father, and the sitting of the Father at Your right hand,  
Draw my insight, and even my whole being;  
You are the head of the church, O Power of the Mighty Father;  
What else would we need, when You sit in the midst of Your church?  
And, at the same time, You sit at the right hand of the Father?
- ❖ My father Abraham bowed before Melchizedek, Your symbol;  
He presented tithes to Him, when he felt Your greatness in Him;  
You are the heavenly High Priest;  
You alone, are without sin;  
Acquiring You, and being clothed by You, we carry your righteousness;  
Intercede by Your precious blood, to forgive all our sins;  
And to grant us the fellowship of Your glories.
- ❖ The rod of Your kingdom, O King of kings, destroys the power of the enemy;  
The devil has no more place in our hearts;  
Having fallen down from heaven like lightning;  
We came to have the authority to trample over all his tricks, deceptions, and lies  
The enemy is exposed by the power of Your cross;  
And has no reputation, being weak and helpless;  
You have set us kings, O King of kings;  
Grant us to live by the heavenly royal spirit.
- ❖ You are the judge of the whole earth;

Before You, the devil paraded all the kingdoms of the world in one moment;  
With the false assumption that he will rein on them forever;  
He claimed that he can grant them to whom he chooses;  
In his ignorance, he counted You as seeking the world;  
When You are the Rich who chose to be poor;  
To make His believers rich by the heavenly glory;  
You came down to our earth;  
And walked along the way of thorns and temptations;  
You drank the water of our sorrow;  
To present Yourself to us, the true Way;  
To carry us in You, and to bring us forth into the bosom of Your Father;  
To gush in us the water of the living Spirit;  
To water us from the fountains of Your love;  
To satisfy us with the bread that comes down from heaven;  
What else would we seek, O our Lord, our King, our heavenly Priest, the Judge of the whole earth?!

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## **PSALM 111**

# **THE FEAR OF GOD IS THE WAY TO KNOWLEDGE**

As psalm (110) concerns the ascension of the Lord of Glory Jesus Christ, and His sitting at the right hand of God the Father; it is followed by a group of psalms, called 'the Alleluias' (Psalms 111 to 118), which are, generally, although short psalms, yet they are full of vitality, capable of lifting the soul up high, of pouring on it the spirit of hope or optimism, and of drawing man's insight away from himself, to exult in the glory of the Lord, in the greatness of His exalted works, and in His amazing care.

This psalm is one of the alphabetical psalms, in which each sentence starts with a Hebrew letter, in alphabetical order.

Some believe that this psalm, and many of the following ones, were used in the celebration of the Passover. It was interpreted by St. Augustine, as a symbol of the Christian Passover.

The psalmist presents to us, by the spirit of praise, practical steps, to enjoy, and grow in knowledge, which everyone, even a small child, desires to have, and in which he would be happy to grow.

**1- Knowledge and collective worship**

**2- Knowledge and meditation in the works of the Lord** 2 - 6

**3- Knowledge and the Word of God** 7 - 9

**4- Knowledge and the fear of God** 10

### **1- KNOWLEDGE AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:**

Praising the Lord, with his heart, burning with fire, the psalmist certainly reacts with his people, supports, and is supported by them. For the believer has his activity in the life of his brethren; and the congregation have their activity in his life.

Having pleasure in the holy congregation, worshipping Him with the spirit of love, fear, and thanksgiving, God would grant them the understanding and knowledge, with the spirit of humility, and not that of pride and boasting.

***"I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation"*** (1)

As praise and thanksgiving come forth from the heart of the psalmist, he calls the people of God to join him in this angelic deed.

What is the assembly of the upright, and who are their congregation, but those who fear God, and never cease to give Him thanks, even in the midst of afflictions.

❖ Unless David is faithful and simple-hearted, he would not say: “*I will praise the Lord with my whole heart*”, but would only say: ‘... with my lips’<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ “*I (confess) to You, O Lord, with my whole heart*”. “*With my whole heart*”, he means with longing and zeal, free of the worries of, and the preoccupations with this world; with the soul lifted up high, free of the bonds of the flesh.

“*With my whole heart*”, and not just with the words, the tongue, the mouth, and even with the mind.

This is the way set by Moses in the law: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your (mind)*”(Deuteronomy 6: 5)

Here, I believe that “confession” (or praise) means “thanksgiving”. The psalmist spent his whole life heading toward this goal, he started and ended by it. At all times, he kept giving thanks to God for the sake of His goodness toward him and others.

God seeks nothing more than such a sacrifice, and such an offering, as a sign of a soul that appreciates His favors; and it is actually a slap on the face of the devil.

A sign of a sound tendency of thanksgiving, is to present it to God during times of affliction and difficulties<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*I (confess) to You, O Lord, with my whole heart*”.” Confession” is not only of sins, but implies praise to God, in the piety of confession: The former is done with remorse and sorrow, and the later with joy; The former reveals the wound to the Physician, and the later expresses gratitude to Him, for the sake of being healed; “Confession” not only means that the person concerned is set free of all evil, but that he will separate himself from every evil situation<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 37 on Ps. 110 (111).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 111.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 111 (110).

❖ How horrible and deadly is that venom of the enemy, which would blind many, and would cast them down all of a sudden. For it, so inspires a false and a destructive impression to the soul, that it has perceived things, imperceptible by most people; and that it is superior in fasting, and in many other heroic issues; That it would tend to forget all about its own sins and faults; would, no more, address to God the healing words: “*Against You, You only, have I sinned*” (Psalm 51: 4); and, “*I praise the Lord with my whole heart*” (1); But would say what Satan said in his heart: “*I will exalt my throne above the stars of God*” (Isaiah 14: 13). Man’s soul would be deceived and perish by the desire to have authority, high positions, gifts of learning and healing; and would be afflicted by a wound difficult to heal.

(St. Mother Senkletiky)

## 2- KNOWLEDGE AND MEDITATION IN THE WORKS OF GOD:

The great and amazing works of God proclaim the secrets of His love, wisdom, and might. Admiring God’s creation, it is befitting of us to attach ourselves to the whole loving and merciful Creator.

: “*The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who delight in them*” (2)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “*Great are the works of God, all are well searched*”.

What are the works of God that delight the believers? ... His beautiful creation, exalted care, and rich grace. The believers would stand in awe before God’s wisdom, compassion, and might, for He is the Almighty Creator, and the all-loving Father.

The great and amazing works of God, would bring forth the spirit of hope to the people to enjoy the salvation of God.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the psalmist, here, says that all creatures proclaim the wisdom of God; and that He often dispenses wonders and signs for the sake of mankind. He commands fire, hail, snow, tempests (See psalm 104: 19-20) , not only to consummate what they are created to do, according to the nature given to them, but He even command them to do what contradict it; As for example:

He commanded the sea, not only to refrain from drowning anyone, but to split open, to allow the children of Israel to pass through, more securely than walking on dry ground (Exodus 14: 21-22).

He commanded the furnace, not only to refrain from burning the three saintly young men, but to turn for them into mild dew (Daniel 3: 50).

He commanded the fierce lions, not only to refrain from devouring ‘Daniel’, but to stand guard on him (Daniel 6: 22)

He commanded the great fish, not only to refrain from devouring ‘Jonah’, but to give him a safe ride to his destination (Jonah !: 17; 2: 10).

He commanded the well-established earth, to split open to swallow the company of ‘Dathan’ and ‘Abiram’, who rebelled against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16: 31-32)<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom** confirms that God, the Creator, out of His care for us, would let His creation work according to the nature He created them, and to respect its laws; But, at His discretion, and in certain situations, He would command them to work contrary to their nature.

***“His work is honorable and gracious, and His righteousness endures forever” (3)***

Caring for everything, big and small, even the hair of our heads are counted by Him; He lets touches of His might and splendor, be apparent on every work; and His dealings reveal His divine righteousness, that endures forever.

According to **St. Augustine**, God’s work, full of majesty and splendor, is *“justifying the ungodly”* (Romans 4:5): [Man’s actions may, oftentimes, hinder this glorious work of God; but, through confessing his sins, he may be qualified to be justified ... *“Much is forgiven to him who loves much”* (See Luke 7: 42-48); and *“Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more”* (Romans 5: 20). And lest man may think himself worthy to be justified by his own works; the blessed apostle Paul says: *“Not of works, lest anyone should boast; for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works”* (Ephesians 2: 9-10)<sup>2</sup>].

❖ ***“His righteousness endures forever”***. He means to say: [Do not despair, O man, however oppressed you may be, for you will get the reward of your labor, even after your departure from this world. ... And you, as well, who do evil, do not rejoice, even if your life may end peacefully; for you will have to present a complete account of

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 111.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 111 (110).*

your deeds, and will have to pay back the cost of your evil works....  
God's righteousness, as you see, endures forever<sup>1</sup>].

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ As an interpretation of the verse: "***His righteousness endures forever***", St. John Chrysostom says: [In case, O man, you see the good people suffer, and the wicked rejoice, in the present world, Do not be disturbed, for "*His righteousness endures forever*", to the age of ages].

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***"He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; The Lord is gracious and full of compassion"*** (4)

All what the Mighty One does, is so wonderful, to be always remembered by the believer; But what is truly amazing, is His compassion and mercy.

- ❖ Saying: "*He has made His wonderful works to be remembered*"; means that the wonderful works He has done in the old, for the sake of the children of Israel; and has ultimately done when He came incarnate to the world, ... all will be remembered forever.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***"He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant"*** (5)

Some believe that this psalm is sung as a praise to God on the day of Passover, and that the food here, is meant to refer to the Passover itself, but the Holy Book, by the food, as well as by the manna, the bread, and the water, often means the spiritual food, and the spiritual drink.

God perpetually intends to satisfy His children, and lets them need nothing of the things of this world; and perpetually confirms His faithfulness in His promises and covenants, which He renews with His people and believers.

It is an amazing and miraculous food, about which the prophet says: "***He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and full of compassion; He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant***" (4, 5).

It is the miracle of miracles, to turn the bread and wine to His holy body and blood; a spiritual food that grants life to those who fear Him; a heavenly, immortal food; the tree of life from which the believer

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 111.

plucks living fruits, the hidden true mental manna, the medication of life, that heals the weakness and the sickness, that provides strength against the devil and sin; And at the same time, we find in it a memorandum of an eternal covenant by the Lord to provide us with life, and growth of our souls.

Our Savior said: *“I am the bread of life. Your father ate manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever, and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.... Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh, and drinks My blood has eternal life”* (John 7: 48-54).

❖ Why does He refer here “to those who fear Him”; as though He will feed no one but them; When He says in the gospel: *“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)? ... As the food to which He refers here is not the material food, but that of the soul, so he talks about those who fear Him; it only concerns them.... As you may see, the body feeds, so does the soul, as confirmed by the divine words, saying: *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4: 4; Deuteronomy 8: 3). So He refers here to that kind of food, which He gives to those who fear Him: the preaching of the word, the commandment, and all the true values<sup>1</sup>.

❖ *“He will ever be mindful of His covenant”*. .. Here, He shows that the good things which they enjoy, are not for the sake of their own worthiness, but for the sake of the love of those who preceded them; and for the sake of His covenants with them. Hence He says: *“He will ever be mindful of His covenant”*. That is what the prophet Moses warned them when they enter into the promised land, not to say that what they have reached is because of their own righteousness, but it is for the sake of the covenants with their fathers. As there is nothing worse than arrogance; God keeps on warning His people against it<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 111.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 111.

❖ “*He has given food to those who fear Him*”. He fed Elijah when he was hungry; and rained manna on the Jews in the wilderness ... And He will give us the bread that comes down from heaven, if we are worthy of it. Many are the martyrs who perished out of hunger (physically); but they are now with the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ His oracle: “*He has given food to those who fear Him*”, was realized when He commanded the ravens to bring Elijah bread and meet in the morning, and bread and meet in the evening (1 King 12: 6); and when the Lord blessed the five loaves of bread and two fish, by which He satisfied the five thousand men in the wilderness (Matthew 14: 13-21).

And He was mindful of the covenant He gave through His prophets, and consummated by His apostles, who, in turn relayed it to the Gentiles, and turned them into people of God.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ We are being fed on the body and blood of Christ.

**(The scholar Tertullian)**

❖ In the church we find the true tree of life, namely, the body and blood of Christ, about which He said: “*Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day*” (John 6: 54).

**(Abba Sevirus, Bishop of El-Ashmonin)**

❖ They are truly good things, that will endure forever, and will never change with location nor with time<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ What would be better or of more benefit, for those who fear God, than to be given by the Lord, the Compassionate and merciful, the incorruptible food, “*the bread that come down from heaven*” (John 6: 27, 51), which He gives not for our own worthiness.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“*He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations*” (6)**

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 37 on Ps. 110 (111).

<sup>2</sup> Flight from the World, 6: 35.

From the Gentiles, who worshipped the idols, instead of glorifying the Creator, He withdrew His gifts, and gave them a heritage to His believers.

The believers often experience the violence of the world against the church of God; and it so seems to them that God does not care to move to their help. Yet, in the time designated by Him, He declares to them the power of His works, and gives them the heritage of the nations. That is what the early church has actually experienced, when Saul of Tarsus kept on persecuting her by every means and everywhere; But the Lord Jesus Christ, in the designated time, turned the destructive energies of Saul into a power to work and to minister to the account of the church of Christ.

### **3- KNOWLEDGE AND THE WORD OF GOD:**

God talks to us through nature, the work of His hand, or through His Word or His commandment, as though from the same source. ... There is a great difference between the theories of the scientists, that appear and disappear, to be replaced by new theories, and the Word of God that endures forever.

*“The works of His hands are faithful and just; All His precepts are trustworthy” (7)*

God never errs in His plan; His commandments, faithful and just, reveal to us His holy will, and lead all our thoughts, intentions, words, and behavior. His commands are never contradictory, nor without goal, but always faithful and trustworthy.

Commenting on the words: *“All His precepts are trustworthy”*, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Some may think of God’s commandments as carrying mere words, whether concerning rewards or punishments in the life to come. But the great flood which happened in the day of Noah, the destruction by fire of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the perdition by drowning of Pharaoh, all confirm that the commandments of God are trustworthy, and are not mere threats].

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, God’s commandments are trustworthy, those which He provided through the natural law (Romans 2: 14), about which the apostle Paul says: *“For I delight in the law of God, accord to the inward man”* (Romans 7: 22); and the written law as well, the old law which He consummated in the new covenant. That is beside the natural laws that control the whole creation.

❖ Everything that God intends to stay, will definitely stay, and will never fail; Man can do nothing without the allowance of God.

- ❖ The laws of God will remain with more splendor than the sun, for the benefit of those for whose sake they were set; will lead them to virtue, and not to vanity; namely, riches, and the love of authority. God’s things are all truth, by which He instructs men , not to be rich, or to succeed in projects, but to how they would enjoy the coming things. Those laws are all true and upright, and are never twisted or distorted<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Having referred to the power of His works, here he also refers to His Righteousness and authority ... He deals with everything with both righteousness and compassion; For, if He does it only with righteousness (justice), everything would be lost, as it is written: “*Do not enter into judgment with Your servant; For, in Your sight no one living is righteous*” (Psalm 143: 2). On another aspect, if He does only with compassion, the majority of people would become slothful. That is why He uses two different ways to save and reform mankind<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness” (8)***

Many and changeable are the laws of men, and are often contradictory; Whereas the commandments and the laws of God, being the unchangeable divine truth, in harmony, upright, and eternal, they are well established, and perpetually grant comfort and security.

***“He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name” (9)***

The mind of the whole loving God is only preoccupied with the redemption of His people, whatever the cost may be. He saved them from the bondage of Pharaoh; liberated them from the Babylonian captivity; and all along the eras, He kept listening to their cry-outs, and sending them help. All those dealings were a shadow of the eternal salvation He realized through sending His only begotten Son to carry the sins of the whole world on the cross.

The Holy, Awesome God has many titles that are short of revealing His whole unutterable, and indescribable nature. He flows with His features upon us, to become, in and by Him, saints, and to enjoy His awe and splendor in us.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 111.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 111.

❖ **“Holy and awesome is His name”**. As His name is “Holy”, praising Him requires holy and pure mouths<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ **“Holy and awesome is His name”**. He is holy for the saints, and terrifying to the sinners<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The redemption sent by God to His people is his beloved Son, crucified for our sake ... About this, Zechariah the priest, father of St. John the Baptist, said: *“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people”* (Luke 1: 68). He counseled us to keep His covenant, namely His statutes, to the end of time; which, if we faithfully do, we will get a non-mortal heritage.

**“Holy and awesome is His name”**. Holy for the saints, and terrifying to the sinners. For, by this name, the apostles drove the demons away, healed the sick, raised the dead, and performed wonders.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

#### **4- KNOWLEDGE AND THE FEAR OF GOD:**

As long as we search for, and abide in the divine truth, the divine fear, and the submission with the spirit of obedience and humility, will prepare our souls for the recognition of, and walking in, the truth; and *“the truth shall make us free”* (John 8: 31-32)

***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever” (10)***

The true wisdom will have no place in man, unless he enjoys the fear of God. Fearing Him, the believers practice wisdom. Wisdom exhort us to walk along the way of our salvation, to enjoy the blessed life, and to have exultant depths, praising God forever.

❖ There is no wisdom in those who do not fear the Lord; Those without wisdom, are those who have no fear of God<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ Here he calls wisdom ‘work’. This ‘work’ is the fear of God, that paves the way to wisdom. But, if the law leads to the fear of God, the knowledge of the law is therefore, the beginning of wisdom. Man

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 37 on Ps. 110 (111).

<sup>3</sup> Homily 37 on Ps. 110 (111).

would never be wise without a law; Those who despise the law are unwise, and are consequently counted as wicked, as it is written: “*the fear of the lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction*” (Proverbs 1: 7)<sup>1</sup>

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

- ❖ “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*”. “*the beginning?*” means the (fountain), the (source), or the (foundation) ... He who fears God, is full of wisdom and reason. And lest someone may assume that the essence of wisdom is not more than knowledge, he adds: “*A good understanding have all those who do His commandment*”. So you see that faith is not enough, unless it is bound with the way of life. He refers to wisdom, not by mere talk, but by work ... What is required is not just to listen to wisdom, but to practice it as well<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ In few words, That is how we can ascend up to the highest level of perfection, without much effort or difficulty: The fear of God, according to the Holy Book, is the beginning of our salvation, and the beginning of wisdom. From the fear of God, will come the good remorse of the heart; ... From the remorse of the heart will come the self-satisfaction, namely, despise of all possessions; .... Then, humility; ... then bringing lusts to death; ... then the retreat of faults; ... then the setting forth and the growth of virtues; ... then the acquirement of the purity of heart; that leads to the acquirement of the perfection of the apostolic love<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Cassian)**

- ❖ He who acquires the fear of God, even if he is ignorant of everything else, he will be granted the knowledge of God and the divine truth; and will acquire the perfect and consummate wisdom<sup>4</sup>.

**(The scholar Tertullian)**

- ❖ The fear of God, itself, leads to all virtues.

**(Father Dorotheos of Gazza)**

- ❖ The prophet says “the wisdom”, and not the knowledge of creatures; but the knowledge of God, that begins with fearing Him, and ends

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<sup>1</sup> *Stromata* 2: 7.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 111*.

<sup>3</sup> *The Institutes*, 4: 43.

<sup>4</sup> *Ad Nationes*, 2.

with loving Him. Understanding this knowledge is good, not for those who know it, but to those who practice it, with what conform to it.

And as God is immortal, praising Him will never weaken, but will endure forever.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5: 3). In the Holy Book we read that the labor for the sake of temporal things is *“all vanity”*, and will lead to the ‘presumption of the spirit’<sup>1</sup>; which implies rudeness, pride, and arrogance. The proud is said to be haughty in spirit; which is true, as the violent wind is called ‘spirit of tempest’. The proud is called ‘puffed-up’, according to the words of the apostle: *“Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies”* (1 Corinthians 8: 1). Whereas the *“poor in spirit”* are the humble, who fear God, and have no puffed-up spirit.

Blessings would not have a better beginning, as long as they are set for reaching the high wisdom *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”* (10); And on another aspect: *“Pride is the first of sins”* (Wisdom of Joshua 10: 15).

Let the proud, therefore, love and search for the earthly kingdoms; But *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God”* (Matthew 5: 3)<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Notice how the teacher descends from wisdom to the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11: 2-3). But you, the learners, if you seek progress, you are committed to ascend from the fear of the Lord to wisdom, according to what is written: *“The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom”*<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Whoever abides in this perfect love, will certainly go up to a higher level, namely, **to the fear, emerging from love; which is not the fear of punishment**, or of loss of the reward, but it is that kind of fear that emerges from the great love. For who is the son, in his love for his compassionate father, would not fear him (or between brothers, friends, or spouses). Yet that would not be fear of harm, but a caution against wounding the feelings of love; one partner would be cautious lest any word or behavior on his part would have a harmful impact upon their mutual love<sup>4</sup>. The greatness of such a kind of fear is

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<sup>1</sup> حسب طبعة رومية، أما طبعة بيروت "الكل باطل وقبض الريح"

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon on Mount, 1: 1: 3.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 119: 2.*

<sup>4</sup> الترجمة الحرفية لما ورد في النص (إش 23: 6).

elaborately expressed by a prophet, saying that it is the riches of our salvation, embracing the wisdom of God and His true knowledge, that could not be kept, except through the fear of the Lord.

The divine Word on the tongue of the prophet, calls, not only the sinners, but the saints as well, saying: “*Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him*” (Psalm 34: 9). **Whoever fears God with this kind of fear, will certainly need no more perfection.**

It is obvious that this is the kind of fear meant by St. John the Evangelist, when he talked about the fear of punishment, saying that he who fears has not yet consummated in love, “*Fear involves torment*” (1 John 4: 18)<sup>1</sup>.

There is a great difference between the fear that lacks nothing; “*the treasure of wisdom and knowledge*” (Isaiah 33: 6); “*the beginning of wisdom*” (10), and the fear of punishment, which is far from the hearts of those perfect in the fullness of love; For “*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear*” (1 John 4: 18)<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Sherimon)**

❖ According to Abba Bemen, “The fear of God teaches man all the spiritual virtues”; And, “The fear of God is the beginning and the end at the same time”. For God said to Abraham who has not withheld his only son from God, “*Now I know that you fear God*” (Genesis 22: 12).

He also said: “It is impossible for him who truly believes, and who strives with the fear of God, to fall into the transgressions provoked by the devil”.

**(Paradise of the fathers)**

❖ If “*the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*” (10); the lack of wisdom, and the denial of God, are against ‘anti-wisdom’<sup>3</sup>.

**(Theodoret, bishop of Arle)**

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<sup>1</sup> الترجمة الحرفية لما ورد في النص (1 يو 4 :18).

<sup>2</sup> Cassia, Conference 11: 13.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on Ps. 14: 3.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 111  
MY SOUL PRAISES YOU, O LORD, FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR  
SALVATION**

- ❖ With every new morning I remember Your resurrection;  
As though it is new mercies;  
That instigate in me a new knowledge of the secrets of Your love;  
My depths exult;  
As though no one would exult in You like me, a sinner;  
I get together with Your people;  
And I experience the praise by a choir of heavenlies.
- ❖ I confess my sins to You;  
And I taste the power of Your works, O Forgiver of sins;  
I confess to You, giving thanks for the flow of Your compassion;  
My soul will keep on giving thanks to You;  
In the midst of affliction, Your cross transfigures, and my soul exults;  
And in the midst of joy, I see You, Grantor of conquest;  
Whenever my soul bows down to praise You;  
My depths get filled with Your knowledge;  
I know You, pouring Your splendor on me.
- ❖ Your works are great and glorious, O Almighty Philanthropic One;  
Your works testify to the greatness of Your will;  
As You “*desire all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2: 4)  
Your works testify to Your love, compassion, and righteousness;  
By Your love You embrace me, and by Your righteousness You chastise me;  
You are an amazing Father, who cares for my eternal salvation;  
Your works present to me a true knowledge.
- ❖ Your law and commandments present to me an exalted knowledge;  
Behold, Your laws move the nature for the sake of my salvation;  
You grant me the natural law in my depths;  
I have no more excuse;  
You present to me Your law and commandments;  
Your commandments are food for my soul;  
With them I am satisfied, and will never hunger for the temporal things;
- ❖ Nail Your fear in me;

That I enjoy the fountain of Your divine wisdom;  
It grants me understanding and knowledge, with an amazing  
sweetness;  
Your wisdom direct my thoughts, emotions, and feelings;  
Your wisdom controls my tongue, to utter nothing unbefitting;  
Your wisdom grants me strength;  
To walk according to the spirit, and not to the body;  
To enjoy fellowship with You;  
To get filled with Your wisdom;  
To have an ever increasing knowledge;  
To have my whole being turn into a harp;  
Its only work is a perpetual praise;  
I shall praise You as long as I live;  
And I shall praise You when my soul sets forth to You;  
My praise will become my ony preoccupation, here, and in the life to  
come.

## **PSALM 112**

# **THE FEAR OF THE LORD PREVAILS OVER ALL FEARS**

In the last psalm, the psalmist was praising God with his whole heart, whether in his secret place, or among the congregation as an exultant choir; who finds his pleasure in the perpetual enjoyment of the knowledge of God, His secrets, the living worship, the practical behavior, tasting the sweetness of the divine commandment, and the amazing salvation of God. Now, in the present psalm, the psalmist sees the man who fears the Lord, practice the blessed life with no worry, for God Himself is his support, who would never forsake him.

According to some scholars, the author of the last psalm is himself the author of this one, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the first verse of this psalm comes as a consummation of the end of the last one; as though they are one and the same psalm.

❖ In the last psalm he said: “*The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*” (Psalm 111: 10); While here, he says: “*Blessed is the man who fears the Lord*” (Psalm 112: 1). He presents a teaching concerning the fear of the Lord, in different words, yet carrying the same thought.

There, he said that he who fears God is wise; and here he says that he is blessed<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

This psalm presents to us a portrait of him who fears the Lord, who submits to His will, and who obeys Him all the way.

This psalm is one of the psalms that concern wisdom, that present a comparison between a wise man who fears the Lord, challenging all other fears, and the wicked man who has no peace. According to the prophet Isaiah: “*The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread*” (Isaiah 8: 13).

In this psalm we see him who fears the Lord, utterly exulted in His commandments (1), fears no one, and nothing (7-8). He who fears the Lord does not need to fear anything or any situation:

- a- He will not worry about his descendants.
- b- He will not worry about his household and his family.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 112.

- c- He will not fear the darkness.
- d- *“He will guide his affairs with discretion”*
- e- *“He will not be afraid of evil tidings”*
- f- He will not fear the wicked.

The wise man who fears the Lord starts with the fear that brings forth peace; and ends with the great exultation in the Lord, and practicing His commandments, in particular the practical love, and the generous giving.

❖ I often told you that all the interpretations concerning the righteous man refer to the Lord Christ; and that the saints are symbols referring to the Holy Savior. This may truly apply to Joseph, David, Solomon,, and the rest of the saints. Therefore, the blessed man, described in this psalm is truly a symbol of the true Righteous divine Person.

Psalm 111 (112) came in an alphabetical order like that of psalm 110 (111) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

<b>1- The exultant man who fears the Lord</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- He who fears the Lord, and his holy household</b>	<b>2 - 3</b>
<b>3- He who fears the Lord challenges the darkness</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4- He who fears the Lord, is steadfast forever</b>	<b>5 - 8</b>
<b>5- The compassionate man who fears the Lord</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>6- The wicked will be belittled before the man who fears the Lord</b>	<b>10</b>

## **1- THE EXULTANT MAN WHO FEARS THE LORD:**

*“Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments” (1)*

In the Last psalm, we saw that the fear of God is the fountain which flows on us the divine wisdom. Here, we find it the source of every true blessing, and of every eternal sound happiness.

With a pious spirit of worship, the psalmist glorifies the Lord by blessing those who fear the Lord; he praises the Lord for the sake of His dealings, care, and gifts to him who fears Him and leans on Him.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, those who *fear* the Lord here, are among the Gentiles; For, in the psalms, when he refers to the Jews, he mentions ‘Israel’, ‘Aaron’, or ‘Levi’; then he says: “those who fear the Lord”. It is obvious that he talks here about those who fear the Lord among the Gentiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 38 on Ps. 111 (112)

❖ *He* who fears the Lord, the blessed man, will readily obey the commandments of the Lord; he feels strong and deep love toward His commandments. To perceive this, the psalmist did not say that he just abides to the commandments of the Lord; as many are those who do because of fear, and would not get a reward. He who, out of fear of Hell, refrains from committing adultery, will not get a reward, as great as him who ministers to the Lord with faithfulness through love. He whose will is in the law of God, desires what God desires, zealously desires to consummate the will of God; .... Perpetually carries a great love, to consummate the will of the Lord; he not only does according to His commands, but desires them with his whole zeal of heart<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ As the demons fear the Lord, and are terrified before Him; lest you may assume that this would be enough for our salvation, the psalmist, the way he did in the last psalm, saying: “*The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*”, he added: “*A good understanding have all those who do His commandments*” (Psalm 111: 10); binding the teaching to the way of life, conforming to it. Here, as well, after referring to the fear, he does not stop at the fear, which even the demons also have, but added: “*Who delights greatly in His commandments*”.

He does not say: ‘He will consummate His commandments’. But says: “*he delights greatly in them*”; by which he exhorts us to do them with loving zeal, not for the sake of the promised reward, but for the sake of Him who issued them; not for fear of hell or of the threat of punishment, nor for the sake of the promise of kingdom, but for the sake of the author of the law.

In another psalm, he shows the satisfaction he gets from keeping God’s commandments, saying: “*How sweet are Your words to my taste; sweeter than honey to my mouth*” (Psalm 119: 103).

That is what the apostle Paul also means when he vaguely says: “*For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness (for satisfaction)*” (Romans 6: 19).; Meaning, For just as, by great zeal and fervent desire, you walked in iniquity, which presents no reward, but rather punishment, so now walk in virtue the same way.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms. Homily 38 on Ps. 111 (112).

Your love for the author of the law will make the law look easy, even though it involves much difficulty.

Just as, he who lusts for an adulteress, does not care for what he may endure slanders, violence, reproach, probable exile from the city, loss of inheritance, despicable treatment from his parents, beside many other serious consequences, all for the sake of a corrupt covetousness; So it will be, if you zealously receive God's commandments, you will find them as described by the Lord; "*My yoke is easy, and My burden is light*" (Matthew 11: 30) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ In the Book of Acts, the Christians are called "those who fear the Lord"; but here, none of them are blessed other than he who practices them, not out of keeping appearances, nor of fear of punishment, nor of hope for promised rewards; but he practices them because he loves them, or rather the One who issued them; not a little and temporal kind of love, but rich and perpetual; according to the words of the prophet: "*Who delights greatly in His commandments*".

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## 2- HE WHO FEARS THE LORD, AND HIS HOLY HOUSEHOLD:

*"His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed"* (2)

The apostle Paul enjoyed the blessed life as a believer who fears the Lord. Although he had no descendants according to the flesh, yet he gave birth to a multitude in the gospel, and came to have strong children who testify to the gospel of Christ.

What inheritance would we give to our children and grandchildren, greater than our rejoice in God's commandments, and our enjoyment of the blessed life, namely, of our living practical faith!

❖ I, who obey God by my own choice, am qualified to become a father of saints ... I wish the Lord would grant you, as well, who listen to me, to become an upright generation<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ *The Holy Book* used to refer 'descendants', not to those born according to the system of nature, but rather to those who follow the virtue. So does the apostle Paul, interpreting the verse: "*To your*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 112.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalms. Homily 38 on Ps. 111 (112).

*descendants I will give this land*” (Genesis 12: 7), he says: “*nor are they children because they are the seed of Abraham, but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called’*” (Romans 9: 7).

Accordingly the good people, the children of those who fear the Lord will be among those, about whom the psalmist say:: “***Your descendants will be mighty on earth***” (2). He says “*on earth*”, to show that this will happen before the departure from here, and before the experience of the life there. As I have already said, virtue has its reward, even before the crowns are given.

There is nothing stronger than virtue; it is more solid than rocks, and harder than steel; and consequently, there is nothing lower or weaker than iniquity, even in the presence of a uncountable possessions, or considerable authority.

Now, if such is its might on earth, just imagine how much more would be the might of those who enjoy heaven<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ If the Jews boast in what they were given, that their *descendants* would increase and be mighty on earth, say to them that, as there was no mention in the Holy Book, that many men of God had no descendants, like Melchizedek; Joshua, the son of Nun; Elijah, Jeremiah, and other prophets, what the psalmist means here is not the descendents according to the flesh, but the spiritual descendents, namely, the congregation of believers, who, like a good soil, have received the seed planted by the saintly apostles, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty; they increased in number on earth, mightily fought the hosts of darkness, and overcame them by faith in Christ the Lord and God.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever” (3)***

Being attached to God, he who fears God will have God make his heart His dwelling place, pours in it the riches of His grace and divine gifts.

He will be in need of nothing, but, on the contrary, he will be the source of giving to others.

He who fear God, will enjoy the fruits of the Holy Spirit, of “*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 112.

*gentleness, self-control*” (Galatians 5: 22); and his heart will turn into a closed garden that carries spiritual fruits.

❖ Referring to the riches, the believers will have, the apostle wrote to the Corinthians: *”You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 9: 1) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Testifying that the works of mercy are the seeds of the coming crop, the apostle says: *”Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (Galatians 6: 9); And, *”He who sows sparingly, will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully, will also reap bountifully”* (2 Corinthians 9: 6).

What is it, brethren, more convincing than that ‘Zacchaeus’ purchased the kingdom of heaven for half of his goods (Luke 19: 8); whereas the widow purchased it for two mites (Mark 12: 42); and each of them will have an equal portion like the other?!

And what is more convincing that the same kingdom of heaven purchased by the rich man for his treasures, the poor will get it for just a cup of cold water?! ... *”Wealth and riches will be in his house”* (3). As his house is his heart, through praising God he will live in greater riches, together with hope in the eternal life, than the hypocrites who live in palaces of marble, together with the fear of the eternal perdition.

*”And his righteousness endures forever”*. That is his glory, and there is his riches<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *”Wealth and riches will be in his house”* (3). This needs no interpretation. ... They got glory from God; those who received the apostles like the angels of God, *”sold their possessions and goods and put their prices at the feet of the apostles”* (Acts 2: 45); and came to be of a better reputation than those with crown on their heads.

Who was with an entrance like a king; who, while talking, death was cast out, illness was cured, demons fled away, and performed wonders even by his clothes; who turned the earth into heaven; and led everyone to virtue?!

If they (the apostles) have realized such things on earth, just imagine what sort of glory they would get in heaven.

By saying, *”in his house”*, he means in his soul. Wealth that comes from outer sources, do not belong to its owner, for it would not be

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms. Homily 38 on Ps. 111 (112).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 112 (111).

safe there, but would be in the hands of the flatterers and hypocrites around him, who help scatter them in all directions. ... And even, with guards to protect him, it would not be helpful, as long as he is prone to die any time and leave everything behind<sup>1</sup>.

❖ **“And his righteousness endures forever”** (3). Everything human is prone to be eventually lost. Whereas the fruit of righteousness will endure *uncorrupted* forever, will not be distorted with time. The human body may eventually get corrupted, but not the righteousness that will endure forever, and will prepare a proper dwelling place for the Lord who says: *“My Father’s house has many mansions”* (John 14: 2). Being characterized by endurance and steadfastness, it is far more exalted than any human thing in this life,

Beauty will wither with illness, and be lost with time.

Authority is mostly unpredictable.

Wealth, riches, and lust in this life, either forsake man during his life, or, when he dies he will be naked of everything.

The fruit of righteousness, on the contrary, will never be corrupted with time, nor destroyed by death, but will be more secure, particularly when it reaches the safe haven, protected against tempests<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ **Those bad riches about which** it is said: *“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). Taking the riches away involves an exultation in perfection; according to the words of the Lord about the poor (who do not have this kind of riches): *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5: 3); and in the psalm it came: *“This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him”* (Psalm 34: 6); and also: *“Let the poor and needy praise Your name”* (Psalm 74: 21).

**Whereas the good riches** is what is acquired by the virtuous, the maker of righteousness, commended by the prophet David, saying: *“His descendants 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”* (2-3); and by the wise Solomon, saying: *“The ransom of man’s life is his riches”* (Proverbs 13: 8).

About such man who lacks this kind of good riches, the book of revelation says: *“Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 112.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 112.

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) <sup>1</sup>.

(Abba Pavnottius)

### **3- HE WHO FEARS THE LORD CHALLENGES THE DARKNESS:**

*“Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness. He is gracious, merciful, and righteous”* (4)

❖ *“Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness”*. In truth, those who fear God direct their hearts toward God; and in truth they walk together with their God, put His will above themselves; have no rude pride, and self-haughtiness; and remember that, *“they were once darkness, but now they are light in the Lord”* (Ephesians 5: 8).

*“He is gracious, merciful, and righteous”*.

We are glad to hear that He is gracious, and merciful; but we may be terrified to hear that He is “righteous” (Just).

But, O man, who fear the Lord, and who rejoice greatly in His commandments, you should never be terrified nor despair. Be happy, merciful, and give. ... Yet, *“Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy”* (James 2: 13).

God will not spew him from His mouth, for He says: *“Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you”* (Luke 6: 37-38) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“Unto the upright, there arises light in the darkness”* ... By the darkness he means if they are passing through afflictions, difficulties, temptations, and dangers. But he directly adds that they will feel a great comfort.

As men at that time (when in affliction) tended to disregard heaven, and search for God on earth, here he puts before their eyes a certain consideration that would lead them up high with no limits<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

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<sup>1</sup> Cassia, conferences 3: 9.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 112 (111).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 112.

❖ *“He is gracious, merciful, and righteous (Just)”*. ... Notice how God is merciful and righteous (Just) at the same time. If you are a sinner, do not despair of being forgiven; for God is merciful. And if you are proud, and abusing the mercy of God, Beware for He is righteous (just) as well<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ *You* should know that you are not light for yourself, You are rather an eye, and not a light.

What would be the use of an eye, even if it is open and sound, if there is no light?

I have been darkness, but You are the Light to scatter my darkness and enlighten my ways.

I am not light for myself; and I have no portion in the light except by You<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *The* prophet calls ignorance darkness, as well as the tribulations and temptations. But he, who fear the Lord, and loves His commandments, his teaching will shine on those without knowledge, support those in tribulations, and enlightens their darkness, as though he is light.

Before the incarnation of our Lord, the darkness of vanity prevailed upon the whole world; and men sought God on the earth among the creation which they worshipped, That is why the Lord shined incarnate on the earth to enlighten them, to lift their minds high up.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

#### **4- HE WHO FEARS GOD WILL BE STEADFAST FOREVER:**

*“A good man deals graciously and lends; He will guide his affairs with discretion” (5)*

He Who fears the Lord, does not only follow the lead of his Creator, but draws from the fellowship of His features, to become a living portrait of his Savior, in compassion and giving, not for any personal benefit, material or symbolic, but for the sake of his love for the evangelic truth.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Psalms. Homily 38 on Ps. 111 (112).*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermons On N.T. Lessons, Homily 17: 8.*

If the Mosaic law forbids the believer to take interest or usury on debt from a brother in affliction; Under the shadow of the gospel, a believer would give his brother in need with joy and pleasure.

- ❖ *See* the multitude of rewards given to those who love; how the fruit of their compassion endures forever, how they are relieved of temptation, and how they follow the lead of their God, the merciful, and the forgiver of sins.

Saying, “***He will guide his affairs with discretion***” (5 LXX), he means, by his mercy and compassion, he will get the benefit of being defended and protected in the day of judgment. And according to another interpretation, he will enjoy great goods, and will never be shaken.

The psalmist calls him who guides his affairs with discretion, ‘merciful’, on account of that he purchases the bountiful with a little; he purchase heaven with wealth, the kingdom with clothes, and the coming goods with bread and a cold drink. What could be compared to such a discretion, when you forsake perishable and corrupt things, to get instead such enduring goods; and would accordingly enjoy security in the present life<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ Because the Lord is gracious and compassionate, the righteous man, following His lead, would also be gracious and merciful<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ The rich man is not he who possess and keeps his wealth, but he who gives and does not receive; for he is happy. Generosity is the fruit of the soul; and the true riches abides in the heart<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

- ❖ “*A good man deals graciously and lends*” (5). How much more would be he who lends God here on earth, to to get it doubled in the eternal life? He would then be worthy to stand before the throne of judgment of the eternal Judge, and before the angels. He would be able to say with surety and pure conscience: Give, O Lord, for I have given; Have mercy, O Lord, for I have shown mercy.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 112.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Psalms. Homily 38 on Ps. 111 (112).*

<sup>3</sup> *Paedagogus 3: 6: 35.*

- ❖ A good man has compassion upon his fellow human brethren, not for the sake of any profit, but hoping for the reward of God. For he who gives alms to men, would be as though he lends the Lord Himself, who will pay him double back; according the wise words of Solomon in his proverbs.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Surely he will never be shaken. The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance” (6)***

He who fears the Lord will never be shaken from his position or his pious behavior; and his giving will never let him lose his inner riches, and his outer possibilities; And being honored by God Himself, he will be a living role model along the generations; according to what came in Malachi:

*“The Lord listened and heard; So a book of remembrance was written before Him”* (Malachi 3: 16); And to the words of the Lord Himself, saying: *“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels”* (Revelation 3: 5)

**St. Clement of Alexandria**<sup>1</sup> says that the Gnostic, namely, the exemplary Christian with the true knowledge, is *“the righteous who will never be shaken”*; for he uses all kinds of knowledge, and never fears philosophy, but draws benefit from it. People usually fear philosophy, like kids who fear masks; but a Christian, by faith, can recognize the truth, and discern between it and vain views. He would be like an experienced cashier who can separate the genuine money from the counterfeit ones; So the Gnostic would not be deceived by the false words. ... The psalmist cries out, saying: *“The righteous will never be shaken”* (6), neither by the false words, nor by the sinful pleasures; he will never be shaken from his inheritance; *“He will not be afraid of evil tidings”* (7); nor of baseless slanders spread around him<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ Someone may say that the Greeks have discovered philosophy through their human understanding; but I find the Holy Book say that the understanding is from God; for which the psalmist cries out, saying: *“I am Your servant, give me understanding, that I may know Your testim0omies”* (Psalm 119: 125)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

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<sup>1</sup> Strom. 6: 10.

<sup>2</sup> آباء مدرسة الإسكندري، 1980، ص 76.

<sup>3</sup> Strom. 6: 8.

- ❖ *“He will never be shaken”*; that was exactly what the Lord Christ said about him who builds his house on the rock, the rain, the flood, and the wind will not shake it (Matthew 7: 25). What is noteworthy is that you would not be safe of temptations in the wilderness, but you will be steadfast before the persistent deceptions of others. The soul, rich with giving, would never be beaten by the waves of miserable feelings<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ *“The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance”* (6)... Even after death and burial in the ground, his remembrance will be always green everywhere. The power of virtue is that it does not submit to the passing of time, and is not corrupted by the running of days. That may be true with the wicked, but the virtuous are in no need of the good testimony of people. ... The psalmist particularly shows that virtue bears its own reward<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ He who works or talk with righteousness, and discernment, will never be shaken from his mission, neither by grief, by tribulation, by threats from anyone, nor by any evil tidings; like the righteous ‘Job’ on whom the evil tidings of the loss of his children and all his possessions came in succession, and yet he only said: *“Naked I came to the world, and naked shall I depart from it”* (Job 1: 21).

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord”* (7)

Many evil tidings may come to the attention of him who fears the Lord, yet, his heart where the Lord dwells, and protects in His hands, will never be shaken, but will stay steadfast. God is the Rock on which he is founded, never to be shaken by the tempests of this life.

- ❖ *“He will not be afraid of evil tidings”* ... He does not say: ‘he will not hear any evil tidings, but he will not be afraid to hear them. Even if he sees war, earthquake, thieves, attacks by hooligans, deadly illness, etc. he will not be afraid. Why? ... Because he has deposited his wealth in a secure place.... Approaching the end of the way will not worry him, but will make him hasten to set forth to the destination he truly longing to reach; *“For where his treasure is, there his heart will also be”* (Matthew 6: 21).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 112.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 112.

*“His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord”* (7). Nothing will disturb him, or bind him to the present things, but he will rather concentrate his eye ahead toward God, in anticipation of the realization of his hope<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ You have surely heard, O brethren, much commendation on mercy. Well, wish for it, and long for it, seek it, and once you get it hold fast to it with all your might, in this world, lest it would despise you in the life to come. ... Now, if we all, humans, seek mercy, let it be our advocate in this life, so that it will condescend to welcome you, and defend you in the future. If we despise it in our land, How could she condescend to look at us in her land<sup>2</sup>?!

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

*“His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies”* (8)

- ❖ It is a double foundation upon which their security is set: of the grace coming from above, and from the possibilities down here; nothing can disturb them, neither slanders dwelling upon them, nor calamities, or the loss of wealth, for they have nothing to lose; they forsake their wealth here for the sake of heaven, to go up there, where no evil can approach. ... Who could be an enemy of such a person, except the evil demons, and the devil himself<sup>3</sup>?!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ Let our heart be steadfast, until we see our desire upon our enemies; who intend to see the good things for men here in the land of the mortals; while we, on the other hand trust that the goodness of the Lord, are there in the land of the living (Psalm 27: 13)<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

## **5- THE COMPASSIONATE MAN WHO FEARS THE LORD:**

*“He has dispersed freely ; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted with honor”* (9)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 112.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 26: 1.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 112.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 112 (111).

The man who fears the Lord is characterized by being calm, courageous, having a steadfast heart, and would never lose his inner peace. The secret of all that is his trust in God. Having a sound personality, the true believer will never be shaken by temptations, however strong and diverse.

God will pay back the believer who opens his heart by practical love to the poor, by providing him with the spirit of strength (the horn), and glory.

When **St. Basil the Great** was threatened by Caesar, he said to him: [This ‘bugbear’ you threaten me with, you may use to frighten the children]. ... And **St. Athanasius the apostolic** says: [It is no more than mist that will soon scatter].

❖ The righteous man has compassion; and lends. All the riches submit at the feet of the wise and the righteous man, who counts all what the others have as his own, and all what he has as a public possession<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Ambrose**)

❖ Lend God of your wealth, to be true rich. We are taught by the Lord Himself how to do this, saying: “*Sell what you have and give alms, provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches, nor moth destroys*” (Luke 12: 33) And the blessed David, saying: “*He has dispersed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever*” (9) <sup>2</sup>.

❖ The word “*horn*” (9) refers, not only to power, but also to the royal authority; For Christ our Savior, who came from the household of David the king, is the King of kings, and the great might of God the Father<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Cyril the Great**)

❖ Let us now see whom the psalmist means by the giver of alms; him who gives from the abundance he has, or him who denies himself what is his. It is obvious that he means the later one who denies himself what is his, and gives it bountifully, according to the words of the apostle Paul, saying: “*Who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*” (2 Corinthians 9: 6).

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<sup>1</sup> *Duties of The Ckergy, 1: 25: 118.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Luc. Homily 91.*

<sup>3</sup> *In Luc. Ch1.*

Notice how the inspired author uses his words in an amazing way. He does not say: ‘distributed’, nor ‘divided’, but he says “*dispersed*”, which refers to how the giver bountifully scatters his gifts ... the way a farmer disperses his seeds, even when he is not sure of how the crop will be; but you, are In God’s hands, where nothing will be wasted<sup>1</sup>.

❖ “*His horn will be exalted with honor*”. Here he refers to what men always desire of good reputation; which the righteous will have in this life, as well as in the life to come; for no one will have a better reputation than the merciful man. Virtue is commended, even by him who does not practice it; and iniquity, as well, is hateful, and condemned, even by him who practices it<sup>2</sup>.

❖ In case you wish to have control your money, do not keep it, but give it to the poor. For money is like a wild beast, that will escape, if you try to hold fast to it, whereas if you leave it loose, it may stay. Hence it is said: “*He dispersed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever*” (9).

Disperse it then, to keep it with you; and do not bury it, lest it will flee from you.

If I may ask those who have already departed: ‘where is your riches?’ I do not mean this as a rebuke; God forbids; nor opening up old wounds and soars; but I intend to find for you all a refuge far from the perdition that dwelt upon others<sup>3</sup>.

❖ According to the wise Solomon, “*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*” (Ecclesiastes 1: 2); and to the blessed David, “*He heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them*” (Psalm 39: 6). Vanity of vanities are the magnificent buildings you built for yourself, the flocks of slaves you have, and the immense riches you collected ... for all that did not come from the hand of God, but you own doing. ... Why are they vanity? Because they have no goal of benefit... Riches become vanity if it is spent on luxuries; but become of benefit if it is “*dispersed and given to the poor*” (9)<sup>4</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Saying “*dispersed*”, refers to bountiful giving of alms, jut like what a farmer does when he bountifully disperse his seeds on a land of

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 112.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 112.

<sup>3</sup> عظمان عن أتروبيوس.

<sup>4</sup> Homilies on Ephesians, 12.

doubtful fertility, hoping for an increased crop; How much more would he who deposits his treasures in heaven?!

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Being attached to heavy issues, man would not be light; It is befitting of us, therefore, to keep away from the earthly things that brings us down, and to be preoccupied with the things that buoy us up to the heavenly places.

He who gives the poor, will have the Lord Jesus Christ as our partner. You, therefore, should not fear poverty, for He, who made Himself poor for our sake, reigns on all creation; and if you become poor through giving, you will reign together with Him; He who said: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5: 3)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

- ❖ The apostle does not judge those who possess riches, but rather those who desires it, when he says: Those who seek to become rich, may fall into temptation, and into the snares of the devil<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

- ❖ Giving the necessities to those in need, we are actually giving them what is theirs, and not what is ours. We are rather giving the debt of justice, and we are not doing an act of mercy; Hence the divine Truth warns us, saying: "*Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before me*" (Matthew 6: 1)<sup>3</sup>; which conforms to what the psalmist says: "*He has dispersed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness (justice) endures forever*" (9). Here, when he talks about giving to the poor, he uses the word "*justice*" instead of 'mercy'; for the gift given to us by God, is surely a matter of justice, when we present that gift for public benefit; Hence the wise Solomon says: "*The righteous gives and does not spare*"<sup>4</sup> (Proverbs 21: 26)<sup>5</sup>

**(St. Gregory the Great)**

- ❖ There is a Good One who creates good men; And there is a good one through whom good is done. The former is God, for no one can make

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<sup>1</sup> *The Beatitudes, serm. 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon 48: 4.*

<sup>3</sup> من أننا قد نعمل أفعال الخير ويرانا الناس ويتمجد الله، إلا أنه يجب ألا نفعل هذا فقط ليرانا الناس. مثل هذا الزهو والمباهاة لن ينالا المكافأة. وإن كلمتي "صدقة" و "صديق" يقابلهما في النص الإنجليزي عن نسخة الفولجاتا "Just" و "Justice" أي "العدالة و "العادل".

<sup>4</sup> لا يتوقف الصديق عن تقديم الصدقة، إذ يظل قادرًا على فعلها، لأن الله يجزيه ويثريه

<sup>5</sup> *Pastoral Care, 3: 21.*

man good, except the “Good One” forever. You, therefore should call God to make you good.... But there is something good, by which you can do good; namely, all that you possess, like gold and silver, which, although they are good things, yet they cannot make you good, but through them you can do something good.

You have gold and silver, yet you wish for more. Namely, you are both satisfied and thirsty at the same time. It is an ailment and not riches; like when someone is ill with dropsy, his body would be oversaturated with water, and yet they are always thirsty.

You indeed have gold, which is, itself, good; and yet you do not have what makes you good, but, what you can do good with. That is what you should do with your gold; “*Disperse it freely, give it to the poor; your righteousness will endure forever*” (9).

Do good with the good which cannot make you good.

You have wealth, use it bountifully to grow in righteousness... See what decreases and what increases; Your wealth may decrease, but your righteousness will certainly increase. What you are to lose eventually will decrease; and what you will possess eternally will increase<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## **6- THE WICKED WILL BE BELITTLED BEFORE THE MAN WHO FEARS THE LORD:**

***“The wicked will see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked comes to nothing” (10)***

The psalmist does not speak of the wicked with some kind of gloat, but with grief for his condition. He who fears the Lord bears the blessed life, and the joyful hope in his depths, anticipating the day of his glory with joy and gladness of the heart; whereas the wicked, bearing his corruption and his sins within him, despair will prevail on his heart, lose his peace, anticipating his day to come.

The wicked cannot stand seeing the righteous before him; for he represents a heavy burden on his heart; according to the words of wisdom: “*The very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others*” (Wisdom 2: 15); and to **St. John Chrysostom**, saying: [The thief hates the light<sup>2</sup>].

❖ Virtue disturbs iniquity, and is a burden on it. Just like the fire destroys the thorns and thistles, compassion stirs up the cruel men, for

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermon on NT Lessons, 11: 3.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on 2 Corin. 28: 3.*

it represents an accusation against iniquity. The wicked, even those crowned with authority, usually cannot dare to stir directly at the power of virtue in the righteous. Those with virtue, on the contrary, even if they are in need or in prison, they are of better reputation than those on thrones, and, in complete peace of mind, they relax, as though in a quiet and calm haven; they have the ability to avenge themselves against the wicked by utter their utter silence. ... Above everything else, who are more miserable than those who live in sin<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ When the mean see the truth of those who bountifully give, they become angry, and gnash their teeth; So will be the devil, and the non-believers when they see how the believers flourish in faith. All those will be consumed, together with their vain desires, by the unquenchable fire.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Even before the day of judgment, the conscience within the wicked will torment him; And after committing evil, he will find no place to escape from punishment; for he, himself, will become punishment enough for his crime<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 112.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon 218: 4.*

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 112

### SHINE, O LORD, WITH THE LIGHT OF YOUR LOVE IN ME

- ❖ My depths cry out to You, O the true Light;  
Who will set me free from the darkness?  
And Who will shine in me, but You?  
Nail Your fear in my flesh;  
For Your fear grants me wisdom;  
Your fear brings me forth up to the heaven of your splendid love;  
When I listen to Your commandments, my soul exults;  
On them, my soul feeds, and become stronger;  
Your word works in me;  
To bear the fruits of the amazing spirit.
- ❖ Draw me by Your Holy Spirit, to run to You;  
And many will run together with me to enjoy You;  
I will have mighty descendants on earth;  
I will testify to Your gospel by the work of Your grace in me;  
You bless me, and bless many together with me;  
To enjoy Your glories and riches;  
To bear Your righteousness, O Holy One;  
All the tempests of evil cannot harm us;  
For in You, the Rock of ages, we hide, and endure forever;
- ❖ When You shine on us with the light of Your love;  
We see You as the wholly love and compassion;  
The wholly righteousness and justice;  
In the midst of our weaknesses, we shall never despair;  
When we look up to You, You forgive our sins by Your cross;  
All the hosts of the enemy will not be able to make us lose our hope  
in You;
- ❖ You are righteous and just, In case the enemy make us slothful, we  
resort to You;  
Nailing Your fear in us, we shall no more be slothful ;
- ❖ Grant me the spirit of compassion, to be like You;  
Grant me the spirit of mercy, to be like You;  
Let me lend my brethren;  
Let me present to them all what You gave me;  
For all what I have are Yours;  
I am indebted to You with my whole life and possibilities;

- ❖ Grant me the spirit of wisdom, to dispense my affairs well;  
I desire nothing beside You;  
I fear no one but You;  
The whole world is belittled in my eyes;  
Even the whole earth goes away before me;  
All around me will be shaken;  
But I shall be steadfast in You forever;
- ❖ I shall not be afraid of evil tidings, whatever they are;  
My heart will never be shaken, as long as it is in Your hands;  
My soul will lean on Your chest;  
By the two wings of the Spirit, they will be lifted up to heaven;  
No enemy can disturb me;  
By You, all the hosts of darkness, will not be able to quench the light  
You poured in me;  
For Your dwelling pours an amazing splendor in my depths.
- ❖ Why would the enemy keep disturbing me?  
Why would he keep trying to make the way of virtue impossible  
before me?  
Virtue is nothing but to be attached to You, who dwell in my depths;  
While Iniquity and evil are fleeing away from You;  
Encountering You, I will enjoy the glory of virtue;  
And every iniquity will fall down like autumn leaves;  
You are my life, glory, and riches;  
What should I seek more than to have Your fear nailed in me;  
And to have Your love kindle my whole being?

## ***PSALM 113***

# **CONDESCENSION OF GOD, WHOLE IN MAJESTY**

This psalm is considered conveniently short to be practiced in worshipping; a liturgical psalm for praising God, during the feast of Passover, together with psalm 114, before eating the Passover; While psalms 115 to 118 were sung after eating the Passover. This psalm was also sung in the feasts of the Pentecost, the Tabernacles, the dedication of the temple, and the head of the month; The Orthodox Jews still use it in the feast of Passover; And it is claimed that, before going, together with His disciples, to the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26: 30), our Lord Jesus sang with them psalms 113 to 118.

This is one of the most famous psalms in both the Jewish and Christian religions, called “The Egyptian Hallel”, it is a magnificent praise to God, incomparably wholly in love and majesty; who, in His condescension, disregards no man, however poor, miserable, or even cast in an ash heap.

This psalm binds the praise said by ‘Hannah’ (mother of the prophet Samuel), of sorrowful spirit (1 Samuel 2: 2-10), and the praise said by St. Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, exultant for the incarnation of the divine Word (Luke 1: 47-55). It reveals the harmony between the old and the new covenants, with the Savior as their Center; the Word of God who took the form of a servant, and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, to exalt us to him (Philippians 2: 7-9).

### **HALLEL PSALMS:**

There are three separate groups of Hallel psalms:

- 1- The Egyptian Hallel: Psalms 113 to 118.
- 2- The Great Hallel: Psalms 120 to 136, including the psalms of ascents.
- 3- The conclusive Hallel: Psalms 146 to 150

The first and the second groups were used in praise during the annual feasts (Leviticus 23; Numbers 10: 10).

### **WORSHIPPING GOD AND RECOGNIZING HIM:**

If this psalm is a praise to God, wholly in majesty, who, in His coming to men, condescended to exalt us to Him, It actually binds between worshipping God and recognizing His Person, and His features; For worship brings us forth into a deeper recognition; and recognizing

Him motivates us to worship Him more with the spirit of praise and exultation.

In this psalm, the psalmist reveals to us the exultant worship:

a- **Who do we worship** in truth? (1)

b- **When do we worship Him?** (2). With every breath of our life.

c- **Where do we worship Him?** (3). All over the universe, from east to west; wherever we are, whether at home, in bed, or while we work, etc.

d- **Why should we worship Him?** (4-9). Recognizing Him, and His amazing works with us; we would offer Him the sacrifices of praise; experiencing His amazing grace, our souls would flood with unceasing thanksgiving to Him.

<b>1- Who worship God?</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- When do we worship God?</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3- Where do we worship God?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4- The majesty of the worshipped God</b>	<b>4 - 5</b>
<b>5- The amazing condescension of God</b>	<b>6 - 9</b>

## **1- WHO WORSHIP GOD?**

*“Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord; Praise the name of the Lord”* (1)

According to Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: *“Praise the Lord, O young men”*.

The whole congregation, not just the Levites and the priests, praised God with verse 1, all being servants of the Lord.

What does he mean by *“servants of the Lord”*, but all the believers who fear the Lord, and long to dedicate their whole life to Him. By dedication here, we mean, not the full dedication to ministry, but the dedication of the heart; that the believer feels in his worship,, in his daily work, while he drinks, eat, and even while he sleeps, that he lives to the glory of God.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, this is the position of the Holy Book concerning praise, being a sacrifice which brings pleasure to God, more than offering oxen and sheep. Although it costs the believer nothing, yet it should be offered according to the following two conditions:

a- It is to be presented by the righteous; for praising God is realized only by the mouth and tongue, but by life, holy in the Lord. *Praise is unseemly on the lips of a sinner*” (Sirach 15: 9).

b- B- Praise is not only by words, but should be practiced by works as well; according to the words of the Lord Christ: “*Let your light shine before men*” (Matthew 5: 16). That is the way the cherubim praise God, which when heard by the prophet Isaiah, he said” “*Woe is me, for I am lost! Because I am a man with unclean lips*” (Isaiah 6: 5)

According to **St. John Chrysostom**: [You need to be like an angel, to praise God this way; Do not take praise lightly. ... Let our life itself present the voice of praise before our mouths... Let our behavior utter praise before our tongue... That way, we can praise God, even while silent; and if we talk, we are as though playing music in harmony with our life<sup>1</sup>].

❖ The sacrifice we are committed to offer to God is praise; according to His oracle, saying: “The sacrifice of praise glorifies Me”.... That is how the youth, the beginners in faith, and even those spiritually strong, be taught to praise the Lord; not only by their uttered words, but by their behavior as well.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ Being all, servants of their Creator, they do according to His will, and obey His commands<sup>2</sup>.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

❖ When you hear the psalm saying: “*Praise the Lord, O young men*” (LXX), do not assume that it is not addressed to you; on account of that you are no longer “young”, and you are now fully mature, or even gray-haired elders; for the apostle says to all: “*Brethren, do not be children in understanding, however in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature*” (1 Corinthians 14: 20; Matthew 18: 3).

What is malice but pride? For it is the proud who shows the false greatness, and keep man from going through the narrow way and door; through which a child can easily do. No man can enter into the kingdom, unless he is like a child<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## 2- WHEN DO WE WORSHIP GOD?

“*Blessed be the name of the Lord, from this time forth and forevermore*” (2)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 113.

<sup>2</sup> الرسائل عن الروح القدس إلى الأسقف سريبيون، 2: 3 (ترجمة مؤسسة القديس أنطونيوس).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 113 (112)

If, for the realization of our temporal affairs, we work hard and seriously, would we, as servants of the Lord, be less preoccupied with doing our work in His vineyard? We are committed to praise Him as long as we live; to praise Him both in our joy, and in our grief.

The psalmist asks us to start praising the Lord now; and to count every breath we draw, as a joyful praise, we present, as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God.

**St. John Chrysostom** wonders: Will the name of the Lord not be blessed, unless we pray?; to which he answers, saying: As the name of the Lord is blessed in us; the blessing here is our own; according to the words of the apostle Paul, saying: “*Glorify God in your in your body and in your spirits, which are God’s*” (1 Corinthians 6: 20). ... That is how the Lord commanded us to pray and say: “*Thy name be hallowed*” namely, to glorify His name in our life; For, the way it is insulted when our life is wicked, it will be glorified, blessed, and sanctified, when we practice virtue<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Why was it said: “*from this time forth?*” ... Namely, from this very moment in which you utter these words, start praising, and praise forevermore<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

### **3- WHERE DO WE WORSHIP GOD?**

*“From the rising of the sun to its going down, the Lord’s name is to be praised” (3)*

It is not befitting of us to be anywhere we cannot meditate and praise our God; praise Him wherever we are, in the east or in the west; during the day or during the night.

❖ Do not you see how he put an end to the Jewish ways and worship, and proclaimed the way of life of the church, and her worship<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

❖ From one grain which died and was buried with passion, came the crop of the church in the whole world; not like before, when the name of God was only known in Judea and only worshipped in Israel; Now, “*From the rising of the sun to its going down, the Lord’s name is to be praised*” (3)<sup>4</sup>.

(**Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle**)

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<sup>1</sup> See St. John Chrysostom, Psalm 113.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 113 (112)

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 113

<sup>4</sup> Sermon 94: 1.

❖ If you seek a sacrifice among the Jews, you will no more sacrifice according to the order of Aaron. And if you seek a sacrifice, according to the order of Melchizedek, you will not find it among them as well, but you will find it celebrated all over the world in the church. *“From the rising of the sun, to its going down, the Lord’s name is to be praised”* (3) <sup>1</sup>.

❖ I wish we praise the Lord like children; and sing: “Alleluia”.  
(St. Augustine)

❖ Before the incarnation of the Son of God, the name of God was known, great and glorified in Judea alone; Whereas the Gentiles, from the rising of the sun to its going down, did not know Him, nor seeking His name, but were in the vanity of idols. But after the incarnation of our Lord, and the preaching of the apostles was received by the Gentiles, the name of God became praised, and His exalted majesty recognized.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

#### **4- THE MAJESTY OF THE WORSHIPPED GOD:**

*“The Lord is high above all nations, and His glory above the heavens”* (4)

Recognizing the Lord, and getting in touch with His works, specially with the poor and the contrite of heart, we praise Him in our depths with a language inexpressible by the tongue.

❖ Do not you see, again, how He is worshiped, not by one nation, two, or three, but by the whole world? Is there any more obvious text than this inspired one?... Now, is the Lord high above all nations, just because we glorify Him, and we do not refer His exaltation to Him”... Far from it<sup>2</sup>!

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Who is like the Lord our God?, Who dwells on high?”* (5)

He lovingly created the heavenly creatures to testify to His holiness and righteousness; and He works in men to set out of them, children who bear His image; But He stays, incomparable, and unique in His exaltation, holiness.

The goal of this praise is to stir up the feelings and cherishment of the whole people of the Lord, the heavenly God.

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<sup>1</sup> In Ps 108: 8

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 113

❖ How could He dwell in heavens, He who fills the heaven and earth, who is present everywhere, saying: “*I am a God near at hand, and not a God afar off*” (Jeremiah 23: 23); and, “*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measure heaven with a spa; He who sits above the circle of the earth*” (Isaiah 40: 12, 22)?... He does not look on the things down on earth, as though He is limited to heaven; For He is present everywhere, and is available for everyone... Do not you see how He gradually lifts up the mind of him who listens to Him<sup>1</sup>?

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Although man made his idols with his own hands, yet he became their captive and worshipper ... Those idols, according to the Holy Book, have eyes, but they cannot see<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## 5- THE AMAZING CONDESCENSION OF GOD:

*“He who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth” (6)*

Being the Creator of all mankind, all nations, peoples, and tongues, It is therefore befitting of all to gather together with one spirit to glorify and to praise Him.

In His humility and love, God beholds the heavenlies and cares for them, How much more would be His humility when He cares for the men down on earth, lifts them up from the ash heap, and brings them forth to sit together with the heavenlies?

❖ *“He who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth” ... He glorifies the humble, yet not to make them proud. For He dwells in those whom He lifts up high, makes them His heaven for Himself; And seeing them not proud, but perpetually submitting to Him, He, while being in heaven, He beholds them as a dwelling place for Himself<sup>3</sup>.*

(St. Augustine)

❖ What are the things which we should think about at the onset of our prayer to “*Our Father in heaven*”? (Matthew 6: 9)... “*Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before You. And I am no longer worthy to be called Your son*” (Luke 15: 18-19) ... Let us look downward with

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 113

<sup>2</sup> City of God, 8.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 113 (112)

the humility of heart, and supplicate with tears from the depths of our hearts to God up in heaven, who “dwells on high, , who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heavens and on earth”(5, 6); “Let us beat our breasts, saying, ‘God be merciful to us sinners, who are not worthy of raising our eyes up to You” (Luke 18: 13); Grant us the grace to glorify Your name on earth, as it is in heavens; For You, O Lord, are holy, and Your righteousness endures forever (Psalm 112 : 3) <sup>1</sup>.

( **Sahdona Martyrius**)

***“He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap” (7)***

God has condescended to encounter those who sit on the ash heap; with the sinners, to forgive them, to sanctify them, and to prepare them to have fellowship with the heavenlies in their everlasting heavenly praise.

Our heavenly Christ is the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 33, etc.), who carries us, not on His donkey, but over His own shoulders, to bring us forth to His heavenly inn, to His church clinic, to provide a heavenly treatment for our wounds.

God called David to the royal work while he was shepherding his father’s sheep; called Saul the son o Kish, while searching for his father’s lost donkeys; called Gideon while threshing wheat; called the apostles while fishing on their boat; He chose the ignorant to put to shame by them the wise; the weak, to put to shame the mighty; and the poor to shame the rich. Yet all that would not be compared to His work among the sinners, the adulterers, and the tax-collectors, to set out of them apostles, saints, and angel-likes.

❖ I wish God of peace (Hebrews 13: 20), who made the two as one (Ephesians 2: 13); He who sets kings on thrones; raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap 97); He who chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfold (Psalm 78: 70), even though he was the least and the youngest among his brothers (1 Samuel 17: 14); who granted His word, strongly, to those preaching the gospel (Psalm 147: 18); ... I wish He, being the Shepherd of shepherds (Ezekiel 34: 12), and the Counselor of counselors, holds me by my right hand, guides me with His counsel, and receive me to glory (Psalm 73: 23-24) <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> كتاب الكمال، 11.

<sup>2</sup> Defense of His Flight to Pontus, Pration 2: 117.

**(St. Gregory the Nezianzen)**

- ❖ *“There was no room for them in the inn”* (Luke 2: 7); As the Jewish denial flowed everywhere, the divine infant had no room in the holy of holies, adorned with gold, silver, precious stones, pure silk, and was born on a heap of ash, in a manger... He was born on a heap of ash, to lift up those who come out of it (7); He was born on a heap of ash, where the righteous ‘Job’ sat, the crowned<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ The “inn” is where those who become exhausted after a long travel go to relax and find comfort. To this “inn”, the Lord brings us forth, after raising the poor from the dust, and lifting the needy up from the heap of ash (7).
- ❖ According to the apostle Paul, once Abraham confessed that he is but “dust and ashes” (Genesis 18: 27), he found grace in the sight of God, And once the righteous ‘Job’ sat on the heap of ashes, he got back all what he lost (Job 2: 8; 42: 10-17); And quoted the prophecy of David: *“He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap”* (Psalm 113: 7) <sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ Yes indeed, unless Paul, counted himself like rubbish, he would not have acquired Christ for himself<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ He raised the poor, namely, the idol-worshippers, from their lawlessness, from the filth of the idols, to seat them with the apostles, the princes of the Israeli people.

**(Father Onesimus, of Jerusalem)**

*“That He may seat them with princes – with the princes of His people”* (8)

- ❖ What would be poorer than our nature? Nevertheless He raised it, and set it up in heaven from the beginning, and seated it on the Fatherly throne<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ I probably would be counted as uttering things that would never be believed by him who witnessed your corruption and desolation; For

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 88, on the Nativity of the Lord.

<sup>2</sup> On Penitence, 2: 1: 4.

<sup>3</sup> The Prayer of Job and David, 3: 2: 3.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 113.

which I wail, and will never cease to wail, until I see you again in your past splendor. Even though that would seem impossible for humans, but everything is possible for God, who “*raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that he may seat them with the princes of His people*” (7-8); And He who “*grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children*” (9).

Therefore, you should not despair of being utterly changed.

If the devil has the ability to cast you down to earth from such a lofty height, and exalted virtue, to the farthest limits of evil, how much more would God be capable to lift you back to your past confidence; not just to how you have been, but far better than that<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ Therefore, do not despair; do not forsake the good hope; and do not fall into where the atheist are. It is not the multitude of sins that lead to despair, but the lack of piety; like those few who walk along the way of despair, who would not look upward, or climb above where they fell.
- ❖ Such ungodly despair, weighs upon the neck of the soul like a yoke that forces it to bow down to earth, and keeps it from looking up to God. The work of a man of courage is to break this yoke to pieces, to move aside every weight on it, and to utter the words of the prophet: “*As the eyes of a maid to the hands of her mistress, so your eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us. Have mercy on us, O Lord, , for we are exceedingly filled with contempt*” (Psalm 123: 2,3). Saying: We are filled with humiliation, and under limitless afflictions; yet we will never cease to look up to God; nor to pray to Him, until He responds to our supplication. For, a sign of a noble soul is not to bow under the weight of the multiple calamities that come over it, or to be terrified by them; and to resort instead to increase and persist on prayers, until God would have mercy on her, according to the words of the blessed David.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“*He grants the barren woman a home, like a joyful mother of children*” (9)**

What is said here has been materialized in the cases of Hannah, Samuel’s mother, Sarah, Isaac’s mother, Rebecca, Rachel, Samson’s mother, and to Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, and probably

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<sup>1</sup> رسالة من القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم إلى ثيودور بعد سقوطه، 1: 1.

thousands others among the people of Israel along the generations; and still happens to many up to our present time.

❖ Such a thing happened as well to the church; that after being barren, became a mother to a multitude of children; for which the prophet Isaiah says: *“Sing, O barren, you who have not home; Break forth into singing and cry aloud; You who have not travailed with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman”* (Isaiah 54: 1), prophesying beforehand, what will happen to the church<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ God who took away the barrenness of Sarah, Rebecca, Hannah, Elizabeth, and others, is the same God who took away the barrenness of (the congregation of the Gentiles), made her dwell in His holy church, with a multitude of children; namely, with upright dogmas and good works; for which the church became perpetually exultant; For it is so written in the prophecy of Isaiah, the oracle of God, concerning the congregation of the Gentiles: *“The place is too small for me; Give me a place where I may dwell. Then you will say in your heart, ‘Who has begotten these for me, since I have lost my children, and am desolate; a captive, and wandering to and fro? And who has brought these up? There I was left alone, but these, where were they?’”* (Isaiah 49: 1).

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Indeed, the joyful mother is the Virgin Mother, who by the work of the Spirit, bears the immortal children; whom the prophet called barren, only on account of her chastity<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 113*

<sup>2</sup> دير السريان البتولية، 1966، ص 113.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 113**  
**FILL MY LIFE, O LORD, WITH THE SPIRIT OF PRAISE**

- ❖ Grant me the simplicity of infancy;  
to have dove-like eyes;  
To have my insight concentrate on Your might, wisdom, and  
fatherhood;  
To have my depths exult in You;  
To have my whole being turn into a harp to praise You.
- ❖ To praise You by my tongue, as well as by my life;  
Thy name be hallowed in me;  
To make me a joyful song;  
To praise now and forevermore, to the age of ages;  
Let my praise mix with my whole life;  
Let me praise you in the midst of my joy, as well as in the midst of  
my sorrow
- ❖ Wherever I go to the east or to the west;  
While I am awake, or in my sleep;  
In the church, as well as at home, or even on the street;  
My depths will never cease to praise You.
- ❖ My contrite soul praises You;  
For, when You are Higher than any height;  
You are closer to my soul than all;  
You, the Heavenly One, condescend to look down on me;  
To look at my miserable self;  
To lift me up from the heap of ash;  
To seat me among the heavenly hosts.
- ❖ I complain against my contrite soul to You;  
For I have become barren;  
I, no more, carry the fruits of the Spirit;  
You gave the barren women children;  
You let them become mothers of multitudes;  
Instead of reproach, You granted them splendor and glory;  
Instead of barrenness, You filled their houses with holy offspring;  
Who will grant me the fruit of the Spirit, but You?!  
Who will take away my reproach, except Your grace?!  
Who will turn the wilderness of my heart into a heavenly paradise?!  
Who will open up in me, the fountains of Your Holy Spirit?!

Who will kindle my depths with the fire of Your divine love?!  
Who will set Your joyful kingdom in me?!  
Who will make me join the heavenly choir?!  
That my depths would never cease to praise You?!

## ***PSALM 114***

### **THE SONG OF EXODUS**

Some believe that this psalm was originally written at the site of the River Jordan, at the Gilgal, after the crossing over of the children of Israel to the promised land. Whereas, according to others, it was written to honor the three young men in the furnace of fire in Babylon; And according to others, it was written to honor Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai; For God does exalted wonders with His children, both on the personal level, or on that of the whole people.

If the journey of exodus of the ancient people, and the liberation from the bondage of Pharaoh, have struck, even the irrational nature, to awe. to move in submission to consummate the will of its Creator; How about the journey of our own exodus out of the death of sin, of the bondage of the devil, and setting forth to the heavenly Canaan, to settle down in the bosom of God the Father, and to enjoy the fellowship of the divine glories?!

The three “Alleluia psalms” (114 to 116), proclaim the ways of God in dealing with His people:

Psalm 114 proclaims God’s dealings with them at the beginning of their history, especially on their exodus from the land of Egypt, and their liberation from the bondage of Pharaoh. This song presents it as an amazing incident, when even nature, stood in awe and fear before the presence of God among His people, and His leadership of them. The psalmist sees in it an amazing portrait of God, reigning among His people, when the earth quakes, and the sea flees before the Mighty One, the Holy Shepherd and Leader of His people, who granted them conquest.

In psalm 115, the psalmist compares between the people of God, who enjoy the conquest and blessings, with joy and praise, and the Gentile nations, who trusted in the lifeless and helpless idols.

And in psalm 116, the psalmist shows the people having enjoyed salvation, present to God a joyful worship, through praise and sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Here, psalm 114 presents to us a magnificent and joyful portrait of the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt, as a symbol of the exodus of humanity out of the bondage of the real Pharaoh, namely, the devil. ... We see the sea, the River Jordan, the mountains, and the hills, all dedicated to serve the church of Christ, setting forth toward the

heavenly Canaan, by the spirit of joy and of conquest on evil and corruption.

The earth shakes before the soul that enjoys the salvation of God; and the rock turns to work to her account, and gives her living water, whoever drinks it would never thirst.

Yes indeed, once the believer submits to the ordinance of God, and receives His will working in him, all creation, even the irrational, would long to serve him, on account of his fellowship with the Savior Creator.

Becoming a sanctuary for the Lord, and a center of His divine dominion (2); namely, becoming a temple for the Lord (1 Corinthians 7: 19-20), the believer delivers to Him the steering wheel of his whole life, to bring him forth into the bosom of God the Father.

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|---|--------------|
| <b>1- God, the Mighty Leader</b>                | <b>1 – 4</b> |
| <b>2- The presence of God, the God of Jacob</b> | <b>5 – 9</b> |

### **1- GOD, THE MIGHTY LEADER:**

*“When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language” (1)*

The Egyptians were called *“a people of strange language”*, because the Jews, while in Egypt did not use the language of the Egyptians. While according to some, by this he means (a violent and cruel people). In the Holy Book, particularly the Old Testament, Egypt always refers to the devil in his violence, on account of that Pharaoh enslaved the old people of God, whom the Lord liberated, as a symbol of liberating us from the bondage of the devil.

- ❖ Whenever ‘Egypt’ is mentioned, it means (sorrow), (who brings forth sorrow), or (who applies pressure); It is mostly used as a symbol of this world from which we are committed to come out, spiritually, and not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6: 14).

Everyone would become worthy of carrying the citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem, once he first denies this world; like those people who would have never been able to be led to the promised land, unless they first departed from Egypt. ... And as those have not departed from there without the divine help; no one would ever depart from this world in his heart, unless he is supported by the gift of the divine mercy.

What did happen through the symbol, is itself actualized in every believer in the church, at the end of the world, called by the blessed St. John “*the last hour*” (1 John 2: 18) <sup>1</sup>

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ They would never have been liberated from those cruel Egyptians, who were indeed more violent than the vicious beasts, and harder than the rocks, unless they were supported by the Mighty arm, and the unconquerable right hand; and not before being subjected to a multitude of plagues before they would eventually surrender..

That is why, after referring to the violent Egyptians, the psalmist showed the super normal dominion of God in committing them to release His people against their own will; then delivering them eventually to be swallowed by the sea<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

**“Judah became His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion” (2)**

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “Judea became His sanctuary”.

By “Judah”, he means “Israel”; as “Judah” is its governing royal tribe, And “Israel” is “Jacob” the father of all tribes.

Some scholars believe that, by “Judah”, he could not mean the kingdom of Judah, that embraced the two tribes ‘Judah’ and ‘Benjamin’; or that by “Israel” he means the northern kingdom that embraced the ten remaining tribes; because this psalm was written before the dissension of the kingdom in the days of Rehoboam, son of Solomon.

According to **St. Augustine**, “Judah” means (confession). By confession, the believer gets cleansed and purified, to become God’s sanctuary.

And “Israel” means, that the believer would become one of authority, a son of God.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the whole world is under the dominion of God; Yet there is great difference between God’s dominion on the whole world, and His dominion on His own people, whom He leads, cares, defends; and to whom He lets everything in nature submit to them.

❖ He starts with referring to “Judah” as God’s sanctuary, on account of that, Jerusalem became the city of God, where His temple was built. Then he refers to “Israel”, being the symbol of His dominion, on

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 114 (113).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 114.

account of that, it received the divine law and the teachings of the prophets. He probably also meant to give worship the priority; so that the commandment and the teachings would not turn into dry rational concepts, with no fellowship with God through worshipping Him.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ “*Judah became His sanctuary*”, namely, they became a people who minister to Him, dedicated to Him, and referred to Him. The word “sanctuary” was used to refer to the deepest section of the temple: the ‘*holy of holies*’.

Before that, ‘Judah’ was a defiled and abominable place; but once the people returned to God, the city became a sanctuary, through the offering of sacrifices, and the other rites of worship<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ By that, God means to say to His people:

Surely, I would not be of no benefit to you!

Let me present a testimony of some of the innumerable goods I have given you:

Have I not changed nature itself for your sake?

Have I not dedicated all elements for your service?

Have I not granted you a way of life (along your journey in the wilderness) with no difficulties?

Have I not granted you the following innumerable benefits:

A liberation from Egypt; An escape from the bondage of Pharaoh; Miracles and signs on the vicious Egyptians; Wondrous care in the wilderness; inheritance of the promised land; dominion over the surrounding nations; conquests without limits; increased your number to be like the stars of heaven, and the sand on the sea shore; glory all over the world<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“*The sea saw it and fled; Jordan turned back*” (3)**

Man stand in awe before such an amazing portrait, given by the psalmist, of the Red Sea, the River Jordan, the mountains, and the hills, all nature moving in terror before the work of God with Israel, who enjoyed salvation from the bondage of Pharaoh, setting forth to the promised land. Yet, all those carried symbolic meanings, which were realized, and still are, when man receives faith in the Lord Christ, Savior of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 114.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 114.

He would become a member in the new Israel; whose name, according to some, means (Beholding God).

What is the sea, fleeing away from the face of the believer, but taking off the old man, and the escape of the abominable habits that used to enslave him? ... It flees, seeing the Lord Christ, the head of the church, a Leader of the believer, granting him the grace to behold the divine secrets, and to recognize the heavenly life.

And what is the River Jordan, turning back, but the grace of baptism, received the repentant believer; when the Holy Spirit dwells on him; and when the heavenly hosts exult to see him, who has long been a slave captivated by Satan, enjoy sonhood to God. The River Jordan stands in awe before such exalted divine work.

Leading His people, liberated from the bondage of Pharaoh; the sea, the river, the mountains, and the hills, moved to open the way before his people; And the earth was shaken, to proclaim its longing to serve them.

Indeed, when we leave the steering wheel of our whole life in His hands, the Almighty God works in us; and there would be no hindrance to realize our mission; Even nature would proclaim its longing to work to our account. ... The only hindrance that may destroy our life and energies, is rebelling against God, disobeying His commandments, and not trusting in Him.

We are truly His holy temple, where He enters, and proclaim His kingdom in us.

Portraying the work of God with His people crossing the Red Sea ((Exodus 14), and the River Jordan (Joshua 3); the psalmist intends to put him, who does not trust God, to reproach and disgrace; when he sees the sea flee to open the way before the people to cross; the River turns back to welcome the leadership of God of His people, crossing over to the promised land; the mountains, and the hills dancing and jumping, exultant for the divine presence; ... while he, the rational human being stand with lack of faith in God's work, care, and protection! ... The psalmist says: "*The water saw You, O God, the water saw You, and were afraid; the depths also trembled*" (Psalm 77: 16).

According to **St. Augustine**, this psalm concerns us, for we are the children of the church, the people of God, the new Israel. ... He sees him, who puts the love of the world before him, Once he appears before God, he would turn back, forget things which are behind, and reach forward to those things which are ahead (Philippians 3: 13)

- ❖ Let us take into consideration what we learn here, for all those works were meant to be examples for us, and those words to exhort us to recognize ourselves. If we holdfast to the grace of God with a steady heart, that was given to us, we shall be counted as ‘Israel’, according to the words of the apostle, saying: “*You are Abraham’s seed*” (Galatians 3: 29; Romans 4: 10; etc.).

I wish every Christian would not consider himself as foreign to the name ‘Israel’; for, by the divine Cornerstone, we are bound with the Jews who believed in Christ, among whom were the apostles themselves. That is why our Lord says: “*And other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd*” (John 10: 16)..The Christian people are rather ‘Israel’, preferably called ‘the household of ‘Jacob’, for Israel and Jacob are one and the same<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ “*The sea saw it and fled*”. By fleeing, the sea intended to confirm its instant submission, to express its awe; and to open the way for realizing the work of God’s mercy.

The action of the sea was against nature. Like any living rational person, according to the command of God, it saved some people, and destroyed others; confirming that it would be a grave for some, and a way of transport for others (See Exodus 14).

A similar thing happened in Babylon, when the fire, according to God’s command; kept the three saintly young men, cast in it safe, while burned others outside it to death (See Daniel 3).

“*Jordan turned back*”. All those wonders that happened in different moments, and in different places, happened for our sake, to learn that God’s dominion reaches everywhere, nowhere is far from it. It happened in the sea and in the river; in the days of Moses, and in the days of Joshua; to soften the human mind, characterized by helplessness and lack of submission, to submit to God, and to welcome His knowledge<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ The Lord Christ came to be **baptized and to sanctify baptism**. He came to perform wonders, and to walk on the sea.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 114 (113).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 114.

If, before being incarnated, the sea saw Him and fled, and the Jordan turned back; the Savior took a body to let the sea see Him, and the Jordan receive Him without fear.

Another reason for His coming;... Through 'Eve', a virgin, death came to the world; and through another virgin, life came. As the ancient serpent seduced the first virgin; the archangel Gabriel carried the good news to the second virgin<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

*“The mountains skipped like rams; the little hills like lambs”*

**(4)**

What are those mountains that skipped like rams, and those little hills like lambs, but the prophets, and the apostles of the new covenant; who all skip together in joy, for the sake of what the believer would enjoy of the blessings of salvation presented by the Lord Christ.

When God encountered the prophet Moses, the Israeli people stood below the mountain; and *“Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently”* (Exodus 19: 18). It was also said: *“His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise; ... You divided the earth with rivers; the mountains saw You and trembled. The overflowing of the water passed by; the deep uttered its voice, and lifted its hands on high”* (Habakkuk 3: 3; 9-10).

God's dealings with His people, old and new, testify to the fact that the irrational nature move in some way or another, obeying the divine commandments, in awe before God's care and love for men.

❖ Now, the angels, the heavens, the stars, the sun, the moon, together with the earth with its mountains and hills; all skip and jump for joy.

If, at the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, the whole creation exulted; heaven kept providing them with a lighted pillar of clouds by day, and a pillar of fire by night; and the mountains skipped before them like rams, and the little hills like lambs (4); ... What would happen on the day Christ was born?!

Until recently, the whole creation were moaning because of their diversion toward corruption, through the fall of Adam, their king; But the Lord came to renew those who initially had the image of God, and to recreate them according to how they should be<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Maccarius the Great)**

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 12:15.

<sup>2</sup> الرسالة الثانية، 2 (في عيد الميلاد غالبًا في إحدى سنوات القرن الرابع – فردوس الآباء).

❖ “*The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs*”. By these words, the psalmist was inspired to portray the extent of awe and rejoice of the irrational creation before the greatness of God’s wonders that made them skip and jump, the way men do in case of intense joy ... And as, according to the prophet Isaiah, at the time of calamity, “*the new wine fails, and the vine languishes*” (Isaiah 24: 7). ... We as well, to express our pleasure to receive an important guest, we say: [The house is filled with joy]; we do not mean the walls, but we refer to our exalted and great pleasure<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 2- THE PRESENCE OF GOD, GOD OF JACOB:

“*What ails you, O sea, that you fled? O Jordan, that you turned back?*” (5)

Here, the psalmist talks again about the reaction of the sea, the Jordan, the mountains, and the little hills, to the work of God for the salvation of His people. He probably intends to confirm the submission, in complete obedience of the irrational nature to the Creator and Savior. The psalmist, standing in awe, talks to the sea and the river, as though to real persons, not about some event that happened in the past, and was over with, but about the perpetual position of God, the Philanthropic, in the past, as well as in the present, and in the future. Nature, perpetually stands by, in anticipation of any divine command for the sake of men, particularly His believers.

The Coptic church sings this verse and the one following it in the feast of Epiphany of the Lord Christ, which concerns the activity of the epiphany of the Lamb of God in the life of believers.

“*O mountains, that you skipped like rams? O little hills like lambs*” (6)

If the sea and the river moved in awe before the lord; The mountains and the little hills, moved for joy and exultation, skipped as though in a feast, for the sake of God’s work for the salvation of man.

❖ The Holy Book often personalizes many irrational things; as for example, when it says that the sea says so and so; the sword is given command to do so and so; and the mountains and the little hills, are asked why they skipped like rams and lambs (Psalm 19:1; Zechariah 13: 7; Psalm 114: 6)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 114.

<sup>2</sup> On the Son, Theological Oration 4 (30) 2.

(St. Gregory the Nezenzian)

**“Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob” (7)**

The earthquake refers to the crucifixion of the old earthly man, for the believer to receive the new creation, the deposit of the heavenlies; as though his earth turns into a new heaven.

**St. John Chrysostom**, standing in awe, when the Lord calls himself **“God of Jacob”**, says: [The Lord refers Himself to His servants; and it is written: *“Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God”* (Hebrew 11: 16); And He Himself says: *“I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob”* (See Exodus 3: 6) <sup>1</sup>].

**“Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters” (8)**

What is the Rock, but the Lord Christ who calls the thirsty to come to Him, to gush into the depths of His believers, fountains of living water.

Whoever believes in the Lord Christ, the Rock of ages, He will come and dwell in him, and will turn his depths into a fountain of living water.

❖ **“Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of water”**. Tell me, what excuse do we still have? Why are we so cruel, and non-submissive? When even the solid and hard rock and the flint have submitted to the command of God? Why is it that the human being, with what he was given of reason, surpassing any other creature, is so non-responsive<sup>2</sup>?

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ As our nature turned into rocks through the worship of idols, and became unable to progress, the Sun of Righteousness arose (Malachi 4: 2), in such severe cold, to instigate the advent of spring; and the warm south wind made the warm rays of the sun prevail over the whole earth. The human race, that turned into rocks because of the cold idol-worship, is warmed up by the Holy Spirit, the rays of the Word of God, to become again like the water that grants the eternal life (John 4: 14); **“Who turned the rock into a pool of water; the flint into a fountain of waters” (8)** <sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 114.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 114.

<sup>3</sup> عظة 5 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 114**

**PREPARE, O LORD, MY CROSSOVER JOURNEY TO YOU**

- ❖ The exodus of Your people out of the bondage of Pharaoh,  
Will remain the song of every true believer, who enjoys the new birth  
in baptism;  
You sent Moses and Aaron to work;  
But You were the actual Leader of the journey;  
As a loving and holy heavenly King, You preceded the procession of  
Your people;  
You let nature work to their account.
- ❖ You descended from heaven to us;  
You took over the leadership of Your people, to set them free from  
the kingdom of darkness;  
To bring them forth to the kingdom of light in a unique journey;  
Who can describe the journey of Your cross and resurrection?!  
You have set Your divine kingdom in us; and turned our hearts into a  
new heaven;  
The sea, with all its whirlpools and mighty waves, was terrified  
before You;  
The hosts of darkness could not stand before Your redemption work;  
The enemy stirred up men to get rid of You;  
They cried out to Pilate, saying: Crucify Him, crucify Him!  
They did not perceive that the way was opened by Your cross;  
For Your believers to cross over into the bosoms of Your Father;  
Like someone in weakness, You were moved to be crucified;  
Behold, the prophets, together with all the believers of the old  
covenant,  
like the mountains and hills, skipped for joy;  
For what the prophets and kings longed to see has been realized.
- ❖ The procession of Your cross caused the earth to tremble!  
The love for the earthlies was shaken in my heart;  
It fled before You, to let the love of the heavenlies occupy my depths;  
Behold, my heart, hard like a rock, was flooded by the water of Your  
grace;

And my feelings, hard like flint, enjoyed the water of Your Holy Spirit;  
What an enjoyable journey!  
Your cross turned my life into a journey to heaven!

## *PSALM 115*

# **THE INEFFABLE AND IMMEASURABLE DIVERGENCE BETWEEN GOD AND THE IDOLS**

This psalm came as an extension of the last one -- psalm 114 -- which praises God for the sake of His glory and blessings, particularly for His leadership of His people during their exodus, and their liberation from the bondage of Pharaoh. The present psalm continues on the same line of thought, and demonstrates, as well, the immeasurable divergence between the living God and the lifeless and senseless idols. It presents to us God, being a Helper of His people, a Shield for them; And ends with the blessings that dwell on His people who trust in Him, an issue proclaimed more clearly in the following psalm.

The scholars differ widely, concerning the circumstances in which this psalm was written. Some refer it to the prophet Moses, after crossing over the Red Sea; Others refer it to the prophet David at the beginning of his reign; Others refer it to Mordecai and Esther, when God saved His people on their hands; Others to the three saintly young men, when God saved them from the furnace of fire; and still others, refer it to king Hezekiah, whom God saved from his Assyrian enemies.

This psalm is a poem of thanksgiving to the living God who works in the life of His people. It is the praise of every day of the life of the believer, to whom the Lord grants a conquest, and new mercies every morning, while the devil would not cease to oppose him. The more the believer or the church seem in danger, the more the Lord of Glory Jesus Christ transfigures in His salvation work. It is along the narrow way where we encounter the Savior, experience His salvation, and enjoy the sweetness of His love; that our depths set forth to praise Him all the days of our sojourn, and in eternity as well.

This psalm provides us with answers to the following questions:

1- **Where is our God?** (1- 3). He is the Mighty God in heaven; Whoever enjoys a fellowship with Him, would never put his trust in whoever is lesser than Him.

2- **What are His features?** (4 – 11). If the idols are made of senseless hard stones by those who worship them; Our God, on the other hand, grants us the fellowship of the divine nature. Every man is conformed as an icon to whom he worships. He who worships the love of the world will carry the features of the mortal world; While he who

worship the Savior of the world will carry the features of love for all mankind, even for his oppressors. Our God is preoccupied with us, sees us, hears our voices, and helps us.

3- **Are we committed to praise Him?** (12 – 18). The Holy One shines with His blessings on us; and unceasingly blesses us; Do we bless Him in return, by receiving His splendor working in us; and by glorifying Him by our life, holy in Him? ... He presents to us His divine promises; Do we trust in Him, and lean on Him? ... He is the living God; Do we praise Him in the land of the living; or we surrender to death, and going down toward the deadly silence?

This psalm, being liturgical, it is sung successively by the following categories:

- a- **The people:** This psalm starts by the people’s confessing **their sins (1 -2); then rejecting the false gods (3 – 8).**
  - b- **The Levites: join the debate (9 – 11)**
  - c- **The priests: proclaim the divine blessing (12 – 15).**
  - d- **The people: sing the refrain (16 – 18)**
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- 1- **A collective confession 1 - 3**
  - 2- **An immeasurable divergence between God and the idols 4 - 8**
  - 3- **The trust in God 9 - 17**
  - 4- **Let us bless the Lord 18**

### **1- A COLLECTIVE CONFESSION:**

Whenever one goes through a tough temptation, and falls into a condition of despair, he would be ridiculed by some, saying to him: *‘Where is your God?’* (Psalm 42: 3). And as it came in Joel: *“Why should they say among the peoples: Where is their God?”* (Joel 2: 17); And when Rabshakeh the Assyrian said: *“Thus says the king: Do not Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you; nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord; .... Has any of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria?”* (Isaiah 36: 14-18).

What would be worse is when such a question arises within man himself, feeling that God resides high in heaven, not caring for him.

Such a question might have come from some nations, which, on entering into Jerusalem, or into any other city of Israel, and finding no statutes of idols, they would deride the Jews for being godless!

This psalm came, by a collective confession, to confirm that the affliction that dwelt upon them, was not because the heavenly God disregards them, as much as it is because of their own sins.

***“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, and because of Your truth” (1)***

The believer presents this praise to God. Looking at how the nations around him, deny faith, he would not fall into pride, counting himself better than them, but would refer all what he has reached to God’s grace and mercies; and for the sake of God’s righteousness, despite our lack thereof. The psalmist denies every human self-righteousness, to proclaim the glory of God, who works with His mercy, righteousness, and divine truth, in the life of His believers, who seriously enjoy Him.

The expression ***“Give glory”***, mostly binds with the confession of sins; the way it happened when Joshua said to Achan the son of Carmi who sinned to God: ***“My son, Give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me”***(Joshua 7: 19).

And when the Philistines took away the Ark of the Covenant, and their god Dagon fell down before it; their priests and diviners said to them: ***“You shall give glory to the God of Israel, perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land”*** (1 Samuel 6: 5).

In this psalm the people confess that God is righteous; that what dwelt upon them is a natural fruit of their own evil; and that they have nothing to offer on their side to seek His mercy, except for God’s name to be glorified, and His righteousness to appear, despite their own lack thereof. God Himself says: ***“Not for your sake do I do this, says the Lord God, Let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel”*** (Ezekiel 36: 32).

According to **St. Augustine**, mercy, and truth, are often bound together in the Holy Scripture: [In His mercy, God calls the sinners ; and in His truth He condemns those whom He calls, and refuse to come to Him<sup>1</sup>].

❖ ***“For Christ died for the ungodly”*** (Romans 6: 7), people seek no glory for themselves, but for the name of God<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 115 (113).*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 115 (113).*

***Why should the Gentiles say, 'Where now is their God?'" (2)***

The devil perpetually attempts to stir doubt in the hearts of believers concerning God's care for them; he did his best all along the eras to portray God residing in seclusion in His heavens, not caring for the affairs of men.

Man feels bitterness when non-believers reproach God as though He does not exist, or as though He is helpless; although the real cause of what dwell upon him is his own sins.

When there is no more preaching of faith in the Lord; on His second coming on the clouds, the non-believers will wail; and the Gentiles will no more say: "*Where now is their God?*", but will be overwhelmed with fear and terror.

❖ According to the prophet: "*For with You is the fountain of life. In Your light we see light*" (Psalm 36: 9), ... Those who drink from the riches of the house of God, from the river of His joy, will become in ecstasy; as the great David came to be, when he got out of himself into the ranges of joy and overwhelming happiness. Seeing the unseen beauty, with his voice led by the holy power, he cried out, saying: "*Why should the Gentiles say: 'Where now is their God?'" (2)*. By such an expression, David explains the very great, and inexpressible treasures of God; about which Paul, the new Benjamin, while in the ecstasy of joy and happiness, also says: "*If we are beside ourselves, it is for God, or if we are of sound minds, it is for you*" (2 Corinthians 5: 12). In a similar way, Paul, addressing Festos, the Roman Governor, says: "*I am not mad, most noble Festos, but speak the words of truth and reason*" (Acts 26: 25) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

***"But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases" (3)***

If the enemy attempts to distort the image of God Himself, portray Him as though in seclusion in heaven, with no work nor role on earth; The believers, on their side, confirm that, although He is in heaven, where the enemy has no place, and where evil has no role; yet He works to the account of humanity, the object of his love. The Holy Book often confirms that "*The Lord is near*". He is in heaven, yet, because of His love, He is closer to us than our own household and beloved ones. The Lord of glory Jesus says: "*My Father has been working up till now, and I have been working*" (John 5: 17) .

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 1 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

Although He is unseen, yet He is present everywhere, and intends to work. He is in heaven, and wishes that His believers bear the Spirit of holiness befitting of Him.

Once the understanding returned to him, and he perceived the danger of his foolish pride, Nebuchadnezzar said: “*All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He (God) does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him: ‘What have you done?’*” (Daniel 4: 35).

- ❖ God is both in heaven and on the earth, doing according to his will, whether among the elites or the lowly of His people. He presents His grace free, so that no one may boast his self-worthiness<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## 2- AN IMMEASURABLE DIVERGENCE BETWEEN GOD AND THE IDOLS:

*“Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man’s hand” (4)*

The word ‘*idols*’ here came to mean (images). They are silver and gold, lifeless, less than angels and men. While God is the Mighty Creator of men, their idols, on the other hand, are, not only unable to create, but are, themselves, “*the work of man’s hand*”, namely, are not gods.

**St. Cyril the Great** discerns between the ‘images’ worshipped as gods by the pagans, and the ‘images’ of the saints and the righteous men of God, which glorify God, and lift our hearts up to Him.

- ❖ We make images for the saintly men of God, not to worship them as gods, but so that, whenever we look at them, we are motivated to follow their lead. If we make an image of the Lord Christ, it is so that our minds would rise in longing for Him<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- ❖ They might had as well, images of bronze, wood, and stone; but the Holy Spirit refers to those made of precious materials in particular, so that if man, perceiving their futility, stops worshipping the precious-made ones, it would become easier for him to do the same with the less expensive. We hear the prophet Jeremiah, ridiculing the

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 115 (113).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 114 (115)No. 16.

idol worshippers, say: “*Saying to a tree, ‘You are my father’, and to a stone, ‘You gave birth to me’*” (Jeremiah 2: 27) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see” (5)***

The psalmist wonders, how it is possible for man to worship perpetually mute and blind images! And **St. Augustine** wonders how the pagans worshipped, honored, and referred authority to the idols, when their maker is better and more exalted than them! The animals, even the harmful among them, like rats and serpents, have a breath of life, which the idols lack; and even a dead corpse of man, used to be once alive; while the idols never have been.

❖ Although the maker of idols is better than them, yet man would never worship the artist who can do what his handiwork cannot.

It is written that even the animals are more exalted than the idols which “*do not mutter through their throats*” (7).

Man would move to chase a living animal away from his idol, the work of his own hand; Nevertheless he worships that helpless god, as though one with authority<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Although man makes his idols, yet he would turn to become their captive, those which “*have eyes, but they do not see*” (5) <sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell” (6)***

Man needs a God who hears him, responds to him, and is capable of working and sharing; Yet these idols are deaf, and cannot even smell. As to the living God, in His exalted love, inclines His ear to hear, even the sighs of our hearts, And smelling in us the fragrance of sonhood, He embraces us to His bosoms.

❖ You should never utter a thing before God with pride, as though you are someone with knowledge; but you should approach Him with the spirit of a small kid trusting in his father, to be counted as worthy of the parental care given by a father to his child<sup>4</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 115 (113).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 115 (113).

<sup>3</sup> City of God, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Homily 72.

***“They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat” (7)***

The old covenant, perpetually standing against idol-worship; describes idols as no more than things which do not act, move, see, hear, smell, handle, walk, nor mutter through their throats; negative features that deserve only ridicule and taunt. According to the prophet Isaiah: *“To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? The workman molds a graven image; The goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains. Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution, chooses a tree that will not rot; he seeks for himself a skilled workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter”* (Isaiah 40: 18-20).

- ❖ Attempting to liberate those who possess lifeless treasures from being enslaved by them, and from turning eventually into idol-worshippers; the Holy Book describes them as *“having mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat”* (5-7). That is why the apostle Paul called the love of wealth as (idol-worship), and those who love it as ministering to mute gold or lifeless silver<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Philoxinus)**

***“Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them” (8)***

According to **St. Augustine**, the peoples who worshipped the stone idols, became stones like the things they worshipped. Worshipping the senseless image, they, themselves, came to be senseless<sup>2</sup>.

If the idol-worshippers, foolishly worshipping irrational things, have become irrational like them; We, on the other hand, worshipping the living Creator, the whole wisdom, understanding, love, and mercy, intend to be like Him,. . . Man likens what he worships.

- ❖ The human nature, have been in a certain time, through idol-worship, as irrational as the idols they used to worship; as according to the Holy Scripture: *“Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them”* (8).

It is something unavoidable; . . . Those who worship God, and keep His commandments, will gain the features of the divine nature;

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 8 : 230

<sup>2</sup> In Jon, 42: 2.

Whereas those who take the side of vanity, namely, the idols, would liken what they worship, and would, themselves become stones instead of human beings<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

❖ After being created in the image of God, man, through evil habits, turned into what is like an irrational animal, like a tiger or a lion; As according to the words of the prophet,: “*As a lion in his den; he lies in wait to catch the poor; he catches the poor when he draws him into his net*” (Psalm 10: 9). ... Man turned into a vicious animal “*Those who make them (the idols) are like them, so is everyone who trusts in them*” (8).

Men, and among them even the Jews, deflected to idol-worship, and were defiled by a multitude of the filth of this world. Then the human nature, passing through the Jordan, and by the fragrant herbs and incense, rose to an exalted level, to walk eventually with God.

The Divine Groom grants the soul that rises up to Him, a deep enjoyment of exaltation; shows her His beauty, and reminds her of her past sins, when she was like vicious beasts, to let her appreciate her present enjoyment, compared to her past condition<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

### 3- THE TRUST IN GOD:

Leaning on the chest of God, the believer would find in Him, help to resist the sin that corrupted his nature; and a Shield to protect him against the devil and all his tricks. He would anticipate with joy the day of the coming of Righteousness; for he does not fear the judgment, but exultantly anticipates his encounter with God, his Savior.

“*O Israel, trust in the Lord, He is their help and their shield*”

(9)

If the heathens trust in their idols, and deliver their life to them; How much more would the believers trust in the living God, the Philanthropic, the Dispenser, and the Wise?! The psalmist says: “*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*” (Psalm 33: 20-21).

He addresses his talk to Israel, namely, to the church as a whole, with all levels, rich and poor, young and old.

<sup>1</sup> عظة 5 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار

<sup>2</sup> عظة 8 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار

***“O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord, He is their help and their shield” (10)***

If the call to trust in God is addressed to all believers, It would be more befitting of the priests and the ministers who labor in the vineyard of God, to trust in Him, as their help and their shield.

***“You who fear the Lord, He is their help and their shield” (11)***

After calling all believers, and in particular those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord, the psalmist intends to confirm that those who enjoy the help of the Lord, to whom, He truly becomes a shield, are those who walk in His fear, and live with the spirit of piety, faithfulness, and repentance.

***“The Lord has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron” (12)***

If the psalmist calls us to trust in God, it does not mean that God needs to be reminded of us, for we are perpetually on His mind, He loves us, and is preoccupied with us. Although He perpetually intends to bless us. Yet, He does not commit us to get His blessings, but it is befitting of us to respond to His holy will.

***“He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great” (13)***

The psalmist confirms the desire of God’s heart to bless all, small and great; For, being a Father, He has no partiality.

❖ Let the children come to their loving Father; ... Let the sick come to their divine Physician; ... Let the lost come to their Savior; ... Let them all come! ... If the branches (the children) have not committed a sin yet, yet they are tinted through their origin. Therefore, *“He will bless both small and great” (13)*.... As long as the loss is general, let the salvation be as well; ... As we are all lost, let us all be in Christ; ... I wish no one is excluded from His salvation<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“May the Lord give you increase more and more, you and your children” (14)***

The psalmist exhorts them to trust in God, not only to get His blessing and help, but to get more and more of it. The believer would feel the continuous renewal, and open the door before his children to have it as well; As man mostly wishes for his children and grandchildren to get more blessings than he wishes for himself.

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<sup>1</sup> Ser. On N.T. 65: 4.

*“May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth”*

(15)

The believers, along the generations, wished to enjoy the blessing, which was given to their father Abraham by Melchizedek, saying, *“Blessed be Abraham by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth”* (Genesis 14: 19); an immeasurable and unutterable blessing, on account of that it comes from the Creator of heaven and earth.

*“The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord’s; but the earth He has given to the children of men”* (16)

The word “heavens” came here in pleural; he probably refers to the third heaven, which the apostle Paul could not describe. Having given the earth to the children of men to live there during their temporal life; Yet God prepares for them eternal glories in heavens.

According to **the scholar Origen**, “the heavenly God” presents “the heavenly fatherhood”, and embraces us to Him as His “heavenly household”<sup>1</sup>.

We, on earth, we are bound together through temporal relationship.

❖ Heaven is indeed high, and the distance between it and us is unlimited; Yet, it is not befitting of us, accordingly, to be slothful or fearful; as though it is inaccessible to reach; but we are rather committed to be zealous<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6: 19-21).

If the heart is on earth, namely, if man, in his behavior, desires earthly benefits, how could he be purified,?! ... But if the heart is in heaven, it will be pure, like everything in heaven. ... Things are defiled by being mixed with something of lesser value, even though is pure in itself. As for example, gold would be considered as defiled, through being mixed with pure silver. Likewise our thoughts would be defiled by wishing for earthly things; despite the purity of the earth, and its beauty in itself.

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<sup>1</sup> *In Exod. Hom. 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *Paschal Letters, 4: 3.*

But we do not understand the word ‘heaven’ here in a material sense; for what is material would be considered as ‘earthly’. He who lays his treasure in heaven, has to despise the whole world. About heaven it is written: *“Heavens are the Lord’s”* (16), namely, It is a spiritual firmament. ... We should not lay our treasure and heart on that mortal heaven, but lay them in the heaven that endures forever<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence”* (17)

No voice of praise is heard out of the mouths of the dead who go down into silence, namely, into the graves. It is therefore befitting of us to cross over the existence in graves, to praise God forever, *“For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth. The living, the living man, he shall praise You, as I do this day”* (Isaiah 38: 18-19).

❖ A feast does not mean the enjoyment of eating meet, clothed with expensive attire, nor having fun; but its gladness lies in the knowledge of God, and in giving thanks to Him.

King Hezekiah, after being spared from death, praised God, saying: *“For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You ... The living shall praise You, as I do today”* (Isaiah 38: 18-19).

**Praising God and glorifying Him is done only by those who live in Christ;** they who go up to celebrate the feast; for the Passover is not for the Gentiles (the idol-worshippers), nor for the Jews according to the flesh, but for those who know the truth, as said by him who was sent to proclaim such a feast, saying: *“For our Passover, Christ, was slain for our sake”*; and as said by the psalmist: *“The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence; but we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore”* (17-18)

That is why, although the wicked may force themselves to observe the feast, which is meant to glorify God; they, being wicked, are considered as busybodies in their entrance into the church of the saints. Rebuked and admonished by God, He says to them,: *“What right have you to declare My statutes?”* (Psalm 50: 16); And by the Holy Spirit, saying: *“Praise is unseemly on the lips of a sinner, for it has not been sent from the Lord”* (Sirach 15: 9). Sin has no existence in the altar of God; For *“The mouth of the wicked pours forth evil”* (Proverb 15: 28).

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<sup>1</sup>Sermon on the Mount 2: 13: 44.

How would God be praised by a defiled mouth?!; ... How would such contradictories conform to one another?!... *“For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness”* (2 Corinthians 6: 14), as said by Paul, the minister of the gospel.

The righteous, although he seems to be dead to the world, yet he dares to say: *“I shall not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord”* (Psalm 118: 17). ... Even God is not ashamed to be called God of those who put to death their members which are on the earth (Colossians 3: 5), of those who live in Christ, who is God of the living, and not of the dead; He, by whose word He gives bread, by which the saints live, as declared by the Lord, saying: *“I am the bread of life”* (John 6: 48).

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ The goal, for the sake of which man becomes a sojourners to this world, is for his soul to cross over to another world and another age; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“For our citizenship is in heaven”* (Philippians 3: 20); and, *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh”* (2 Corinthians 10: 3). That is why, he who denies this world, should positively believe that he has to cross over with his thoughts, by the spirit, to another world, where our behavior, pleasure, and enjoyment of the spiritual goods, are; And to be born from the spirit in the inner man; according to the words of the Lord, Himself, saying: *“He who believes in Me... has passed from death to life”* (John 5: 24).

As there is death, other than the natural seen death; and life, other than this seen life. the holy Book says: *“But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives”* (1 Timothy 5: 6); and the Lord says: *“Let the dead bury their own dead”* (Luke 9: 60);... For, *“the dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence”* (17, 18) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Maccarius the Great)**

❖ As long as there are some who, although aware of the prophets, yet they do not believe in what is written, and debate against us; They are about whom it is written: *“The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment”* (Psalm 1: 5).

Yes, it is befitting of us to encounter them, as much as possible, in a superficial way; For, being said that *“the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment”*, shows that God is in no need to look long at them, but He will send them at once to their punishment.

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 49 : 2

And being said that “*The dead do not praise the Lord*” (17), it shows that this present life is the only time for remorse and forgiveness; for, “*He who goes down to the grave, does not come up*” (Job 7: 9). Those who are dead in sins, have no more chance to praise the Lord after death; but only to wail over themselves; Praise is for those who thank God; and wailing is for those under punishment.

That is why it is the pious who praise the Lord; but those who died in their sins, have no more chance to confess (to praise) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

#### **4- LET US BLESS THE LORD:**

God stretches His hand and blesses His believers; who feel that they are perpetually in His thoughts, that He keeps His promises, and is faithful in realizing His covenants.

*“But we will bless the Lord, from this time forth, and forevermore; Alleluia” (18)*

It is befitting of the church to bless the Lord, from this time forth, and forevermore. She indeed confronts troubles; but her hope is in God, her Savior. Looking forward to the heavenly glories, makes her in perpetual joy, even during the moments of trouble and suffering.

❖ As the kingdom of the devil is by receiving sin; the kingdom of God, on the other hand, is got by doing virtue in the purity of heart and spiritual knowledge ... Wherever there is the kingdom of heaven, there is surely the eternal life in joy; And wherever there is the kingdom of the devil, there is surely death and the grave. ... He who is in the kingdom of the devil, cannot praise the Lord; for the psalmist tells us “*The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence; But we (who live for God and not for the sin or the world), will bless the Lord from this time forth, and forevermore; Alleluia*” (17, 18). “*For in death, there is no remembrance of You. In the grave (in the sin), who will give You thanks?*” (Psalm 6: 5). Man is according to how he is; If he calls himself a Christian thousands of times, or even a monk, he cannot confess God, if he sins, and holdfast to his sin<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Moses)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Cath. Lect. 18: 14.*

<sup>2</sup> *Cassian: Canferences 1: 14.*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 115**  
**YOU ARE, O LORD, MY HELP AND MY SHIELD**

- ❖ Your amazing grace works in me;  
I cannot boast any of my works;  
But Your mercy supports me;  
And Your faithfulness stands by me;  
Your promises are true and faithful;
- ❖ In the time of affliction, I have to judge myself;  
My sins corrupt my peace;  
But by Your grace, You forgive all my iniquities;
- ❖ The pagans cherished their idols;  
In particular those made of gold and silver;  
They did not perceive that they could not create; being themselves,  
made by man;  
But I cherish You, O Creator of heaven and earth;  
Gold and silver have no place in my heart;  
Come, o Creator of all, and occupy my whole heart;
- ❖ I long to hear Your sweet voice, O Creator of the mouth;  
To see You, and to enjoy Your splendor;  
O, who made eyes for me;  
And who provided me with an insight to behold Your secrets;  
Incline Your ear; For only You can hear the sighs of my heart, and  
perceive their causes;  
Grant me the smell of Your fragrances;  
To become the object of gladness to the heavenlies;  
Stretch Your hands and embrace me;  
As there is no Comforter like You;  
You always search for me;  
And seek after me, to bring me back to You.
- ❖ Stretch Your hand, O Lord, and bless me;  
Let my heart rejoice by the work of Your grace in the life of many;  
That those who are saved would come every day to join the church of  
Christ,  
To enjoy the blessed heavenly life.

## ***PSALM 116***

# **SETTING FORTH TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING**

According to the Septuagint version, this psalm embraces the two psalms 114 and 115.

Some believe that the prophet David is the author of this psalm by an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, at the time king Saul was trying to kill him; or when his own son Absalom rebelled against him. He probably suffered once from a severe illness (3, 8); put in bonds (3, 16); But God, the Liberator, and the Grantor of life, does not desire the death of His saints, but allows for their death, according to His divine plan (Psalm 31: 15; 139: 6). Perceiving that all men lied to him (11); Feeling as though he was a captive of death (3) and that the pains of death have encompassed him, the psalmist's soul was brought low and got filled with trouble and sorrow; But the Lord dealt bountifully with him, and granted him heavenly comforts

This psalm is considered as Messianic, for It refers to the sufferings of the Lord Christ, His death, and His conquest.

Many saintly fathers, like **St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, and St. Jerome**, believe that this psalm proclaims a cry-out by every spiritual believer's heart, longing for the enjoyment of the eternal life, while suffering from temptations and troubles in this life. According to **St. Augustine**, this psalm is sung by every man, together with the choir of saints; when feeling like a sojourner from the Lord while living in this world; but when the Lord drew him to Himself, his heart kindled with love toward God, who heard His voice and supplication as he was lost and dead, brought him back, restored his life, and made him join the congregation of saints.

This psalm is used by the church of England as a prayer of thanksgiving, when a baby is born.

Many see it as a joyful psalm of thanksgiving, presented by the believer, when the Lord saves him from an affliction.

The psalmist starts it by supplicating to God to incline His ear to him, to hear his cries as the pangs of Sheol took hold of him; And ends it as an exultant being who praises God, give Him thanks, and glorifies Him.

**1- The proclamation of the practical faith**

**1 - 2**

**2- The affliction and the salvation**

**3 - 6**

3- The return of the soul to her true rest	7 - 11
4- “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?”	12 – 15
5- A sacrifice of thanksgiving	16 – 19

## 1- THE PROCLAMATION OF THE PRACTICAL FAITH:

*“I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplication”* (1)

The words *“I love”* here, refer to the enjoyment of the true pleasure and gladness in getting attached to the Lord, and recognizing His divine will, together with acknowledging His favor, and giving Him thanks for His mercy and compassion. They express, as well, the wish for a continuous attachment to God, and rejoicing in His perpetual presence in the depths of the soul.

The soul truly exults and gets filled with joy when she perceives that God, Creator of heaven and earth listens to her, and responds to what is for her edification. Yet, the psalmist does not say: ‘I rejoiced because the Lord heard my voice’, but says *“I love the Lord ...”*; as though, when he meditates in God’s love for him, and His condescension to incline His ear to listen to his voice, and to respond to his supplication, the foremost of all the commandments, *“Love the Lord Your God”*, would become for him, something easy and natural.

According to the Arabic language version, it came as *“I loved the Lord, because He hears my voice and my supplications”* (1). According to **St. Jerome**<sup>1</sup>, the expression: *“I loved”* is in the past tense, while the expression: *“He hears my voice”* is in the present tense, For I love the Lord without waiting to see if He hears my voice and my supplication; although I am sure that, in His designated time, He will respond.

❖ Whom does the psalmist love? ... he the Lord his God from his whole heart ... And as a reward for his love, the Lord will respond to his supplications<sup>2</sup>.

**(Pope Athanasius the Apostolic)**

❖ I rejoice that the Lord responds to my supplication; Namely, that, having gradually progressed from fearing the Lord, to loving Him from my whole heart, He, in turn, responds to my supplication, and grants me my wish.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 39 on Psalm 114 (116A).

<sup>2</sup> Letter 7.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*I loved the Lord, because He hears my voice and my supplication*”. I wish the soul of man that wanders in sojourn from the Lord, sings this way.... I wish the lost sheep sing this way; ... I wish the son who was dead and is alive again (Luke 15: 6, 24) sings this way. ... Let us all, together with the saints, sing this way<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

“*Because He inclined His ear to me. Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live*” (2)

The Holy Book often portrays God condescends to incline His ear toward man (Psalm 17: 6; 31: 2; 40: 1; 78: 1). How great for the believer to perceive the true fatherhood of God; and to feel that He listens to the cry-outs of the poor, and responds to his supplications.

The expression: “*I will call upon Him*”, is used to mean “I will worship Him” (See Genesis 4: 26); particularly through prayers; And is sometimes used, meaning “I will give Him thanks”.

According to St. Jerome, the expression “*as long as I live*”, came to mean “all the days of my life”; for the believer’s whole life is day and light; as according to the apostle Paul, we do not know the night; There is no place for the darkness in our hearts, nor before our eyes, For we are the dwelling place for Christ, the true Light, and are perpetually in His presence.

❖ “*Because He inclined His ear to me*’. Being little, lowly, and unable to lift our eyes up to him, the Lord bows downward toward us in His compassion, and condescends to listen to us. Actually, being human, and cannot be gods, God became Man; according to what is written: “*He bowed the heavens, and came down*” (Psalm 18: 9).

❖ How did the psalmist get such a hope, saying: “*Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live*”. I love, ... because He hears, and he hears because He inclines His ear to me..... How could you know, O human soul, that God has inclined His ear to you, except by saying: “*I believed, therefore I spoke*” (Psalm 116: 10). He has, therefore those three things bound together: “*faith, hope, and love*” (See 1 Corinthians 13: 13). As you believe, you hope, and as you hope, you love<sup>2</sup>.

What are “*the days of your life*” in which you called upon Him? Are they the “*fullness of time*” when God sent forth His Son (Galatians

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 116 (115). A sermon to the common people.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 39 on Ps. 114 (116 A).

4: 4); He who said: “*In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You*” (Isaiah 49: 8) ... I would rather call my days ‘the days of my misery’, ‘the days of my death’; the days which are, according to Adam, ‘days full of labor and sweat’; the days according to the old corruption, as “*I sank in deep mire*” (Psalm 69: 2) ... In such days I will call upon You<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Inclining the ear may refer to God’s compassion upon man, who has no daring to raise his voice up because of his sins; It may also refer to God’s condescension to approach us in flesh. As to saying “*all the days of my life*”, it means ‘all the days of my sorrow’, or ‘the days, lightened, not by the material sun, but by the “*Sun of Righteousness*”, namely, the Word of God, and His only begotten Son’.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

## 2- THE AFFLICTION AND THE SALVATION:

*The pains of death encompassed me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me. I found trouble and sorrow” (3)*

The troubles of the body, however immense, could not be compared to the troubles of the soul, which would sometimes make man, wish for death, and not find it.

Do not marvel to know that the psalmist, the man of God, sometimes felt as though not standing on a high mountain, but moans because he walks in the valley of the shadow of death. By “*the pains of death*”, and “*the pangs of Sheol*”, here, the psalmist means to express the state of affliction, sorrow, and bitterness, which he suffers.

**St. Augustine** compares between the days of man, sojourning from the Lord, and lost in vanity, which he counts as “*the days of his life*”, and his days, when the Lord came in the fullness of time to restore us to Him, which he calls “*the days of the Lord*” .

“*The days of man*”, he spends enjoying the pleasures of this world. Then, without being aware, he falls into the snares of Sheol, and the eternal death. Whereas in “*the days of the Lord*” the believer enjoys the new life, and becomes liberated from the pangs of Sheol.

❖ My days are different from the days of the Lord ... I call “my days”, those in which I dared to set for myself by myself; and in which I deserted God ... I became worthy of prison; namely, worthy to receive the darkness of ignorance and the pains (chains) of death ...

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 116 (115). A sermon to the common people.

In those days of mine, *“The pains of death encompassed me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me”*, that would not happen if I had not gone astray from You<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ It seems to me that the *“pains of death”*, are the evil and corrupt thoughts that lead the soul to long for sin, which when realized, would entail instant death. ... If we always have to encounter sin on our way, let us then, run as swiftly as we can, lest it would catch up with us.

*“I found trouble and sorrow”*. A saint would not seek comfort, but would rather seek suffering; for he knows that, *“suffering produces endurance; and endurance produces character; and character produces hope; and hope does not disappoint us”* (Romans 5: 3-5) ... *“Your (bitter) word are to me the joy and rejoice of my heart”* (See Jeremiah 15: 16). In this world, I seek nothing but suffering. So that I would be worthy to earn the happiness and comfort in the world to come ... On their exodus from the land of Egypt, the people of God came to ‘Marah’, meaning (bitterness); and from ‘Marah’, they came to ‘Sinai’, meaning (temptation); ... Again Jeremiah says: *“I sat alone for You have filled me with indignation”* (Jeremiah 15: 17) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ *“The pains (the labor) of death”*, are the evil desires of the soul to commit sin; for according to the apostle James, brother of the Lord, in his epistle: *“When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, brings forth death”* (James 1: 15). Moreover, Sheol has pangs and gates; Its pangs are the fantasies that draw sin; while its gates are the sin itself.

**(Father onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“Then I called upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul”* (4)

In the midst of severe suffering, the believer will find no true support to help him, other than to resort to God.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist, perceives that he is in trouble and sorrow, not only because of the labors of life, but even because of its pleasures and possessions; on account of that, once he gets something temporal, he would tend to fear losing it eventually, and hence, sorrow would dwell over him. He therefore calls upon the name

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 116 (115).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 39 on Ps. 114 (116 A).

of the Lord to deliver his soul from trusting in any human help, and from tending to enjoy temporal pleasure.. ... It is befitting of the holy people of God to call upon the name of God to make them enjoy such freedom; So that when the pagans see that, and would discover how they live in trouble and sorrow, they will, as well, call upon the name of the Lord.

❖ Once I realized that I live in trouble and sorrow, “***I called upon the name of the Lord***” ... I previously assumed that I would rejoice and exult in the vain human help; but when I heard my Lord say: “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*” (Matthew 5: 4), I did not wait until I loose those temporal benefits for which I would rejoice, then I would most probably mourn; but I started to care for my misery itself, that made me rejoice for such things, which I fear to loose, although I could not keep ... “***Then I called upon the name of the Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul***<sup>1</sup>”.

(St. Augustine)

“***Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes our God is merciful***”

(5)

The word “*righteous*” here, concerning God, refers to His Justice, in which there is no oppression.

If God hears the voice of my supplications, inclines His ear to me, as a Father, compassionate toward his child, and intends to deliver him from the snares of death; He is a gracious and righteous (just), . and merciful as well. In His compassion, He is righteous (just); And in His justice, He chastises, yet He is merciful. His justice could not be separated from His mercy.

God is indeed just, and no one can be justified before Him; Yet He is gracious and merciful; His justice is surrounded by graciousness and mercy; namely, preceded by graciousness, and proceeded by mercy; on the right and on the left.... Together with our appreciation of His justice, we are committed to resort to His graciousness and mercy by repentance. In His graciousness, God is longsuffering on man, and when he does not repent, he will chasten him; Yet in His chastisement, God anticipates man’s return to receive him as a son.

According to **St. Augustine**: [He starts by graciousness, then He chastens, to receive again. “*He scourges every son He receives*” (Hebrews 12: 6). His scourges on me are not bitter, as long as His graciousness is sweet<sup>2</sup>].

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 116 (115).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 116 (115).

❖ A victor is he who hopes for the grace of God, and not he who trusts in his own strength. For, why would you not trust in the grace, when you have a such a merciful Judge? “*Gracious is the Lord, and righteous. Yes, our Lord is merciful*” (5 LXX). Graciousness (mercy) is referred to, twice, while righteousness (justice) is referred to, once; Justice in the middle, surrounded by mercy on both sides. As there are an abundance of sins, so should mercy be. ... Righteousness (justice) should not be without practicing mercy; Hence it is written: “*Do not be overly righteous*” (Ecclesiastes 7: 16).

Anything beyond the proper measure, could not be endured, even if it is good. Stick to the proper measure, to gain according to it<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ Yes, O sinner, The Lord is “merciful” indeed; But beware, for in the words to follow, he says that He is “righteous”, meaning ‘just’. He is equally merciful and just; He is merciful to good, and just to the sinners.

(St. Jerome)

*“The Lord preserves the simple. When I was brought low, He saved me” (6)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “*The Lord preserves the children; When I was brought low, He saved me*”.

The word “*preserve*” here, does not stop at protection and guarding, but it also means compassion and divine care.

And the word “*the simple*”, that came three times in the psalms, 13 times in the proverbs, and once in the book of Ezekiel, implies (simplicity), although it came once implying (foolishness, stupidity, or ignorance) in Proverbs 9: 6. According to some, it refers to children or kids, unable to manage their affairs on their own, or to protect themselves; and according to others, it refers to those too mentally weak, to take care of their own life. Actually, if everyone of us meditates in himself, he will perceive that he would easily be put among the “simple”, those helpless to realize their longings on their own, without a divine help.

The word “*saved me*”, means (rescued or helped me), which suits those who go through illness, poverty, oppression, temptation, nervous break down, or a spiritual darkness.

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<sup>1</sup> On the Death of Theodosius 25.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the psalmist here, refers to the helpless fetus in its mother's womb, protected by God, even after coming out to the world. So is he who, feeling and perceiving his naturally human weakness and helplessness, would trust in God, who preserves and saves him.

❖ How could the Lord not preserve the children, when He scourges the grown-ups, whom He seeks to make heirs; For, “*what son is there whom a father does not chasten?*” (Hebrew 12: 7). ‘*When I was brought low, He saved me*’. ... The pain caused by the surgeon's knife is not for punishment, as much as it is for healing<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*The Lord preserves the simple*”. The Lord does not preserve him who is puffed up with pride; nor shows compassion to him who feels self-greatness<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Those who are wise in this world, once they forsake their wisdom, and become through their own choice, as simple as little children, they would come to learn the kind of wisdom not acquired by study<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Isaac the Syrian)

❖ Those who are as simple, and of little experience in strife like children, as much as they faithfully seek the Lord, they would never lose their battles against the devil, and would never fall under his yoke; for it is written: “*The Lord preserves the simple*” (6). Actually the hidden heavenly shield worn by the Christians, is the secret weapon with which they fight their battles within their souls, after which they would resort and settle down in their home, where they enjoy the taste of peace<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Maccarius the Great)

❖ Follow reason in every thing. Have your regular meal every evening; except in special circumstances, like illness, when you have to break the designated time to eat, or to eat in certain days of fasting; Do it, though, without feeling guilty, for we are no more under the law, but under the grace. ... When you eat, do not fill your stomach, specially by the kinds of food (delicious to the throat), but you should rather

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 116 (115).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 39 on Ps. 114 (116 A).

<sup>3</sup> Ascetical Homilies, 72.

<sup>4</sup> الرسالة الثانية عشرة للقديس أنبا مقار إلى أبنا سمعان الناسك في العراق، وإلى إخوة آخرين مقيمين معه، 2 (فردوس الآباء).

prefer the less delicious.... Guard your heart, for it is written: *“The sacrifices of God are the broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart – those, O God, You will not despise”* (Psalm 51: 17); and, *“I was brought low, and He saved me”* (6); and, *“On this one will I look, on him who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word”* (Isaiah 66: 2); and, *“Commit yourself 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”* (Psalm 37: 5-6).

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

- ❖ A hermit said: [We are, before anything else, in need of humility]. ... Why did he say: ‘in need of humility’, and did not say: ‘in need of temperance’, according to the counsel of the apostle, saying: *“Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things”* (1 Corinthians 9: 25).... Why did he not say that we need ‘the fear of the Lord’, according to the words of the holy Scripture: *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”* (Proverb 1: 7) ... Why did he not say that we need ‘mercy’ or ‘faith’ (truth), according to what is written: *“In mercy and truth, atonement is provided for iniquity”* (Proverb 16: 6); and also: *“Without faith, it is impossible to please Him (the Lord)”* (Hebrew 11: 6)?

Why did the hermit concentrate on ‘humility’ alone, putting aside all the other virtues, despite our need for them? By that he shows to us that it is not possible for the fear of God, mercy, faith, temperance, or any other virtue, to grow without humility. Beside the fact that humility has the ability to nullify all the darts of the enemy. All saints have walked along the way of humility, and strived in it, *“Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins”* (Psalm 25: 18); and, *“I was brought low and He saved me”* (6).

**(Father Dorotheos)**

### **3- THE RETURN OF THE SOUL TO HER TRUE REST:**

*“Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you”* (7)

We cannot enjoy the salvation of our souls from death, unless we enjoy the true rest, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Many of the believers of the old covenant believed that their rest would be to dwell ultimately in the promised land. But, according to the apostle Paul: *“If Joshua had given them rest, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day; there remains, therefore, another rest for the people of God”* (Hebrew 4: 8). The true rest for the soul is to

enjoy the fellowship of our Lord Jesus; for He is our satisfaction, joy, and crown. Entering into Him is also realized by Him; as “*He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life*”.

**St. John Chrysostom** meditates in how the praise by psalms is used in the ‘funeral rites’, like: “***Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you***” (7); and, “*I will fear no evil, for You are with me*” (Psalm 23: 4); and, “*You are my hiding place, for You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance*” (Psalm 32: 7)

Meditate in the meaning of the psalm, saying: ... “***Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you***”. ... Tell me! Can you say that the Lord has dealt bountifully with you, and you still weep?! ... Would this not be hypocrisy?! ... If you truly believe in what you say, there would be no place for your grief. ... But if you are just acting, Why would those psalms mean to you? ... Why would you not drive those who sing them away<sup>1</sup>!?

❖ “*Return to your rest, o my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you*”. Meaning: Return, O my soul, to paradise; not that you deserve it, but for the sake of the compassion of the Lord. Your exit from paradise was because of your iniquity; Whereas returning to it would be because of the compassion of he Lord.

I wish you would say to your soul: Return to your rest, O my soul, ... your rest is in our Lord Jesus Christ.... In case you are going through great afflictions, Or your mind is ready to submit to sin, Cry out saying: “*Return to your rest, O my soul*<sup>2</sup>”.

(St. Jerome)

❖ “*Return to your rest, O my soul*”; not because of your worthiness, but because “*the Lord has dealt bountifully with you*”.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Nothing would provide the soul with wings, to take her up from the earth, to release her from the bonds of flesh, and to teach her how to despise the temporal things, like singing praises with harmony<sup>3</sup>.

❖ The soul is sensitive by nature to music; To deny the demons the chance to persuade men to sing the abominable kinds of songs, God set the psalms for them to protect them, on account of that they are

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<sup>1</sup> In Hebr. Hom 4: 7.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 39 on Ps. 114 (116 A).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 116 (115).

both useful and amiable. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, the soul, together with the lips, utter the spiritual songs.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ “Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you” (7). The brave contender applies these comfort-giving words to himself; like the apostle Paul who says: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4: 7-8). With the same sense, the psalmist says to his soul, having faithfully consummated the way of this life: “Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you”. ... The eternal rest is laid up for those who strive in the present life to keep God’s statutes; not as a pay back of a debt for the sake of our good works, but because of God’s bountiful grace to those who trust Him<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

- ❖ Sin disturbs and torments the soul; Whereas to avoid and repent it, will cause man’s soul to return to rest and security.

**“Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Rejoicing in such medication of death; on account of that it puts an end to iniquity, and not to nature; and that it grants freedom and liberty, the psalmist David says: “I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living” (9). “The land of the living” concerns the souls, where there are no sins, but the glory of virtues<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ David knows for sure that death for the sake of Christ is more glorious than ruling the world; For what is more exalted than to become a sacrifice for the sake of Christ?

We often read about the diverse sacrifices offered by David to the Lord, to which he now adds: “I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (17). ... Notice how he does not say, ‘I offer ...’, but says, “I will offer to You the sacrifice ...”. By this he means that the sacrifice will be consummate, once man stands before the Lord, free of the bonds of this body, and offers his soul a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Prior to death, his praise would never be consummate, and no one in this life can offer the ultimate praise; on account of that he would not be sure how good will be his works until his death<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies, 22. F. C. vol 46, p. 356-57.

<sup>2</sup> Death as a Good, 9: 38-39.

<sup>3</sup> Death as a Good, 3: 8.

(St. Ambrose)

***“for You have delivered my soul from death; my eyes from tears; and my feet from failing” (8)***

The psalmist cries out, because evil has surrounded him on all sides, has dwelt upon his soul, and brought her forth into death; because his eyes do not cease to cry, and his feet have failed; But the Savior came to deliver and help in the proper and perfect time; and His grace is bountiful. ... The believer would never cease to cry out to his Savior, For he perpetually needs Him to look down on him.

- ❖ He who does not cry in the present world, will shed an abundance of tears in the world to come. *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”* (Matthew 5: 4).

*“My feet have almost stumbled; My steps have nearly slipped”* (Psalm 73: 2). You have delivered my feet from slipping; How? “For my soul returned to her rest<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Comparing the future rest to the present misery, he says: [Here, the sorrows of death surround me; whereas there, the Lord delivers my soul from death... Here, my eyes shed tears, because of the multitude of troubles, whereas there, no more tears would darken the eyes of those who exult in meditation in the glory of God, who wipes the tears out of every face<sup>2</sup>].

(St. Basil the Great)

***“I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living” (9)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: ***‘I shall (bring forth pleasure) to the Lord in the land of the living’***. “Walking before the Lord” refers to persistent movement and perpetual growth within the church of Christ, until the departure to the life to come. Life in Jesus Christ is a persistent movement through the grace of God, to enjoy the perpetual growth; and an ascension from glory to glory.

The psalmist is preoccupied, not with what the others may say, but with what God may see in him, when he will ultimately stand before God who searches the heart and the mind.

- ❖ [Other people think that I am a righteous man; I, who do no good works; ... they think that I am a saint, I, who utter no good words]. ...

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 39 on Ps. 114 (116 A).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps. 114.

So say David, the saints, and the apostles; but never the sinners! ... The righteous may say, "Although I do no good works, nor utter good words; people think I am a saint, and commend me; But I know my own conscience, the kinds of thoughts that come over my mind and heart from here and there, and the wild lusts that take hold of me! *"I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members"*, that is why I cry out: *"O, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"* (Romans 7: 24).

I intend to confirm the fact that in the present world, no body can be perfectly righteous, neither David, nor the apostles, or any of the saints. *"No one is pure of sin, even though his life is just one day on earth"*. The apostles and the saints did not dare to say, "We are saints", or to say, "I bring forth pleasure to the Lord", but they say "I (shall) bring forth pleasure to the Lord"; the psalmist pledges, as far as the future is concerned, to do what he confesses he did not do in the past, and pledges that he "will bring forth pleasure to the Lord".

Where will he "bring forth pleasure to the Lord?" ... *"in the land of the living"*. The present land, as David knew it, is the "land of the dead", whereas the other one is "the land of the living", which is defined by the Lord Himself by saying: *"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"* (Matthew 22: 32), who were long dead<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ *"The land of the living"* is the time to come, when death has no more dominion on us; and those who enjoy it are said to be: *"Those who come out of the great tribulation ... They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"* (Revelation 7: 13; 16-17).

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***"I believed, therefore I spoke; I am greatly afflicted" (10)***

Faith is perpetually proclaimed through the resurrected practical life; as expressed by the apostle Paul, saying: *"But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believe, therefore I spoke', we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will*

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 39 on Ps. 114 (116 A).

*present us with you*” (2 Corinthians 4: 13-14). Faith will not stay idle, and a captive inside the heart and mind, but we are committed to proclaim it through talk and practical behavior in Jesus Christ.

❖ *“I shall bring forth pleasure to the Lord in the land of the living”,* that is what I believe, and therefore, I speak. ... And who do I say? *“I am greatly afflicted”*, namely (I became humble). What a very deep understanding of the divine utterance! ... He says: *“I believe that I shall bring forth pleasure to the Lord”,* that I shall be an angel, and go to heaven; ... I did not become proud, nor haughty, but *“I rather became greatly afflicted”*; ... Because of the great mercies of God, I shall be in the land of the living; ... knowing precisely that I am dust and ashes, I became greatly afflicted; For what could the dust and the ashes be proud of<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ The psalmist uttered these words when he was in great danger, and there was no possibility of escape, except through the power of God. In similar circumstances the apostle Paul said: *“Since we have the same spirit of faith, we shall find comfort”* (2 Corinthians 4: 13). By this it obvious that there is great harmony between the old and the new covenants; on account of that it is the same Spirit working in both. Since men of the old covenant were going through the same danger we are going through, We are thus committed to find the solution they found; namely, through faith and hope<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Truthfulness in talk should be preceded by good faith; for the non-believer would never be truthful in what he says about God; as the beginning of the true teaching and talk is the steadfast and perpetual faith in the heart of the one who talks; Hence the apostle wrote: *“Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke’, We also believe and therefore we speak”* (2 Corinthians 4: 13). The spirit of faith said by the apostle is the gift of the Holy Spirit given to the believer; and the perfection of the faith is humility, non-haughtiness, and the lack of pride. The apostle also wrote: *“I do not count myself to have apprehended”* (Philippians 3: 13); that is why the prophet David says: *“I am greatly afflicted (humiliated)”*.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 40 on Ps. 115 (116 B).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Corinth. Homily 9: 2.

- ❖ The divine Word came so that the desolate earth would bring forth fruit to us. The Word came, followed by the voice; for the word first works inside before the voice follows it; hence David says: “*I believed, therefore I spoke*” (10) <sup>1</sup>

(St. Ambrose)

**“*I said in my haste, ‘All men are liars’*” (11)**

Amid the afflictions, he felt that all men, even the closest friends, are helpless to give any befitting help. The word ‘liars’ came here to mean (vain). Having lost all hope in men, the psalmist is committed to trust in God; for that is the secure road to salvation from the darkness, and the enjoyment of the true light. The apostle, suffered as well, and said: “*All have forsaken me*”, although, among his loved ones, he found those who were not ashamed of his chain. Someone of experience say: Although my acquaintances are so many to fill a huge cathedral, yet, no one of them can enter into my depths, and restore to me my peace, but the Lord Christ.

According to **St. Augustine**, man in his haste (in his confusion) says that “*all men are liars*”. That also happened with the apostle Peter when he trusted in himself, and finally realized that he should trust in no one, even in his own arm.

- ❖ “*I said in my haste, ‘All men are liars’*”. By “haste” or (confusion), he means the fear caused by the threat of the persecutors, or which come with the sufferings of death.. We may understand it this way, for the voice of the martyrs is heard in this psalm. The confusion may also be caused by an inspiration through a vision<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ I was nothing before He created me;.... I was lost, and He searched for me and found me; ... I was a captive, and He purchased my freedom and cared for me; ... I was a slave, and He made me His brother; ... How can I repay the Lord?; ... You have nothing to give Him;... You seek everything from Him, So what will you give Him<sup>3</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

According to **St. Jerome**, [“*All men are liars*”, could mean that when he behaves as man, he lies; but once he is sanctified, and the words apply to him, saying: “*I said , ‘you are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High’*” (Psalm 82: 6), he will no longer be a liar.

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<sup>1</sup> *Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 2: 67.*

<sup>2</sup> *Cf On Ps. 116 (115).*

<sup>3</sup> *Sermon 25: 6-7.*

Man of holiness becomes a god, and being a god, he is no longer man, and no longer utters lies<sup>1</sup>].

❖ **“I said in my haste, ‘All men are liars’”** ... The prophet says: [I shall bring forth pleasure to the Lord in the land of the living; Yet, when I meditate in the human life, and in all kinds of fault, I find no truth in this world... everything I see and elaborately notice, are lies!] ... The word “lies” here is used to mean (shadow) or (illusion); as it is said in another psalm: *“Every man walks about like a shadow”* (Psalm 39: 6). The present psalm, therefore, carries the same sense and meaning<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Saying, **“I said in my haste”**, means, in my confusion, because of the multitude of my troubles, and when I meditate in the things of this world, and become astonished, *I say, ‘All men are liars’*”; Meaning that all who submit to human reactions, and all who trust in human thoughts, and do not set their view on the statutes of God, are liars.

The word “liar” here means (vain) and (mortal); Namely, that man’s happiness, riches, and knowledge, are all mortal and will soon come to an end. Everything that man has in the present time, will soon turn upside down, whether it is good or bad; Nothing will ever stay stable.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ If **“All men are liars”**, and it is only God who is true, what should we – the ministers of God – do, except to reject the human faults and lies, and remain in the truth of God, obeying His commandments<sup>3</sup>.

**(Cyprian, the martyr)**

❖ I believe that the great David did the right thing, when he showed the futility of such a work; as he was raised, by the power of the Spirit out of himself, and came to be in a state of spiritual awe before such a limitless and inapprehensible beauty. For once the lusts of his body calmed down, meditated in the spiritual realm, and longed to utter a word befitting to such a scenery, he gave forth that cry-out that echoed everywhere, saying: **“All men are liars”** (11)<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 40 on Ps. 115 (116 B).

<sup>2</sup> Homily 40 on Ps. 115 (116 B).

<sup>3</sup> Letters 67: 8.

<sup>4</sup> دير السريان: البتولية، 1966، ص 96

❖ Even though all men tend to lie before coming to the truth, the true God would remain righteous, holding fast to, and realizing the things befitting of Him<sup>1</sup>.

(Eusebius, bishop of Emesa)

❖ God is truth in Himself; and you are a liar in yourself; Whereas, in Him, you can be true<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ David proclaims: “*I said in my haste, ‘All men are liars’*” (11). He truly got out of himself to partake of the divine things, and to say that “*all men are liars*”; For, on account of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, he is no longer a mere human being<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Didymus the blind)

**“WHAT SHALL I RENDER TO THE LORD FOR ALL HIS BENEFITS TOWARD ME?”:**

*“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?”* (12)

The psalmist did not say: What shall I present to, or give the Lord? For man has nothing to give the Lord, except to render a little of what the Lord has given him. Even the martyrs rendered to Him love for the love He granted them by His Holy Spirit; when they shed their blood back for His blood shed for the sake of their salvation.

Before the amazing gifts of God, having granted us our mere existence out of nothing; having granted us to be according to His image, and having incarnated to redeem us, we have nothing to present to Him except a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist presents thanksgiving to God, not for the sake of His gifts, but for the sake of His benefits or goodness. The psalmist feels that he is doing evil, and the Lord renders his evil with goodness; contrary to what the vine-dressers did when they saw Him, saying among themselves: “*This is the heir, come, let us kill Him and seize His inheritance*” (Matthew 21: 38); rendering His goodness with evil<sup>4</sup>.

❖ With what worthiness shall I render to the Lord? ... I am mire, ... I am dust;. ... He made me a teacher; hence I believed, therefore I spoke. What is befitting of me to present to Him for this benefit and

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<sup>1</sup> Eusebius of Emesa: *Paulim Comm*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on, John 1: 6.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Genesis, 230.*

<sup>4</sup> *Cf On Ps. 116 (115).*

this compassion? Whatever I present is actually His; I do not give Him, I rather render to Him what is truly His; ... I have nothing to give Him except to shed my blood for His sake; to die a martyr for His sake; this is the only thing that I can do; to present my blood for His blood. ... Having been saved by the Savior, we shall rejoice in shedding our blood for His sake<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Prepare yourselves to go to your Creator; “*Rend your hearts and not your garments*” (Joel 2: 13); Ask yourselves: “*What shall we render to the Lord for all His benefits toward us?*” (12)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Abba Anthony)

- ❖ If you think you are enlightened, and that your soul is good, you should say: ‘God has worked for me, and gave light to my mind, sunk in darkness’, and say in your heart: “*What shall I render to the Lord, for all His benefits toward me?*” (12)<sup>3</sup>.

(Pope Abba Theopheles)

- ❖ What I should render to the Lord, is to shepherd His sheep; and even if I do this, it is “*not I, but the grace of God which was with me*” (1 Corinthians 15: 10)<sup>4</sup>.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arles)

- ❖ Should we not render something to Him who does us good? ... Yes it is indeed impossible for us to do it as we should, but it would be an evil thing to receive the gifts and not to recognize their true value. Nature itself testifies to our helplessness, but our will rebukes our denial. Hence, the blessed Paul, standing in awe before the greatness of God’s blessings, he said: “*Who is sufficient for these things?*” (2 Corinthians 2: 16). For the world was saved by the blood of the Savior; By His death, He trampled over death, paving the way to the heavenly glories, with no obstacles or hurdles, for those who grow.

That is why, recognizing the greatness of God’s grace, and his inability to pay Him back, the psalmist says: “*What shall I render to the Lord for His benefits toward me?*” (12). For, instead of death, he received life; Instead of bondage, he got freedom; And instead of the grave, he was granted the kingdom of heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 40 on Ps. 115 (116 B).

<sup>2</sup> Letter 7.

<sup>3</sup> رسالة القديس أنبا ثيوفيلس إلى الرهبان، 15 (فردوس الآباء)

<sup>4</sup> Sermon 232: 2.

Since the old time, “death has prevailed from Adam to Moses”, But now, the divine voice says: “*Today, you will be with Me in paradise*” (Luke 23: 43). Feeling this grace, the saintly man says: “*Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence*” (Psalm 94: 17).

Feeling his inability to render to the Lord for His benefits toward him; Yet, recognizing the Lord’s gifts, the psalmist says: “*I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord; ... Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints*” (Psalm 116: 13, 15).

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ The Lord Christ suffered at the time Pontius Pilate has been the Governor and the Judge ... Who has suffered? Our Lord, God’s only-begotten Son! ... What happened to Him? He was crucified, died, and buried! ... For whose sake? For the sake of the wicked and the sinners! ... How amazing is this condescension! How amazing is this grace! ... “*What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?*” (12) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“*I will take up the cup of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord*” (13)**

The Jewish priest used to pour wine over the sacrifice, a reference to spiritual joy. Amid the sufferings, we take up from the hand of the Lord, the cup of salvation, namely, the cup of the inner joy, or the divine comfort.

The rite of Passover of the Jews was bound to more than one cup, of which those present used to partake, as a sign of the collective joy in the salvation of God; together with singing praise by psalms.

Having presented to us that free salvation, and having paid the price on the cross, it would be our pleasure, in turn, to be crucified together with Him, namely, to partake of His passion. Calling upon the name of God, does not stop at supplicating by the lips, but by the heart, as well as by the work.

❖ Who would not take up the cup of salvation without the gladness of the soul? ... Who would not long, with joy and pleasure, to render to the Lord something of what is actually His? ... Who would not, with courage, and without hesitation, accept the death, which is “*precious in the sight of the Lord*”?; He who looks down from up high, upon

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<sup>1</sup> عظة للموعوظين عن قانون الإيمان

us, who wrestle for the sake of His holy name; ...He who supports our will, and helps us in our strife to get the crowns for our perseverance, good works, and love; ... He who crowns in us what He has granted us, and honors what He has realized in us<sup>1</sup>.

(Cyprian, the martyr)

❖ *“I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord”* ... What is the cup of Jesus? *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me”* (Matthew 26: 39); And, *“Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”* (Matthew 20: 22); Then He continued to say: *“You will indeed drink My cup”* (Matthew 20: 23). ... I concentrate on this point for you to perceive that the “cup” is the “cup of salvation”, or “the cup of Jesus”, the sufferings of martyrdom, which is not by my own strength, but by the grace of God; hence, I cannot drink it, unless I call upon the name of the Lord. Jesus is the Victor in His martyr; ... In His martyr, Jesus carries the crown<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ It is obvious that *“the cup of salvation”*, mentioned in the psalms, is the death of the martyrs. That is why, the verse, saying: *“I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord”*, is followed by: *“Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints”* (13, 15)... The precious death will come to us, if we are “the saints of the Lord”, and are worthy to die, not the regular kind of death, but a special kind of death, a Christian, pious, and holy death<sup>3</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

*“I will pay my vows to the Lord. Now in the presence of all His people”* (14)

Some people used to present vows to the Lord when they are passing through affliction. Those vows were either money or sacrifices. When offering a sacrifice, the one who vowed used to take a part of the sacrifice, to hold a banquet to which he invites the widows, the fatherless, and the poor, to share with his household their joy in God who cares for His people, especially in the time of affliction. Singing praises of thanksgiving has been an integral part in such banquets. Here, the psalmist *“pay his vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people”*, not for the sake of seeking recognition or commendation from

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<sup>1</sup> Epistle 77: 4.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 40 on Ps. 115 (116 B).

<sup>3</sup> Exhortation to Martyrdom, 29.

anyone, but to provoke in them the spirit of thanksgiving to God, and of trust in Him.

What is our vow to the Lord, but our commitment to walk according to what is befitting of us as the children of God, who granted us the adoption, and His Holy Spirit, to walk according to the Spirit, and not according to the flesh.

❖ Prayer is called by the Greeks a “vow”. And what came as “*I will pay my vows to the Lord*”, could be interpreted as (I will fulfill my prayers to the Lord): If you vow something to the Lord, or if you pray a prayer to the Lord, fulfill it; “*do not delay it, and do not postpone it from day to day*” (Sirach 5: 7; Deuteronomy 23: 21; Ecclesiastes 5: 4, 5). We fulfill our prayer, when we despise this world, bring to death all the worldly works, and promise to minister to the Lord with a true intention from the heart.... We fulfill our prayer, by despising the earthly honor, and the temporal riches, by attaching ourselves to the Lord in the grief of heart, and in spiritual contrition. ... We fulfill our prayer when we promise to adopt the greatest purity of our body, and the steadfast perseverance; and when we vow to uproot completely from our hearts the roots of anger, and the origin of sorrow that works for death. ... Whereas if we became weak through slothfulness, and return to our old sins, we would fail to fulfill the prayer; in which case we would sin by our prayers and vows, and the following words would apply to us, saying: “*It is better not to vow, than to vow and not pay*” (Ecclesiastes 5: 5) <sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Isaac)**

***“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints”***

**(15)**

Nothing, or no one in the world, is equal in the sight of the Lord, to the soul of a pious man; “*precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of His saints*”, How much more would be the death of the Holy Lord of the saints, for the sake of presenting eternity, non-corruption, and the crown, to His believers!

❖ Precious is the death that brings forth eternity, through presenting the blood as its price, and presenting the crown as its reward. How great would be the joy of Christ in it<sup>2</sup>!

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 9: 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Epistle* 8.

❖ I wish no one thinks about death, but rather about eternity; not about the temporal chastisement, but rather about the eternal glory; For it is written, “*Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of His saints*”<sup>1</sup>.

**(Cyprian the martyr)**

There are several kinds of death. Following in his teaching, the tradition of the double death for the Christian: **the death of his body**, resulting from the sin of Adam<sup>2</sup>, **and the death** of his soul, resulting from his own sin<sup>3</sup>, **the scholar Origen** actually discerns **between three kinds of death**:

- 1- Death in sin – which is evil.
- 2- Death to sin – which is good.
- 3- A neutral death, which is neither good nor evil in itself – which we call (the carnal or regular death).

❖ Those who died to the world, and denied its affairs, have got an honorable kind of death; as “*Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of His saints*”<sup>4</sup>.

❖ The saints are those who truly practice virtue; “*For they have put to death their members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*” (Colossians 3: 5); In them, because of their purity and non-defilement, the promise uttered by our Savior will be realized, saying: “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Matthew 5: 8). Those have become dead to the world, and despised its pleasures, acquiring for themselves an honorable death, for “*Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of His saints*” (5). They are able, as well, to follow the lead of the apostle who says: “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*” (Galatians 2: 20).

This is the true life, lived by man in Christ; For, although he may be dead to the world, yet he is as though dwelling in heaven, preoccupied with higher issues; saying: “*Our citizenship is in heaven*” (Philippians 3: 20).

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

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<sup>1</sup> Epistle 80: 1.

<sup>2</sup> In Ezek. Hom. 1: 9; In Jer. Hom. 2: 1.

<sup>3</sup> Joanne E. McWilliam: *Death and Resurrection (Message of the Fathers of the Church)*, p. 122-3.

<sup>4</sup> Paschal letters, 7: 3.

- ❖ When He was scourged, “*He opened not His mouth*” (Isaiah 53: 7); and when He was crucified, He prayed for the sake of those who crucified Him. ... ! “*What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?! I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord*”.

“*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints*” (15). The only befitting thing we can do to render to Him for all His benefits toward us, is to present blood for blood. And since we are redeemed by the blood of Christ, it is befitting of us to present our own life to the One who redeemed us.

(St. Eronimus)

- ❖ Out of the paradise, a sweet and an amazing fragrance of the blood of the martyrs, start to come, and be presented as a great praise to the Lord, the King of heaven; as prophesied by the prophet, saying: “*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints*” (15) <sup>1</sup>.

(Aponius)

- ❖ Although St. Steven was ordained by the apostles, yet he preceded them by His victorious and blessed death. ... He, who was of less rank, became foremost in passion and martyrdom<sup>2</sup>.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- ❖ To confirm that nothing could possibly harm a good man, we may draw attention to the fact that good men, generally, and with few exceptions, had their head cut off, were stoned to death, or killed by limitless ways, anonymously buried nowhere, and became martyrs for the sake of the Lord Christ. But no man can dare to say that their death has been without honor; but “*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints*” <sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### A SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING:

“*O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds*” (16)

The psalmist here, confirms the extent of his attachment to the Lord; he is His servant, and the son of His maidservant, attached to the Lord who loosed his bonds of sorrow.

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<sup>1</sup> Exhortation of Song of Songs 7: 49 (written on 405-415 AD)

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 219: 1.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Genesis, 66: 2-5.

- ❖ In an eternal and limitless love, Jesus comes forth to carry my sins and yours; He was accused of blasphemy and committing iniquity; was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and opened not His mouth.

*“Judas, having received a detachment of troops and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons”* (John 18: 3). They searched for Jesus to kill Him; and He, giving Himself up to die for our sake, revealed His authority to those who intended to kill Him; *“they arrested and bound Him”*, He, who could have loosed their bonds. Among them, some might probably have scoffed Him; yet also some might have been saved through believing in Him; those who could say: ***“You have loosed my bonds”*** (16)

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Let us abide to every good deed, and say together with the psalmist: *“You have loosed my bonds, I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving”* (16) <sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Love of temporal life used to press on our necks under a vicious yoke, and to put bonds and chains around the feet of our souls. To be qualified to have them loosed, let us proclaim, together with the prophet: : *“You have loosed my bonds; I will offer You the sacrifices of thanksgiving”* <sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

- ❖ From this teaching we come to know about death as a loosening of the soul from the (bonds) of the body; (as a kind of separation between the soul and the body) in man. We become loosed from such a bond through our departure from this world<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ O, brother Andrew, to whom the Lord said: *“Elijah has come already”* (Matthew 17: 12); I also tell you that Lazarus in your heart has been risen already, had all his bonds loosed; and the verse saying, *“You have loosed all my bonds”* (16), was realized in him. You, as well, should offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to Him who has loosed his bonds, so as not to fall again through slothfulness in his previous bonds; according to the words of the Savior: *“See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing comes upon you”* (John 5: 14).

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 134: 7.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 186 186: 3.

<sup>3</sup> Death as a Good, 3: 8.

(St. Parnovius)

*“I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord” (17)*

The sacrifices will not cease, neither by our departure to paradise, not by our entrance into the eternal wedding, offering Him an eternal praise.

And according to **St. Justin**: [I believe that prayers and thanksgiving, offered by good men, are the only perfect sacrifices, well received by God<sup>1</sup>].

- ❖ What kind of sacrifice? Are they goats or oxen? All those were Jewish sacrifices that are no more!.... I offer You the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; the thanksgiving of the martyrs.... As the martyrs praise the Lord with purity in the land of the living, so do monks, day and night with similar purity; for they are in truth, martyrs as well. What the angels do in heaven, is done by the monks on earth<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ He who, by love, becomes according to God’s image and likeness, would rejoice in goodness for the sake of goodness itself, would have such feeling concerning perseverance and meekness, and would not get angry because of the faults of others, but, with compassion, he would seek for them forgiveness for the sake of their weakness; remembering that he himself, for a long time, was tempted by the thorns and thistles of similar lusts, until he was visited by the mercies of God. ... And, having been saved from the carnal attack through the care of God, and not through his own effort, he therefore would not show hate, but mercy toward those who have gone astray, singing with mental peace, saying: *“You have loosed all my bonds; I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving”* (16, 17); and, *“Unless the Lord has been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence”* (Psalm 94: 17). As his mind is perpetually humble, he would be able to perfectly keep the evangelic command, saying: *“Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”* (Matthew 5: 44); And would be worthy of getting the reward, according to the words of the Lord, saying: *“that you may be sons of your Father in heaven, for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on*

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<sup>1</sup> *Dialogue 117.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homily 40 on Ps. 115 (116 B).*

*the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”* Matthew 5: 45). By such feeling, the blessed John knew what he would get, saying: *“that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in the world”* (1 John 4: 17) <sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ In the Holy Book, we hear the Lord calling us to come to Him by our own free will, saying: *“Come to Me all who labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11: 28); And He, Himself, testify to our weakness, saying: *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”* (John 6: 44).

To our free will, the apostle refers, saying: *“Run in such a way that you may obtain it”* (1 Corinthians 9: 24); And to her weakness, St. John the Baptist testifies, saying: *“A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven”* (John 3: 27) <sup>2</sup>

**(Father Sherimon)**

- ❖ When man has a contrite heart and crushed spirit, together with a continuity of strife and weeping, the divine grace will take away from him the remembrance of the past sins, and uproots the stings of the conscience; in which case it would be obvious that he has got the divine pleasure and the reward of forgiveness, and from him the stains of sins he had committed had been taken away. He could then reach to the forgetfulness of sin, through taking away the traces of sins, and the old desires, together with the purity and the perfection of the heart.

Such a state would not be reached by the slothful who failed to get the forgiveness of their sins, but would only be reached by those who persisted on sighing and moaning with sorrow, for the sake of wiping away all the traces of their sins; Through goodness of heart, together with strife, each of them would proclaim to the Lord, saying: *“I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden”* (Psalm 32: 5); and: *“My tears have been my food day and night”* (Psalm 42: 3), to be ultimately granted to hear the words: *“Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 31: 16); And: *“I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud your sins”* (Isaiah 44: 22) ... Hence, having been loosed from the bonds of his sins, by which all

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, conferences 11: 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cassian, conferences 13: 10

are bound, he thanks the Lord with the praise: “*You have loosed my bonds, I will offer You the sacrifice of thanksgiving*” (16, 17) <sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Pinovius)**

By the resurrection of the Lord Christ, and His ascension to heaven, He loosed the bonds of my heart, liberated it, to rise together with Him up to Heaven.

❖ The resurrection of the Lord is our hope; and His ascension is our glory<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle).**

*“I will pay my vows to the Lord, now in the presence of His people”* (18)

*“In the courts of the Lord’s house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem”* (19)

By verse 18, he confirms what he said in verse 14.

Enjoying salvation, the psalmist put in his heart, not only to pay his vows, but to pay them publicly in the temple before all the people of Jerusalem (18, 19). His heart has indeed been transformed to what is like a joyful wedding, or a spiritual banquet. By such an inner joy he preaches in the temple in the midst of Jerusalem, so that all the believers would partake of the true exultation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cassian, conferences 20: 7.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon 210: 1.*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 116**  
**I BELIEVED, O LORD, AND MY HEART OPENED UP**  
**UNCEASINGLY TO PRAISE YOU**

- ❖ I believed that You are a Father, who incline Your ear to hear the hidden sighs of my heart;
- ❖ I believed that, being righteous, You do not accept sin; You chasten me, for You, by Your mercy, receive me as Your heir. You surround Your righteousness by graciousness and mercy.
- ❖ I believed that You preserve the simple; To set them as children, sanctified to You.
- ❖ I believed that that You wait for me, to welcome me in Your bosoms; To let me stand before Your throne, hidden in Your righteousness.
- ❖ I believed, and my heart opened up to praise You unceasingly for Your benefits toward me;
- ❖ I believed that, with pleasure, You drank the cup of passion and death for my sake. So that I would receive the cup from Your hand, O the whole love; Passion from Your hand is wholly sweet.
- ❖ I believed that You are risen from the dead; To raise me up with You; and to loose all the bonds of my sin and bondage.
- ❖ I believed, and I testify to Your love and care; I shall fulfill to You my vows of praise and thanksgiving in the presence of all Your people.

## **PSALM 117**

### **A BLESSING FOR ALL THE GENTILES**

This psalm was assumed by some as a mere glorifying conclusion to another psalm; But the Hebrew text confirms the futility of this assumption, and that it is a complete and an integral psalm; or rather a poem, though short, yet it presents living and fiery feelings.

It is a Messianic psalm, and a prophecy concerning the receiving of faith by all the Gentiles, and establishing the church of the new covenant<sup>1</sup>.

The church praises by it at the beginning of the sunset vespers (the 11<sup>th</sup> hour), as a reference to establishing the church at the fullness of time, and opening up of the gate of faith before the Gentiles, being those of the eleventh hour.

Although it is a short psalm, yet it is a climax of sweetness, that gives hope for the world to receive the Lord Christ, and for the instigation of the spirit of praise and thanksgiving everywhere.

The Lord Christ, took upon Himself to explain this psalm directly before His ascension to heaven, by saying to His disciples: *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28: 18 – 20; Mark 16: 15 – 16).

Finally, this very short psalm 117 , as well as the very long one 119, called the great psalm, both came to confirm the fact that the value of worship is not measured by time and the length of prayers, but by their depth and spiritual warmth.

God wishes for His whole people to become a blessing for all the nations; so that all would truly be the children of Abraham, who has got the divine promise: *“You will become a blessing”* (Genesis 12: 2); And that the proclamation by the Lord Christ to His disciples, that they will become a blessing to the whole world (Matthew 28: 18-20) would be realized. On the cross, the Lord Christ presented salvation to the account of the whole world; and sent to us His Holy Spirit, so that we would be a blessing to those whom we know, and those we do not.

It is a joyful psalm, which confirms that the knowledge of God will spread all over the world, the way water fill the oceans.

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<sup>1</sup> W. S. Plumer, ps. 117.

***“Oh, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Extol Him, all you peoples” (1)***

This is a prophecy that proclaims the love of God for all humanity, and His longing for all to enjoy His salvation, and that they all, together with the heavenly hosts, would become a choir to praise the Lord.

The Jewish people, often, could not manage to present praises befitting to the holiness of the temple. But now, as all the Gentiles partake of praising the Lord, praise is presented with pure hands and hearts.

The Lord Christ Himself promised, saying: *“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring; and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one Shepherd”* (John 10: 16, 17). This promise has been realized when the preaching among the Gentiles started by the entrance of ‘Cornelius’ into faith; as it was then said: *“They glorified God, saying: ‘ God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’”* (Acts 11: 18).

❖ This psalm calls upon, not a single nation, two, or three, but all earth and sea; which was actually realized when the light of the Lord Christ shined by His coming. Then it refers to the reason behind their salvation, that it was not for the sake of their good works, nor for that of their good life and confidence; but it was for the sake of God’s graciousness and mercy *“His merciful kindness is great toward us”* ... stronger and more solid than the rock; and it grows day after day, to be received by many<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ In psalm 116, (LXX), God ordained that, through His mercy, the Jews will be united with the Gentiles; and that His grace will be granted to the Gentiles, to become partners in the inheritance with the Jews, who, by the grace of God, before long time were called His people; While the Jews were noble, and the Gentiles were lowly, Now, by the mercy of God, the Gentiles became noble as well; for all to rejoice together in the knowledge of the truth<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Ambrose)**

***“For His merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord” (2)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Paul's Epistles Rom (15: 11).

The mercy of God was demonstrated in three important evangelic facts:

a- The resurrection of the Lord Christ that has granted us the new life;

b- The ascension of the Lord Christ that opened before us the gates of heaven; and,

c- Through the renewal of the hearts and minds of the Gentiles, they received faith, for the enjoyment of the true promises of God.

The whole world was astonished by their acceptance of the gospel; which was a testimony to the faithfulness of the Lord to the end of time. The gospel of Christ presented to the believers “*an everlasting consolation and good hope by grace*” (2 Thessalonians 2: 16). It presented the practical love of God the Father, granting the eternal life through the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist refers to two things: God’s mercy, and God’s truth or justice. And as it came in psalm 116: 5. the Gentiles submitted to the name of the Lord through His promise of mercy to the pious, as well as through His threat of justice to the wicked.

❖ This psalm tells more clearly about the preaching of the gospel by the saintly apostles all over the world, and the joining of all the nations and their entrance into faith in Christ; as it came in the prophecy of Zechariah, saying: “*Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion. For, behold, I am coming, and I will dwell in your midst’, says the Lord. Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become my people. And I shall dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you*” (Zechariah 2: 10-11). Here, Zechariah openly proclaims that the Father, the Lord of hosts has sent the Lord ... who made the Gentiles His people; His only-begotten Son came and dwelt in the midst of His holy church; His great mercy prevailed over the sins of the Gentiles; and the truth of His words He previously gave to His prophets, He realized, and will endure forever, along with faith in Christ.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ “*And the truth of the Lord endures forever*”. This, in particular, is a feature of His shining truth; For the events of the old covenant were a symbol and a shadow; according to the reference by the Evangelist St. John, saying: “*For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*” (John 1: 17) <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 117.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 117  
LET US ALL BE ONE HOLY CHURCH**

- ❖ My soul praises You, O Lord;  
For all Your benefits toward me;  
Yes, and I call all the Gentiles with me;  
To present a praise of thanksgiving for the riches of Your love;  
My heart will never rest until I see everyone join the heavenly  
creatures;  
To become all one holy church;  
Perpetually meditating in Your love and care.
- ❖ Your mercy, O Lord is the secret of our strength;  
You liberated us from the bondage of the devil;  
And made us children of God Your Father;  
You broke down the gates of Sheol;  
And You gave us the two wings of the Spirit;  
To fly and set forth to You;  
You opened the gates of heaven before us;  
And presented Your righteousness to be our righteousness;  
Your truth supports us forever;  
Glory be to You, O Philanthropic One!

## **PSALM 118**

### **HOSANNA (SAVE US)**

This psalm is the last one of the ‘Egyptian Hallel’ psalms; and concerns the entrance into the Liturgy, probably conducted at the gate of the temple, called “*the gate of righteousness*” (19).

The Jews used in the feast of the Passover to praise God with psalms 113 to 118. So the Lord Christ did before going to the garden of Gethsemane, where he was arrested (Matthew 26: 30). This psalm is therefore, the support of the crucified believer when persecuted, seeking the strong hand of God, and seeing God, opening before him the gates of freedom, and counting himself unworthy of partaking of the passion of the Lord.

The fathers of the church considered it as a Messianic psalm, based on the fact that the multitudes, receiving the Lord Christ on His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, cried out with two of its verses: 25 and 26 (Matthew 21: 9); And the Lord Christ quoted its two verses: 22 and 23 in his debate with the leaders of the Jews (Matthew 21: 33 – 46).

In the New testament, we find quotations from this psalm in: Hebrew 13: 6; Mark 12: 10 – 11; Acts 4: 11; 1 Peter 2: 7; Mark 11: 9).

#### **As a liturgical psalm:**

The Jewish tradition binds this psalm to the feast of the tabernacles. In the ‘*Mishnah*’, it came that the multitudes used to wave branches of palm, myrtle, and willows, at the beginning and end of singing this psalm; then place the willow branches on the altar.

As a liturgical psalm used particularly in the feasts of the tabernacles and the Passover, we notice that all ranks partake of singing it: the congregation, the priests, and the king. It includes as well, a personal praise sung by the believer in his personal talk with the Lord.

Psalms 15, 24, and 118 were used as the entrance into the liturgy of thanksgiving to God

The pilgrims coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the tabernacles, used to sing psalm 118, based on the following points in its text:

a- Verse 15 refers to the tents in which those celebrating the feast of the tabernacles used to dwell for the duration of 8 days.

b- Verse 24 refers to “*the day*”; as the feast of the tabernacles had its own prominent stature for the Jews, that they used to call it just

“*the feast*” (Nehemiah 8: 14), or “*feast day*” (Psalm 81: 4); without mentioning the name of the feast.

c- The word “*Hosanna*” or “*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*”, came in verse 26, as a refrain repeated in that feast, the same refrain that the multitudes cried out on the triumphant entrance of the Lord Christ into Jerusalem as a king.

d- Verse 27 refers to the “*light*” which was a prominent part of the celebration of that feast.

This psalm was used in the rite of the feast of the Passover, during the filling of the fourth cup of wine.

Verses 24 to 29 are used as a special melody in the feast of resurrection in several Christian churches in the East and the West.

It is used by the Coptic church in the readings of the second day of the feast of the cross; based on the fact that the cross is seen as a glorification of the name of the crucified Jesus Christ: “*The right hand of the Lord does valiantly*” (15); “*The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly*” (16); “*Your are my God, and I will praise You*” (28).

### **A psalm, both liturgical and personal.**

This psalm has a special importance in the life of the church, as well as in the inner personal life of every believer:

a- It is the last one of the “*Egyptian Hallel*”, sung by the exultant Israeli people, praising the Lord, on their way out of the bondage of Pharaoh, under the leadership of the prophet Moses – the receiver of the law – and Aaron the priest. It is as well, the psalm, sung by the church of the new covenant, exultant in the freedom that became hers in Jesus Christ -- the Word of God, and the heavenly High Priest.

b- This psalm, being both a collective and a personal song of praise, sometimes use the plural tense, and other times the singular tense, successively; As, the congregation as a whole, the king, the priests, as well as every believer, true and faithful in his relationship with God, his Savior, used to partake of singing it.

c- It is the praise of every believer who feels the touch of “*the right hand of the Lord that does valiantly*” (16), and who experiences the power of the cross in His life. ... It is the praise of all generations: past, present, and future, until the Lord comes on the clouds in His glory, and his Father’s glory, when the (catholic) church cries out, saying: “*Hosanna, Blessed He who comes in the name of the Lord*” (26).... And it is the praise of the believer, feeling, that every day he lives, is the day

of the Lord, and not his own day, will sing: *“This is the day the Lord has made, We will rejoice and be glad in it”* (24).

*d-* This psalm could be called *“Hosanna”*, being a praise for the entrance of the Lord Christ into our inner Jerusalem, to reign in our hearts, proclaim His conquest of evil, and take back what the devil has robbed. It could also be called *“the gates of righteousness open to the Lord”*

<b>1- A collective praise of thanksgiving</b>	<b>1- 4</b>
<b>2- A personal praise of thanksgiving</b>	<b>5- 21</b>
<b>3- A collective praise and prayer</b>	<b>22 - 25</b>
<b>4- A priestly blessing</b>	<b>26 - 27</b>
<b>5- A response by the King</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>6- A collective conclusion</b>	<b>29</b>

### **1- A COLLECTIVE PRAISE OF THANKSGIVING:**

The psalm begins by a collective thanksgiving said by the whole congregation with the spirit of joy and strength, giving thanks to the Lord, for the sake of the riches of His mercy.

The whole congregation stand, calling the priestly house of Aaron, and all those who fear the Lord, to give Him thanks for His abundant and forever enduring mercies.

*“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! Because His mercy endures forever”* (1)

Who is he, who calls all humanity to *“give thanks to the Lord, for He is good”*? ... Probably the king at that time, or the high priest. Yet it is the voice of every believer who, enjoying the spirit of royalty, and desiring to see all humanity as the holy one church of Christ, praises God for His mercy, He has practically demonstrated by shedding His precious blood on the cross.

❖ On account of that the Lord is good, and that His mercy endures forever, *“He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2: 4). Therefore, you who are preoccupied with sins, confess to Him your transgressions, and give Him thanks for His mercy.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“Let Israel now say, ‘His mercy endures forever’”* (2)

The psalmist seeks from Israel to remember God’s works with them, and to offer to Him a sacrifice of thanksgiving, having set them

free of the bondage of Pharaoh, brought them forth to the promised land, as a deposit of the glorious liberty of the children of God; And out of them the Word of God incarnated to grant salvation to the whole world.

❖ *“Let Israel now say, ‘He is good, and His mercy endures forever’.*

He refers to the house of Israel because they have suffered without limits. They were enslaved in Egypt for hundreds of years, suffered troubles without limits in their own land, and were scattered all over the earth. He means to say that they are particularly true witnesses to God’s abundance of goods, which they have enjoyed more than any race.

They are indeed, and above all, committed to give God thanks that the Lord Christ came out of them. And If they have suffered tribulations, it was because of their own denial. He kept on saying to them: *“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of Israel”* (Matthew 15: 24); And He commanded His disciples: *“Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, ... but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matthew 10: 5, 6); And said to the Canaanite woman: *“It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs”* (Matthew 15: 26). He actually did everything, and preoccupied Himself with the salvation of this people.... Now, if they have shown that they are unworthy of that good. I wish they seriously think about their lowly stature and their exceeding denial<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

*“Let the house of Aaron now say, ‘His mercy endures forever’” (3)*

After addressing the people, he seeks from the house of Aaron to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God, who has chosen them for the priestly work; Who for their sake, He sent fire from heaven, and let the land shake and swallow those who envied them, and forced themselves on the priestly work; And who let the rod of Aaron bud to support him.

❖ Here he calls the priests, as a distinguished group, to praise God; to show to what extent the priesthood precedes the others. ... As much as the importance of their ministry, they enjoy a greater honor from God<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 118.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 118.*

*“Let those who fear the Lord now say, ‘His mercy endures forever’” (4)*

**St. John Chrysostom** presents to us the reasons why some, not feeling that God’s mercy is great, and endures forever; they consequently cannot praise Him as they should:

a- They have a problem with their inner insight. ... Like a weak eye cannot look at the sun, those spiritually weak cannot see, nor can perceive the knowledge of God, on account of that the exaltation of His wisdom is beyond their human perception.

b- The existence of evil lusts in their life, deprives and denies them the ability to perceive the mercy of God.

c- Going astray from the perception of the truth; they do not endure to see a father chastising his son, and wrongly assume that he is abusing him, and acting against his interests.

d- In their decisions, they do not discern between what is right and what is wrong.

e- They are not disturbed by doing sin.

f- They do not discern between the ineffable God, and the mortal humans.

g- They do not perceive God’s wisdom, not to proclaim His intentions all at once, but partly according to the circumstances; And that it is unbecoming of man to perceive things beyond his human limits, or which it is too early to perceive.

❖ *“Those who fear the Lord”* are the Gentiles to whom God’s mercy came through the incarnation of the Lord, who saved them from disbelief and the worship of the devil; enlightened them, and granted them more grace than others. ...

And on account of that the grace has been poured equally over all, the prophet instigates all to give thanks to God.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

## **2- A PERSONAL PRAISE OF THANKSGIVING:**

After such a joyful collective call to the priests of God and all His saints to praise (1 – 4), Praise starts by an individual voice; probably uttered by the king (verse 28), or the high priest, or any prominent person; then the congregation react to the individual, and all feel that the praise should be both collective and personal at the same time.... The praise by the congregation as a whole, does not cancel the secret relationship between man and God; And the personal relationship of the believer does not let him do without the collective work.

***“I called on the Lord in distress; The Lord answered me, and set me in a broad place” (5)***

If the psalmist is using now the singular tense, while praising individually, he worships the Lord in the name of the whole congregation which he bears in his heart. And when the whole congregation worship by the Spirit and the truth, it presents to God every man individually; for it is like a mother of all, and desires all to be saved.

Here, according to **St. John Chrysostom**, God’s compassion and goodness is shown, for He saves from distress, not for the sake of our own worthiness, nor of any good thing we have done, but for the sake of the distress itself. When He saved His people, He said: *“I have observed the misery of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry”* (Exodus 3: 7). He did not say: I observed their virtue and progress, but said, I observed their misery, and heard their cry; And being a compassionate father, He moved to save them for the sake of the distress itself. As to saying: ***“He set me in a broad place”***; this reveals that God allowed for the distress, to let them come to be in a better and a more exalted condition.

❖ According to the apostle Paul: *“We 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).

And like a wrestler who does not seek to be relieved of strife, but to have the strength and support for his performances; So is the righteous man who does not seek to be relieved of distress, lest he would lose the reward, but seeks perseverance from the Lord.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“The Lord is on my side, I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (6)***

He who fears the Lord has no fear of anyone, even though the whole world may gather together against him; for the presence of the God in his depths fills his life with comfort and the joy of heaven. The grace of God grants him a joyful prospect of the future.

❖ To answer those who ask: ‘Why the divine care does not support you when you are persecuted?’ ... We say: What evil could dwell on us, as long as we look at death as being a setting forth to the Lord; as a mere change of life, from one status to another?!

Everyone of us would say with confidence: “*The Lord is on my side, I will not fear. What can man do to me?!*” (6). “*The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them*” (Wisdom of Solomon 3: 1)... They persecute us, not because of any evil we did, but because they assume that we, being Christians, are adversaries to life and to ourselves<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

❖ He did not say: ‘I will not suffer’, but said: “*I will not fear, What can man do to me?!*”. Namely, although I suffer, yet I do not fear; as, according to the apostle Paul: “*If God is for us, Who can be against us?*” (Romans 8: 31). Actually, there were many things against Paul, yet he did not deal with any of them the wrong way ... He was beyond, and more exalted than all fears<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ In response to a question: What should man do in case a temptation and a sinful thought dwell upon him, Abba Moses said: [He should weep, seeking the grace of God to help him. He will soon find comfort if he knowledgeably presents his supplications; for it is written: “*The Lord is on my side, I will not fear. What can man do to me?*” (Psalm 118: 6; Hebrew 13: 6).

(Garden of the fathers)

***“The Lord is for me among those who help me; Therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me” (7)***

What preoccupies the psalmist’s heart is that God is on his side. He does not seek revenge against his enemies, namely, the demons and the sinners; but leaves them to God’s hand.

In his spiritual strife, the believer fights against the devil and the sin, under the leadership of the Lord of glory Himself, who has drafted him; “***the author (Leader) of our salvation***” (Hebrew 2: 10); the Leader who has overcome the devil on the cross, and still overcomes him through us<sup>3</sup>.

❖ The devil may aim arrows against me;... But I have a sword.

He may bear a bow; ... But, being a soldier, I bear a heavy weapon.

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<sup>1</sup> Strom. 4: 11.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 118.

<sup>3</sup> Baptismal Instructions, 3: 11.

❖ We should not let despair dwell upon us, for we have several motives in good hope. Even though we may sin every day, let us approach Him, beseeching, supplicating, and seeking the forgiveness of our sins. By so doing, we would distance ourselves more and more from sin, drive the devil away, draw the love and compassion of God, and gain the blessings of the coming age, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His love for man<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

❖ The demons will only harm those who fear them, who are not protected by the strong and mighty hand of God, and who were not instructed the secret of the truth. The demons, however, fear the righteous.

(**Lactantius**)

❖ It so happened one evening, that the devil, taking over the form of a beautiful woman, and imitating all her movements, proceeded to seduce **St. Anthony**. But he, with his mind filled with Christ, and thinking only of the spirituality of his soul, managed to quench the live coal of the deception of the enemy.

The enemy tried to draw him to carnal pleasures; But he, full of anger and sorrow, and concentrating his thoughts on God's threat to man of the everlasting fire and the non-dying worms, managed to go through the temptation unharmed. The devil was overridden with shame, for, considering himself like a god, was scoffed by such a young man. He who boasted on the flesh and blood, had to flee before a man in flesh – Anthony, with whom the lord worked.

The Lord who, for our sake took over a human body, grants the body conquest over the devil; that every man who faithfully fights could say: "... *Not I, but the grace of God which was with me*" (1 Corinthians 15: 10).

Having been unable to conquer Anthony, and finding out that he was utterly driven out of his heart, the devil, as it is written, gnashed his teeth, changed his form to that of an ugly child, that conforms to his mind, appeared humiliated before him, and seduced him with his devilish thoughts no more.

Finally, talking to him with a human voice, he said: [I managed to deceive, and to cast down a multitude; but I miserably failed to hold my own against your strife and labor]. And when Anthony asked him about his identity, he answered him with a humble voice: [I am the spirit

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Matthew, 22: 8.*

of harlotry, clothed with seduction, to attack the chaste and the pure; ... I am he, for whose sake, the prophet rebukes my victims, saying: "*The spirit of harlotry has caused you to stray*" (Hosea 4: 12); ... I am he who disturbed you for long, and whom you have overcome].

Anthony, having given thanks to God, courageously said to the devil: [You, therefore, are very lowly, with a dark heart, and the weakness of a child. From now on, I shall not fear you, for "*The Lord is on my side, and I shall see my desire on those who hate me*" (7, 8)]. Hearing those words, trembling with fear, the devil instantly fled away, and never dared to approach Anthony any more.

- ❖ It is amazing how one man, alone in such a wilderness, did not fear the demons, nor the multitude of vicious beasts and reptiles that often attacked him; Yet, as it is truly written: "*He who trusts in the Lord is like Mount Zion*" (Psalm 125: 1); By an un-shaking faith, "*the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you*" (Job 5: 23).

**(The Garden of monks)**

***"It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man" (8)***

In the midst of the celebrations of the feast, the believer, getting in touch with the exalted love of God, and His salvation work, will trust in the Lord with confidence that would raise him high above any trust in human arm, even his own arm, capabilities, wisdom, experience, and knowledge.

- ❖ There is nothing more frail than to put one's confidence in man, which is, not only weaker than a spider's web, but is dangerous as well. That is actually testified by those who have such a tendency to trust men, by whom they would be ultimately drawn on the ground.

Trusting in the Lord, on the contrary, is not only strong, but is secure and unchangeable, described by the apostle Paul as: "*Hope (in God) does not disappoint*" (Romans 5: 5); and by Sirach who said: "*Consider the generations of old and see: Has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed?*" (Sirach 2: 10) ... If you, nevertheless, happen to be disappointed, it would be because you did not trust in God as you should<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ This saying conforms to what came in the prophecy of Jeremiah, saying: "*Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 118.

*strength; whose heart depart from the Lord” (Jeremiah 17: 5) ... And blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, who would be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season (Psalm 1: 3) ; has no fear of the heat; whose leaves are green, and would give fruit even in the time of draught*

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes” (9)***

What does he mean here by “princes”? ... While departing from the bondage of Pharaoh, the believer perceives that what happened was not by the power of Moses, Aaron, or any other leader, but all has been through an exalted divine work. ... The Lord may use the princes and leaders, yet He is the true Worker, who builds the house, guards the city, and gives an increase to the fruition of His vineyard.

- ❖ (To Nepotian the priest): Avoid entertaining with those of this world, particularly with those who, because of their high status in the society were swallowed by pride ... You are a priest of the poor and crucified Christ, who lived on the bread of strangers. It is shameful for you to have the Consul and the Lectors stand at your door (to be in attendance to receive the Roman governor as he comes to your house). Even if you give an excuse for the luxury of your banquet in honor of the great guest, that, by it, you intend to intercede on behalf of the poor and the oppressed, your holiness; Your holiness, as a man of God, would surely be more appreciated than your wealth<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“All nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them” (10)***

The psalmist here is probably the king who was surrounded by the pagan nations, that could not endure the worship of the living God. It is a symbolic portrait of a spiritual king, whom the devil never ceases to oppose.

- ❖ The prophet calls upon God for the sake of the diverse sufferings of men, caused by the evil hosts, and of those who fight against faith in Christ; for all of them surround the righteous, and strive to make him fall; on account of that his way of life contradicts with, exposes, and rebukes theirs. But, in the name of the Lord he will conquer them, and chase them away, however and whoever they are.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 52 to Nepotian, 11.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ The cause of the envy of the devil is that he does not endure to see, how man, who was created from dust, would have the privilege to be put in paradise. Although, in the sight of the devil, man is a lowly creation, yet he has hope in the eternal life; while he, the devil, being of a more exalted nature, has fallen down to become a part of the lowly realm<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

***“They surrounded me, Yes, they surrounded me; but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them” (11)***

The Holy Book described the devil, sometimes as a horrible dragon, a roaring lion, or a vicious crocodile, etc. and other times as a little helpless jackal. Man, on his own, would be terrified to confront such a violent adversary; Whereas if he hides in the grace of God, he will see him weak, and unable to harm him.

In the book of ‘Job’ it is written about the devil: *“Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you leash him for your maidens?”* (Job 41: 5). Birds would be caught and put in cages, and even, in some backward countries, are leashed with a thread, to entertain little children. But that would never be done to the mighty Leviathan!

❖ Since the fall of Adam, and his disobedience of the divine commandment, the devil and the hosts of darkness, sat in his heart, mind, and body, as though on their thrones. Hence the Lord came and incarnated from a virgin. For if he chose to descend to us with His deity without a human body, who, among men, would be able to endure it?... That is why the Lord dealt with men in a human body as a tool, by which He destroyed the spirits of evil who dwelt, and had their thrones in the human minds and thoughts. The Lord cleansed the conscience of man, and made his heart, mind, and body, His own throne<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Maccarius the Great)**

***“They surrounded me like bees; They were quenched like a fire of thorns; For in the name of the Lord I will destroy them” (12)***

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the church of Christ is likened to the wise bee, which although small in size, yet it produces honey and wax for the benefit of man. Whereas the heretics,

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<sup>1</sup> Paradise, 12.

<sup>2</sup> عظة 6 :5.

intending to liken the church, in an attempt to instigate their faulty heresies, they are not bees, but “*like bees*”.

❖ The bee (in the singular tense), mentioned in the book of Proverbs, is the church of Christ; on account of that she produces honey and wax, for the benefit of the kings and the commons; For her teachings are delicious, and her divine doctrines are upright. The church is likened to the bee, for the bee is honored because of its wisdom; and despite its little size, yet it is feared because of its painful sting by which it attack any intruder who may attempt to spoil its honey and wax. So is the church of Christ who received and honored wisdom; and though she seems little, on account of that she does not use the philosophy of this world, Yet, by the word of truth, she is able to split open and tear the words of the heretics, who attack her in an attempt to pollute her teachings.

This bee is one and unique; whereas the heretics, although many, yet the prophet did not call them bees, but “*like bees*”; for they are more like wasps, which liken the bees, but are not bees; they produce, neither honey nor wax for the benefit of man, but they work on corrupting the good works.

He called them “*like bees*”, on account of that, by their (camouflaged) talk, they may please the listener; and, according to the wise Solomon, may produce a kind of honey that drops from the lips of a harlot; and when they strike by their sting, they, themselves are destroyed. The oracles of such people would be crushed underneath the feet of those strong by Christ, and are quenched like a fire of thorns, by the righteous with the power of the Lord God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ “*They arrested Jesus, bound Him, and led Him away*” (John 18: 12, 13); by which the prophecy concerning him was realized, saying: “*They surrounded me like bees; they were quenched like a fire of thorns*” (11).; And, “*Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls have encircled Me*” (Psalm 22: 12)... While in heaven, the cherubim and the seraphim, not daring to look at His infinite glory, they cover their faces with their wings; On earth, the adversaries laid their sinful hands on His holy body, contrary to the law!.... Can you imagine how great was the longsuffering of the Lord, and the love of the Savior, whom you worship<sup>1</sup>?

(St. John Chrysostom)

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<sup>1</sup> راجع الأب الياس كويتير المخلصي، ص 222.

***“You pushed me violently, that I might fall, but the Lord helped me” (13)***

- ❖ Once things reach to the level of despair in the human hope, God, on His side, would bring forth help. This happened in the incident of Goliath (1 Samuel 17); and in a similar way with the saintly apostles; Hence Paul said: *“Yet we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead”* (2 Corinthians 1: 9) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ We should pray all the time, saying together with the blessed David: *“Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip”* (Psalm 17: 5); and, *“He set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps”* (Psalm 40: 2). God controls our hidden hearts, and guides our desires toward virtue, against their natural readiness to divert to iniquity; whether because of their lack of knowledge of the good, or of having pleasure in practicing abominations; which is apparent in the words of the prophet: *“You pushed me violently, that I might fall”*; proclaiming the weakness of our free will. Then he adds: *“but the Lord helped me”* (13); proclaiming God’s help to our will<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Pavnotius)**

***“The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation” (14)***

This marvelous praise is the song of conquest, often sung by the prophets (Exodus 15: 2; Isaiah 12: 2); And is sung by the church, especially during the rites of the great Friday.

Commenting on the words *“has become”* in verse 14, **father Onesimus of Jerusalem** says:[The Son of God has been, still is, and will ever be; Namely, He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever; But the expression *“has become”* concerns us; according to the words of the apostle Paul: *“He became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption”* (1 Corinthians 1: 30). When we become wise by Him, justified of our sins, cleansed, and saved from the bondage of sin, It would be said that He *“has become”* for us, wisdom and righteousness, etc. ... And when it is said, likewise, that God the Father has made Him a Christ and Lord, this does not mean that He was not, then He so became; But it means that, when we submitted to Him by faith, He became Lord for us; Namely, we recognize Him as the Lord

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 3: 12.

who reigns on all. With this sense the psalmist says: *The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation*” (14); Namely I know now that salvation and strength are from Him, hence I praise Him].

❖ *“The Lord is my strength and song. And He has become my salvation”*. Yes, *“He is my strength”*; ... How about: *“He is my song?”* ... He is my glory, praise, adornment, and exultation. He, not only liberates man from danger, but makes him exalted, reputed and glorified. . Everywhere, you will find that salvation is bound to glory.

He means to say: As for me, this is my perpetual song, and my persistent cry-out... It is my role, to continue praising Him.

Those, who have been corrupted by the demonic earthly songs, presenting as an excuse, that they find in them much fun; while the psalmist keeps on glorifying the Savior; I wish they perceive the horrible harm to which they are subjected<sup>1</sup>

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Finally, the Lord, the Source of our salvation teaches us, not only what we should think about, but also to know what we should do; saying: *“I can of Myself do nothing; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works”* (John 5: 30; John 14: 10).

By the human nature He took upon Himself, He says that He can do nothing on His own; when we, the dust and ashes, think that we need no help from God, in what concerns our salvation. ... We should, in everything, confess our natural weakness; and feel our need for His help; saying with the saintly psalmist: *“You pushed me violently, that I might fall, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation”* (13, 14); and, *“Unless the Lord has been my help, my soul would soon have settled in silence. If I say, ‘my foot slips’, your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up”* (Psalm 94: 17, 18); Feeling that our hearts are strengthened in the fear of God, and in perseverance, we say: *“The Lord was my support; He brought me out into a broad place”* (Psalm 18: 18, 19).

And knowing that knowledge grows by progress in work, we would say: *“For You lighten my lamp, O Lord, lighten my darkness, for by You, I will be saved from temptation, and in You I take refuge”*. Then, feeling that we have acquired courage and perseverance, and that we are walking along the way of virtue with greater ease and with less effort, we would say: *“It is God who arms me with strength, and makes*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 118.

my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places. He teaches my hands to make war” (Psalm 18: 32-34) <sup>1</sup>.

**“The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous. The right hand of the Lord does valiantly” (15)**

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: **“The voice of exultation and salvation is in the tents of the righteous”**.

The choir of singers used to repeat verses 15 and 16, being the refrain. .

❖ The tents of the righteous were not richly furnished, but were adorned with mercy and hospitality to strangers, like the tents of Abraham. When the dwelling place is free of oppression and injustice, they become filled with the voice of exultation and salvation.

The dwelling places of the righteous in this life are the temples of God; and the age to come, they are the mansions set for them in His kingdom. In both of them there will be the voice of gladness with glorification of salvation.... In the dwelling places of the wicked, on the other hand, there are cry-outs, fighting, and reviling, may the Lord keep them away from us.

According to **Theodorus**, the righteous in the age to come will feed on gladness and the glorification of God.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ There, you will never hear complains nor wailing; they will die while having the same feeling; for, considering death as mere departure, they bid farewell to those who die by singing praises, calling the funeral a mere ride to the place of eternal comfort<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“The right hand of the Lord is exalted; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly” (16)**

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: **“The right hand of the Lord does valiantly; The right hand of the Lord exalted me; The right hand of the Lord does valiantly”**.

❖ The right hand of the Lord is the Son of God; And also His works and might, by which He strengthens His people and His own, to confront those who persecute them; He exalts them, and conquer their adversaries.

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<sup>1</sup> *De institutes caenoborum, Book 12: 17.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on 1 Timothy, hom 14.*

Tripling the words “*The right hand*”, refers to that the “Holy Trinity” did valiantly, granting man three kinds of goodness:

a- When God the Father took dust, and made man in His image, and according to His likeness.

b- When God the Son took for Himself the human nature, and exalted it above the highest heaven, by His ascension.

c- When He granted man the gifts of the Holy Spirit; which are the healing of ailments, performing signs, speaking tongues, etc.

As, according to the apostle Paul: “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4: 13)

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ The “*right hand*” of the Lord is understood in several ways. The Holy Book usually refers to it as a tool of wrath (Romans 9: 22), or as a power for protection and guarding: “*No one shall snatch them out of My hand*” (John 10: 28) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Didymus the blind)**

**“*I shall not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord*” (17)**

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly to him whose doctrines are right-handed (upright); and whose works qualify him to stand on the right hand of the just Judge, exalts him, and saves him from death that comes from sin; to say: “***I shall not die but live, and declare the works of the Lord***” (17), and His goodness.

❖ Saying: “***I shall not die***”, he means the other death referred to by the Lord saying: “*Hr who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live; and whoever lives and believes in Me, shall never die*” (John 11: 25, 26) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“*The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death*” (18)**

❖ “***The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death***” ... The psalmist does not give thanks to the Lord, on account of that He saved him from temptation; but, perceiving the great grace in which he reached, he refers to the benefit of temptation,

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Job 1: 11.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 118.

by saying: “*The Lord has chastened me severely*”.; namely, that temptation has made him in a better condition<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Chastening (or rebuking), is a sign of the loving divine care, leading to understanding.

The Lord demonstrates this kind of rebuke when He says: “*O 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). And the Holy Book also says: “*They (the Gentiles) served their idols, they sacrificed to their idols*” (Psalm 106: 35-38).

It is a sign of God’s great love. For, despite His knowledge of the disgrace of those who rejected Him, and how they have gone astray from Him, He nevertheless instigates them to repent. God says to the prophet Ezekiel: “*And you, son of man, do not be afraid to talk to them; (for they may listen to you)*” (Ezekiel 2: 6).; And He says to Moses: “*Go in, speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he must let the children of Israel go out of the land; but I know that he will not let them go*” (Exodus 6: 10). Here He shows two things: His Deity, shown by His prior knowledge of what will take place; and His love, by giving them the chance to choose repentance for themselves.

Caring for His people, God rebuked them in Isaiah, saying: “*In as much 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). And He also says: “*In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15: 9). Here, His loving care shows their sins, side by side with their salvation<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

❖ “*For whom the Lord loves, He chastens; and scourges every son whom He receives*” (Hebrew 12: 6). In chastening him, though, He does not give him over to death; for it is written: “*The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death*” (18)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ He who readily receives the chastening of the Lord, will benefit from, reform his views and works; and will not be given over to the kind of death that dwells upon the wicked. That is why the Lord allows for His own to go through tribulations and temptations, to benefit from

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Paedagogus, 1: 9. ترجمة دكتورة إيفا إدوارد بدمياط

<sup>3</sup> On Repentance, 1.

them, the healing from the death of sin; according to the words of the apostle, saying: *“For whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives”* (Hebrew 12: 6). I wish you would show perseverance when you are chastened by the Lord as His children, *“For what son is there whom a father does not chasten. But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons”* (Hebrew 12: 7).

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord” (19)***

Participation in the procession of the feast, was only allowed for those who fear the Lord, to enter through the gates of righteousness: *“Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in”* (Psalm 24: 7).

- ❖ Some of you may dare to interpret the prophecy that says: *“Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in”* (7), that it refers to king Hezekiah, or to king Solomon, or to any other king. But it certainly refers only to our Christ, He, who appeared without beauty or comeliness, as is written in Isaiah, David, and the whole Holy Book; the Lord of hosts, on whom, God (the Father), has given honor; was risen from the dead, and ascended to heaven. If you so believe, it would be easier for you to be convinced by the events before your eyes<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ The general and collective virtues are four: righteousness (justice), understanding, maturity, and chastity.

These four virtues have four gates to enter through; namely, the good works.

These gates are opened to him, who readily receives the chastening of the Lord, who cares for his own salvation; and are closed to the wicked who does not readily receive the chastening of the Lord. The gates of evil, namely, of transgressions, are open to him who seeks the temporal comfort, and does not care for his own salvation; and are closed to the righteous.

The gates of virtues open up the gates of heaven to him who knocks on them; Whereas the gates of iniquities open up the gates of Hades to their followers.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho. 84.*

❖ Ascending victoriously to God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ commands the angels, saying: *“Open to Me the gates of righteousness, I will go through them, And I will praise the Lord”* (19); Those gates which the angels talk about, saying: *“Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in”* (Psalm 24: 7)

It is befitting for the gates to be commanded to lift up their heads, according to the ordinance and the secret of incarnation; and in conformity to the conquest of the cross.

He goes back to enter heaven with greater power (taking His church along with Him), than when He descended down to earth<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Christ stands at the doors of our souls. Listen to Him say: *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and dine with him, and he with me”* (Revelation 3: 20).

About Him, the church says: *“It is the voice of my beloved, He knocks saying: ‘Open for Me My sister’”* (Songs 5: 2)..

There He stands, but not alone; With Him are His angels who say: *“Lift up your heads, O you gates”* ... The gates about which the psalmist says: *“Open to me the gates of righteousness”* (19)

Open up your gates to Christ to enter through them.

Open up the gates of righteousness, chastity, daring, and wisdom.

**Believe in the message of the angels**, saying: *“Lift up your heads, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory, the Lord of hosts, shall come in”* (Psalm 24: 7).

Your door is the loud and public confession by the voice of faith; It is the door of the Lord, which the apostle longs to open to him, saying: *“that God would open for us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ”* (Colossians 4: 3).

Let your door, then, be open to Christ. Do not just open it, but lift it up, if it is truly an everlasting door, and not condemned to perdition.

The ‘lintel’ of the door of the prophet Isaiah was lifted up, when one of the seraphim touched his lips with a live coal, and the prophet saw the Lord of hosts (Isaiah 6)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 94. On Easter Sunday.

<sup>2</sup> On Christian Faith 4: 2 (19).

❖ “*The gates of righteousness*” are opened to him who is chastised, whose sins are wiped out; for such a man could proclaim with confidence: “*Open to me the gates of righteousness*” (19).

Symbolically, “*the gates of righteousness*” could be interpreted as being the gates of heaven which were closed before the wicked, and on which you are committed to knock with virtue, truth, and righteousness, to have them opened to you<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“*This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter*” (20)**

Entrance through “*the gates of righteousness*” starts in the singular tense, then changes to the plural. It probably refers to the entrance of the Lord Christ, as the Firstborn of those risen from the dead; to Him who precedes us by His ascension to heaven, to open up its gates to His believers, for through Him they are counted as righteous.

The gates of the holy sites used to be called by names with special meanings; as for example, at Mount Sinai, there are 4000 steps that bring the pilgrim or the tourist up to a gate called ‘the gate of confession’, through which he crosses over to the top of the Mount.

❖ He who enters through the several doors of virtues, will finally come to one door, with no second, namely, to our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His words: “*I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture*” (John 10: 9).

Through this door, only the righteous will enter, for it leads to seeing God; not seen except by the pure in heart.

To that one door, the virtues and divine teachings will lead us.

The law and the prophets have likewise, have left us a program that would lead to Christ, and through Him to the bosom of God the Father, and to the kingdom of heaven. To such a program, will reach those who walk along the difficult way, through the narrow door, and not those who love comfort and prosperity in this world.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Now, it is possible to understand the “*gate of Zion*”, as being contrary to the ‘gate of death’.

The “*gate of Zion*” is self-control; which is meant by the saying of the prophet: “*This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter*” (20).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 118.

‘Cowardice’ is a gate to death; whereas ‘courage’ is “the gate of Zion”.

‘Lack of reason’ is a gate to death; whereas ‘reason’ is the “gate of Zion”.

In contradiction of “*what is falsely called knowledge*”, there is one gate, which is “*the true knowledge free of profane and vain babbling*” (1 Timothy 6: 20).

But taking into consideration that “*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood*”, it could be said that, “*the principalities, the powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, and the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Ephesians 6: 12), are the ‘gate to Hades and death’.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ When our father Jacob *prayed* in Bethel, he saw “*the gate of heaven*” opened, and “*dreamed that there was a ladder set up on earth, the top of it reaching heaven*” (Genesis 28: 12). That “*ladder*” seen by him is a symbol of our Savior Jesus Christ, by which the righteous ascend from the lowly kingdom to the high kingdom; And “*the gate of heaven*” is, likewise, a symbol of Christ, according to His own words, saying: “*I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved*” (John 10: 9). And according to David: “*This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter*” (20)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Aphrahat, the Persian savant)**

❖ Let us then cast ourselves down before the Lord, and pray to him with tears to make us merciful, to reconcile us to Him, and to let us go back to the befitting and the holy “*brotherly love*” which was we used to have.

It is the “*gate of righteousness*” which would open up before us the way to life; according to what is written: “*Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter*” (19-20).

“*Love*” leads to unutterable heights.

“*Love*” unifies us with God; ... For “*Love will cover a multitude of sins*” (1 Peter 4: 8; Proverbs 10: 2). ...

By “*love*”, those chosen by God will become perfect; while without love, nothing would bring pleasure to God. ...

By “*love*”, God will take us to Him; ....

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<sup>1</sup> *Demonstrations*, 4: 5.

By “*love*”, the Lord Jesus Christ will carry us; He who, by the will of God, shed His blood, and delivered His body and His soul for our sake.

See, my beloved, how great and amazing is “*love*”!; How ineffable is its perfection! ...

Those perfect in “*love*”, by the divine grace, would sit in the seats of the righteous, and will appear at the proclamation of the kingdom of Christ.

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

❖ There are gates to death, and to perdition, which are wide and spacious; And there are gates to life, which are narrow and rough, through which enter the upright, and those under chastisement<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ “*This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter*” (20). Through this gate, entered Peter, Paul, all the apostles and the martyrs; and the righteous still enter through it. Through this gate the robber who was crucified together with Christ, was the first to enter together with the Lord. ... Have faith, then, and hope to enter through it.

The psalm does not say, that through it the apostles and the martyrs shall enter; but says “*Through it the righteous shall enter*”.

Through it, everyone who lives in righteousness, and is qualified to be among the beloved servants of the Lord will enter. The Lord does not seek the blood of those who testify to Him, but seeks the faith, through which they shed their blood. If our faith is strong up till martyrdom, that would be to our account.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“I shall praise You, for You have answered me, and have become my salvation” (21)***

As the whole congregation praise the Lord, so will every member of the congregation. Salvation is a divine gift, presented to all, as well as to every individual.

❖ He gives thanks, not for the sake of what he was granted, but for the sake of what he was taught; which is actually why he was answered<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 118.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 118.*

- ❖ The righteous confess to the Lord; He would respond to them, and become their salvation.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

### 3- A COLLECTIVE PRAISE AND PRAYER:

It was said that the whole congregation used to go around the altar in a procession, every day of the feast of the tabernacle. Then, on the eighth day, they used to go around it seven times, while singing praise to the Lord. Yet, after coming back from captivity, the priests used to do that in their court.

*“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone”*(22)

The cornerstone is the most important stone in a building, which binds the walls together in the foundation. There is, as well, a cornerstone above the door, which binds the door arch to its two sides, on the right and on the left, in the form of the letter V; without which the door would collapse, and no one would be able to enter into the building.

There is a cornerstone hidden in the foundation underneath the building; and another one manifest above the door at the entrance. It is, therefore the hidden and the manifest; the first and the last; without which the building cannot stand; and no one can enter into it.

That is the Cornerstone, rejected by the wicked; sought to be crucified by the scribes and the Pharisees. And it is the Cornerstone, beloved by the righteous, out of whom He sets a building on the rock of living stones.

According to St. **Didymus the blind**: [Those who receive the gospel, who are born of non-perishable seeds, are a chosen and justified race. And will be, at the same time, living stones, built on the Living Cornerstone, the chosen and honored, the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, to set the spiritual house of God<sup>1</sup>].

- ❖ This Rock is our Lord Jesus Christ, as it came in the Holy Gospel; for whose sake it came in the prophecy of Isaiah: *“Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation; A tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes (in Him), will not panic”* (Isaiah 28: 16). And in Daniel it came: *“A stone was cut out without hands”* (Daniel 2: 34). He is our Lord Jesus who was born from St. Mary, the virgin who knew no man; He who was laid a foundation for our holy church.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Didymus the Blind: Commentary on 1 Peter, PG 39: 1762.

This stone, rejected by the builders, namely, by the scribes and the Pharisees, and the princes of the Jews; as they were called in the prophecy of Habakkuk: “*Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed; who establishes a city by iniquity*” (Habakkuk 2: 12).

He became the Cornerstone of the (catholic) church, who bound two categories of believers: the circumcised, and the Gentiles. Such a union could not happen by men, nor by angels; but was the work of the Lord, He who, in one Person, has gathered together the Godhead and the Manhood; And gathered together, as well, the diverse peoples into one faith; something amazing in our sight.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ The Lord will reward those who followed Him, the faithful who embrace these works with love, gladness, and piety: and will use them to establish the building belonging to Him, as living stones, conformed by faith, to become extremely solid by hope, and to unite together by love<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Just meditate in the position of the Lord Jesus Christ between the Jews and the Christians. Is He not a Cornerstone?!

In a cornerstone, you see the end of one wall, and the beginning of another; a wall is measured up to this stone, and another is measured from it. Hence the cornerstone which binds two walls is counted twice. That is why ‘Jeconiah’, king of Judah, as a symbol of the Lord, as though a cornerstone, having been denied reigning on the Jews, and carried away by king Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to the Gentiles; So was Christ, the stone rejected by the builders, became a cornerstone (22). ... The gospel had to reach the Gentiles<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Without the cornerstone, namely Christ, I cannot imagine how could men be built in the house of God, for God to dwell in them<sup>3</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ From Peter (1 Peter 2: 5), we learn that the church is the body, the house of God, built by living stones<sup>4</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ Peter calls our Lord Jesus Christ, a chosen and precious stone, conformed by the glory and exaltation of the Godhead; He calls Him

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 337.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 1: 15.

<sup>3</sup> Letters 187: 3.

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on John 10: 266.

the Cornerstone; on account of that, through one faith, He binds two peoples – Israel and the Gentiles – together in one unity<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

- ❖ As the Lord is the true Light who will ultimately come to this world for judgment; When He first came, He granted sight to the blind, and blinded those who see the wrong way. He honors those who bind themselves to Him in faith, and proclaims Himself to them as a trusted foundation; Whereas, to those who do not believe in Him, He would be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, considered as nothing, and rejected by the builders, namely by the scribes and the Pharisees<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Didymus the blind)**

- ❖ To show that He, Himself, is that stone, He said: “*Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder*” (Luke 20: 18),

The leaders of the people gathered together against Him, and intended to destroy Him, on account of that they were not happy with His teachings. But He said: “*On whomever (that stone) falls, it will grind him to powder*”; for He opposed idolatry among other things; “*The stone that struck the image, became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth*” (Daniel 2: 35)<sup>3</sup>

**(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)**

- ❖ By “*the builders*” he means the Jewish teachers of the law, the scribes and the Pharisees; who rejected Him, saying: “*You are a Samaritan, and have a demon*” (John 8: 48); And, “*He is not from God; He deceives the people*” (John 7: 12)<sup>4</sup>

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ It was said that St. Maccarius, while traveling in the company of some brothers, they heard someone wail, saying: [If a building of stone falls over me, I shall not die; but if a cottage of hay falls over me, I will die]. When the brothers saw how the elder marveled by that talk, they cast themselves at his feet, begging him to explain what they heard. He said to them: [There is indeed, O my children, a great secret in this talk.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catens.*

<sup>2</sup> *Catens.*

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron, 16: 20.*

<sup>4</sup> *On Ps. 118.*

This “stone” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, about whom it is written: *“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.... It is marvelous in our eyes”* (22-23; Matthew 21: 42). This is *“the one pearl of great price, for which sake the merchant went and sold all that he had, bought it”* (Matthew 13: 45-46); hid it in the secret places of his heart; and found it *“sweeter than honey and the honeycomb”* (psalm 19: 10); he, who keeps this stone in his heart, will get a reward in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ in the eternal kingdom of heavens.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has actually made His face like a solid stone, according to the apostle, saying: *“The Rock was Christ”* (1 Corinthians 10: 4). For the sake of the salvation of men, *“He gave His back to those who struck Him, His cheeks to those who plucked out the beard, and did not hide His face from shame and spitting”* (Isaiah 50: 6)... Even if He presses on us by ailments, because of His great love for us, yet our souls will remain in a state of non-death, because of the purity of heart.

The devil, on the other hand, is as helpless as hay; If he falls on someone unaware, and submitted him under his tyranny; If this man does not cry-out to the goodness of God; the Spirit of God will retreats from him, and his soul will die, despite being still in the body, because of the pains and rottenness of the ailments.

**(Garden of the fathers)**

***“This was the Lord’s doing; It is marvelous in our eyes” (23)***

❖ Having been rejected by you, O scribes and Pharisees, He became a Cornerstone for the early church, gathered together from the believers among the Jews and the Gentiles; and united them into one flock, and one divine secret.

***“This was the Lord’s doing; It was marvelous in our eyes”*** (23). It was marvelous that we, who, before the passion of the Lord, were without a covenant nor a law, came to have the adoption to God. ... While the old garment deteriorated and fell apart. God wove for Himself another tunic.

While you had the holy books; We have the understanding of the holy books.

While you read the holy books, We believe in Him, about whom the books were written.

While you attach yourselves to the pages, we attach ourselves to the meaning of those pages

While you treasure the scrolls made of dead animal skins, We possess the Spirit, the life-Giver.

What is more awesome than such a great secret?!

(St. Jerome)

***“This is the day which the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it” (24)***

He who walks in a fellowship with the Lord Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, walks in the daylight, and his life would become a joyful day. Whereas he who rejects his Christ, would be covered by the darkness of sin; and his life would become a night with no light.

According to **St. Erinaos**, this verse refers to the coming of the Lord Christ to Judea<sup>1</sup>.

❖ The meaning of: *“the Lord has made?”*, is that, being a Cornerstone, is not the work of man, nor of angels, archangels, or prophets. It is the work of God Himself, which, above anything else, represents his own feature<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ What we sing to our Lord, let us practice by His help; being sure that ***“every day made by the Lord”***, is said for some good reason about a certain day.

We read that when God created heaven and earth, He said: *“Let there be light’, and there was light; ... And God saw that the light was good; ... and God called the light day, and the darkness He called night”* (Genesis 1: 3 – 6).

But there is another day, a good day, which we specially commend, about which the apostle says: *“Let us walk as is befitting of the day”*; “The day”, when the light of the Word of God shines on the hearts of the believers, and scatters the darkness, not from the eyes, but the evil habits.

Let us then, receive that light; Let us rejoice and be glad in it; Let us listen to the apostle, saying: *“We are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness”* (1 Thessalonians 5: 5)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The prophet calls the duration of the works of the incarnation of the Son of God: “a day”. As what was achieved during that period;

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *St. Irenaeus: Adv. Haer. 4: 33: 11.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 118.*

<sup>3</sup> *Sermons, 230.*

namely, the reconciliation of God with men; the taking away of the temporal controversy (in the believer); the exaltation of human nature above the highest heaven; the opening-up of the gates of paradise; the restoration of man's early honor; the wiping out of the curse; the decrease of the authority of sin; and the breaking down of the sting of death; ... were all the work of the Lord; for the sake of which we rejoice and be glad.

The prophet calls that duration "a day", on account of that the first day of creation, has been an introduction to it, distinguished from the rest of the days made by God; having created in it the light, by whose rising and the setting, the day and the night were designated by the Lord as "*the first day*" (Genesis 1: 5)...

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ There was another day different from the rest of the days that came since the beginning of creation, by which we measure the time -- the day of the resurrection of the Lord Christ -- the beginning of another creation; For, according to the prophet, in that day, God created a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65: 17).

What heaven? ... The steadfastness in the faith in Christ (Luke 8: 15)

And what earth?... The good heart.

I say as the Lord said: [In this new creation, the earth absorbs the rain falling on it, and makes the heads of grain ripen and bear fruits;. the sun is the pure life, the stars are the virtues, the air is the pure city, the sea is the depth of the riches of wisdom and knowledge, the grass and green plants are the divine good teachings, where the people of God find their pasture, and the trees that give fruit are the consummation of the commandments of God. And on that very day – the day of the resurrection of the Lord -- the true man was created, who came to be "*in God's image, and according to His likeness*" (Genesis 1: 26)<sup>1</sup>].

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

- ❖ "*They shall come up out of the land*" (Hosea 1: 11). ; Namely, they shall truly live the good life of saints. ... Great will be that day of Christ, when He comes down from heaven, sits on His glorious throne, raises all the dead to life, "*and rewards each according to his works*" (Matthew 16: 27). ... Understanding "That day" as (the day of visitation), in which the Lord Christ forgives the sins of the Greeks, as well as of the Jews, and of all those who have wronged Him; is not

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<sup>1</sup> مؤسسة القديس أنطونيوس: وقام في اليوم الثالث، 2006، ص 12. ترجمة دكتور سعيد حكيم يعقوب.

a deflection from the truth; As, according to the prophet David: “*This is the day which the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it*” (24)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great)

- ❖ In the Old Testament, the figure “8”, refers (in Latin) to a group of eight verses of poetry – Octave. As according to Ecclesiastes: “*Give a serving to seven, and also to eight*” (Ecclesiastes 11: 2)... In the New Testament, the eighth day is the day of the resurrection of the Lord Christ; when the new salvation shined on all; “*the day which the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it*” (24)<sup>2</sup>

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ God, surely, has made all the days; but the other days could be referred, as well, to the Jews, to the heretics, and even to the pagans. ...But “***The day of the Lord***” is the day of the resurrection, the day of the Christians, our day... When the pagans call it ‘Sunday’, namely, the day of the sun, we are very content with this nomenclature, for it is truly, the day when “*the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, with healing in His wings*” (Malachi 4: 2)... Does the sun have wings? ... Let the Jews, and those like them, who only follow the literal interpretation of the Holy Book, answer this question<sup>3</sup>!
- ❖ As the virgin St. Mary, the mother of God, occupies the first place among women, So the day of the resurrection of the Lord is the foremost among the days.

Let me tell you a new thing, according to the Holy Book:

This day, although it is one of the seven days of the week, yet, in its prominence, it surpasses the seven, and is called ‘the eighth day’; which is the reason that, some psalms has the title: “for the eighth, or for the octave”; **It is the day in which the synagogue ends, and the church is born.**

According to the number, eight souls were saved in Noah’s ark (Genesis 7: 14); which according to St. Peter, conforms to the church (1 Peter 3: 20-21)<sup>4</sup>.

- ❖ On that day (the Sunday of resurrection), the Lord Christ – and with Him the robber – cancelled the flaming and turning sword guarding the way to paradise (Genesis 3: 24), and reopened its gate, which no

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<sup>1</sup>St. Cyril of Alexandria Commentary on Hosea 1: 9.

<sup>2</sup>Letter 50 to Horontianus.

<sup>3</sup>Homily 94.

<sup>4</sup>Homily 94, on Easter Sunday.

one could go through. Now, the angels say: *“Open the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord”* (19). Once that gate was opened, it would never be closed again before the believers<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“Save now, I pray, O Lord. I pray, O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity”* (25)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: *“Save us, O Lord; O Lord, pave our ways”*

The word “Save” in Greek, came as “*Hosanna*”.

- ❖ Those who are filled with the goodness of Your incarnation, Save them from the snares of sin; and grant them prosperity, namely, make their way easy toward goodness.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

#### **4- A PRIESTLY BLESSING:**

It bears an echo of the blessing that came in the book of Numbers 6: 24-26.

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you from the house of the Lord”* (26)

- ❖ The regular workers come to the Son of Joseph, singing:

[Blessed is Your coming, O Master Worker everywhere.

Your workmanship is apparent in the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25: 10-16);

And in the form of the tabernacle of the meeting (Exodus 26).

In the congregation, which has been only for a limited time<sup>2</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian)

*“God is the Lord, and He has given us light. Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar”* (27)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: *“Set a feast for those who reach up to, and embrace the horns of the altar”*.

- ❖ When the psalmist saw, by the eye of prophecy, the coming of the Lord Christ in flesh to the world, and the goods that the believers will get from it, he was filled with joy, and instigated them to hold a feast and to rejoice for the sake of the goodness of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 94, on Easter Sunday.

<sup>2</sup> Hymns on the Nativity, 6.

As to those who reach up to the horns of the altar, he probably refers to the two cherubs of glory, made of gold, who, by their wings, embraced and covered the ark of the covenant from above.

Or he means to say to the believers: Hold a feast, and gather together in such a dense multitude, until you reach the horns of the altar; ... Rejoice and be glad for the sake of the grace you have got, ... and offer the Lord an abundance of virtues that increase until they reach the cross of Christ; ... Namely, receive even death, for the sake of His love; endure afflictions and temptations for the sake of faith, uttering the truth; according to the words of the Lord of Glory, saying: *“If anyone desires to come to Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me”* (Luke 9: 23)

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ The Lord says: *“Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them”* (Exodus 25: 8); Namely, Christ appears in the church, and be glorified in all its members; according to the psalm, saying: *“God is the Lord; and He has given us light”* (27).

Notice this as well: Although God came down on the mountain in the form of fire, and seen by the whole people; Yet, saying: *“Let them make a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them”* (Exodus 25: 8), is as though, He has not appeared yet... The true appearance of God will be by the Lord Christ, in whose Person we see the Father Himself<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

## **5- A RESPONSE BY THE KING:**

Here, and for the second time, we hear a sole voice uttered by the king, saying:

*“You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You”* (28)

## **6- A COLLECTIVE CONCLUSION:**

*“Oh, Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever”* (29)

❖ As though It is not enough for him to offer this sacrifice, but he calls upon the multitude to partake of the praise and the thanksgiving; and to proclaim God’s mercy, glorifying His eternity and greatness everywhere<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> مؤسسة القديس أنطونيوس: السجود والعبادة بالروح والحق، ج 5، 2006، ص 62-63.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 118.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 118  
I CALL EVERYONE TO PARTAKE OF YOUR PRAISE, O LORD**

- ❖ My depths cry out to all humanity;  
Let us all praise and give thanks to the Lord;  
Let us confess to Him our sins, and get attached to Him;  
For He, alone, is the Forgiver of sins.
- ❖ Nail Your fear, O Lord, in our hearts;  
To love and fear You;  
To live by You, and praise You forever;
- ❖ I give you thanks, for You allowing for me to go through affliction;  
For, as a Father, You seek the edification of my soul;  
I cry out to You in my affliction;  
Yet, I do not seek to be spared the affliction;  
But to be set in a broad place;  
To bring me and my brethren into the width of Your heavens;  
To bring us forth into Your bosoms;  
To let us experience Your amazing love.
- ❖ In my affliction, I shall not be preoccupied with my sufferings;  
And I shall not seek from anyone to save me;  
But I shall only look up to You;  
I shall resort to You, O the refuge of those who cry out to You;  
I do not care if all the hosts of darkness stir-up against me;  
They will never draw my eyes away from You;  
They attempt to push me forth to perdition;  
They tend to kindle my heart with the fire of iniquity;  
But, as You are my strength;  
No defeat shall ever dwell upon me;  
As You are my praise, No vain sorrow will ever captivate me;  
As You are my salvation, I shall not be destroyed, as long as I am in  
Your hand;  
You turn my affliction into a new experience, to enjoy Your mercies.
- ❖ The enemy intends to break me up by affliction;  
But by Your goodness, You turn my affliction into a way to  
encounter You;

You are the Gate of Righteousness; ... Yes, You are the  
Righteousness itself;  
Let me enter into Your bosoms, and get attached to Your  
righteousness;  
That my whole being would turn into a harp;  
On which Your Holy Spirit plays.

- ❖ You are the Cornerstone;  
You are the Rock of ages;  
You are the Builder of my soul;  
Who can destroy Your work in me?!  
What power could stand against Your grace?!  
You make a marvelous thing out of my depths;  
Instead of my corruption, You grant me non-corruption;  
Instead of my days, You grant me Your day, which is like You;  
You make my whole life Your day;  
You make it Yourself; not entrusting my salvation to any creation!
- ❖ O my God, the more I praise You,  
The more the flame of my heart becomes kindled with longing for  
You;  
I call upon everyone to gather together with us, and partake of Your  
praise;  
That the hearts of all mankind would be filled with the joy of the  
Spirit;  
That all mankind would join the heavenlies;  
And our life would turn into an everlasting joy.

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# ***PSALM 119***

## **AN INTRODUCTION**

### **THE RICHNESS AND PLEASANTNESS OF THE WORD OF GOD**

#### **THE PSALM OF THE WORD OF GOD:**

This is the longest psalm in the Holy Book. It is not related to any particular event concerning the Jewish church or the Jewish nation<sup>1</sup>. It glorifies the Word of God, and reveals its honor, exaltation, and benefit; proclaims the pleasantness of the law of God, and testifies to the features of the Holy Book of God on several aspects, in a form of a prayer. Reading this psalm reveals to the reader, the prophet David's concept of the Word of God, which has been the center of his thoughts, interest, love, and meditation, day and night.

In the 176 verses of this psalm, only two verses (122, 132) do not speak of the Word of God.

Some scholars divide the book of psalms into five divisions corresponding to the five books of the prophet Moses (the Pentateuch). This psalm (119) came in the fifth division, which corresponds to the book of Deuteronomy, the book of the commandments, or of the "divine Word".

According to J.R.<sup>2</sup>. Church: [This psalm came in the fifth division of the book of psalms, corresponding to the fifth book of Moses, namely, the book of Deuteronomy, the Hebrew title of which is 'Dabar', meaning (word); after its first verse, saying: "*These are the words*" (Deuteronomy 1: 1)].

The psalmist divided humanity into two categories:

a- **The pious** who are bound to the Word of God, to perceive and consummate it. They pray unceasingly, seeking the growth in the divine wisdom, the enjoyment of the understanding as a divine gift; as well as keep seeking the grace of God to support them to practice the commandment, in an attempt to reach the life of perfection. Those experience the blessed life, despite the opposition of the wicked; and to them, the Word of God transforms into a joyful song of praise, that bears a special sweetness.

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<sup>1</sup> Jamieson, Fousset, Brown (*The Bethany Parallel Commentary on the O.T.*, Minnesota, 1985, p. 1155.

<sup>2</sup> J. R. Church, p. 329.

The life of those pious people, with what it bears of holiness and purity, together with enlightenment and wisdom, that reveals the truth and the strength of the Word of God, is a living testimony, and a book readable by all, that translates the Word of God in the believer's life, and exalts him from glory to glory, until it brings him forth to the perfection of the glorious future.

b- **The wicked:** who reject and oppose the Word of God, and oppress those who abide to it. But their evil plans definitely end with failure, and they are defeated.

## **THE PRAISE OF PRAISES:**

The fathers of the church consider the book of psalms as the heart of the Holy Book, that introduces to us the Word of God in a language of praise and joy, even in the darkest moments. It translates for us the true fellowship with God, in the language of the heavenlies, in the midst of the bitter actuality in which the believers live.

This particular psalm (119), is the song of the soul that enjoys the Word of God, and experiences its activity in its daily life. And through it, it prepares itself to encounter the heavenly Groom. That is why, this psalm occupies a position of prominence in the midnight prayer, by which the soul looks forward to the coming of the Groom. In this psalm, the church finds her comfort after the labor of the whole day and night; and sings to the divine Groom "the Word of God", who comes to carry her with Him to the fellowship of His glory.

According to **St. Augustine:** [Although this psalm is so deep, that I cannot fathom its depth, Yet it needs no interpretation, but only to be read and listened to].

And according to Venn: [This is the psalm to which I used to resort when I lack in my heart the spirit to pray; Eventually, by reading it, a fire would kindle in me, and I could resume praying<sup>1</sup>].

This psalm talks about the divine law as a support for the believer in his sojourn, to find in it:

- 1- A secret of his comfort in the midst of the sufferings of the wilderness (16, 47, 103).
- 2- A secret of his praise and the exultation of his soul (54).
- 3- A secret of his inner riches (72).
- 4- A leader and a guide to his soul in the midst of the troubles caused by enemies (16, 61, 62)
- 5- A secret of his life (25)

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<sup>1</sup> *Plumer, p. 1018.*

6- A secret of his enlightenment (105, 135)

7- Finally, it introduces to the believer the commandment of God in its spirit and depth, with the Person of the Savior, the incarnate Word of God. Hence the psalmist says: *“To all perfection I see a limit, but your commands are boundless”* (96).

❖ The commandment carries inside it the Lord Christ; Whoever enters into its depths and lives it by the spirit, will encounter the divine Word Himself.

(St. Mark the hermit)

### Features of the psalm:

1- **A model school of prayer** that reveals the life of prayer, through the living actuality lived by the psalmist, who says: *“I am a man of prayer”* (Psalm 109: 4). Through this psalm, we can discover how the psalmist practiced prayer.

a- The psalmist does not separate the spiritual law of the Lord, namely, His commandment, or His Word, from his own worship -- his prayer in particular. Beside its essence as a glorification of the divine commandment, this psalm is, as well, a magnificent piece of prayer. It is as though, the goal of the commandment is to enter into a union with God, who is close to us, and even dwelling in us; to debate with Him, and He with us. And as though the goal of prayer is to enjoy the beatitude of the perfect obedience of the commandment; For, by prayer we seek from God to grace us with His will working in us.

b- In this psalm we discover ‘the unity of man’. The psalmist knows no bilateral tendency in his life; but in him, the body shares with the soul, and the heart is in harmony with the mouth and the tongue. On one aspect, the psalmist cares to have the perfect prayer of the heart, saying:

*“With my whole heart I have sought You”* (10)

*“Your word I have hidden in my heart”* (11)

*“Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law”* (34)

*“I entreated Your favor with my whole heart”* (58)

*“Let my heart be blameless regarding your statutes, that I may not be put to shame”* (80).

*“I cry out with my whole heart, Hear me, O Lord”* (145)

On another aspect, not disregarding the prayer of the mouth and the tongue, so that the body shares it with the soul, the psalmist says:

*“My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes”* (171).

Namely, the psalmist's his whole being is like a guitar with several strings, that produces a practical symphony of love, through a life of prayer and obedience, in which the body shares with he soul.

c- With every breath of his life, the psalmist so raises his heart in prayer, that all the time of his life is sanctified by God's work in him.. That is why we find him pray, "at all times" (20), "all day" (97), "praises seven times a day" (164), "in the night", "at midnight", "through the watches of the night", "and before dawn" (147).

d- Meditating in the Holy Trinity, the psalmist talks about the Father (90, 73), the Son (176), and the Holy Spirit (131).

We can summarize the psalmist's goal by his payers in the following points:

- That God would reveal His commandments to him.
- That God would give him the understanding to perceive the depths of the commandment.
- That he would enjoy the divine grace to find sweetness in the difficult commandment, so as to long for it.
- That he would practice and grow in the divine commandment.

2- Beside being mainly **an educational and instructive psalm**, it is, at the same time, a **praise** and a **prayer**; It is rather difficult to separate the spiritual teaching from the worshipping aspect. Commenting on this psalm, **St John Chrysostom** says: [Let the mouth sing, and the mind be instructed, For that would definitely be of value. For once we teach the tongue to praise, the soul would feel shame to walk contradictory to what she praises<sup>1</sup>].

And according to **St. Jerome**: [Psalm 118 (119) is alphabetical in form, ethical in features, and includes instructions for our life<sup>2</sup>].

3- Some consider this psalm a **liturgical psalm**, concerning the general worship.

4- According o **the scholar Origen**, using the whole alphabet at the beginning of each sections in order, refers to its inclusion of "**the whole theological literature**". He also says: [According to my knowledge, There is nowhere to find such a comprehensive dealing of the theological literature"].

And according to **St. Athanasius the apostolic**, this psalm reveals to us the program of the life of saints on three aspects: the spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> *The Epistle to the Romans, hom., 28.*

<sup>2</sup> *St. Jerome: hom. 41.*

war, the divine grace, and the enjoyment of the eternal glories.  
He says:

\* The warring, the suffering, the temptations, the demonic attacks, and the crawling of thousands of thoughts, nets and snares.

\*He describes as well everything that allows for victory and conquest: the law, the teaching, the perseverance, and the help coming from high above.

\*And finally, he describes what would come after the troubles, of rewards and crowns].

5- The distinguishing feature of this psalm, is the deep conviction that, keeping the commandments of God, is not set upon the human

effort, but requires the grace of God, that grants the holy will, and the ability to execute it; and would, as well, give the children of God an unutterable sweetness to enjoy His word. Hence, this psalm has amazingly realized -- through the grace of God, granted to us in the new covenant -- to have the commandment inscribed on our hearts (See Jeremiah 31: 31-33).

The commandment is not merely instructions written in a book, or heard in a sermon, but it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who, alone, can inscribe it in our depths, to be experienced as spirit and life, and get in touch of its activity in our depths.

The commandment, being actually an experience of the "resurrected life", the psalmist often uses the expression: "According to Your words, I live" ... This is the gift of the Spirit of God, who gives us the fellowship with Christ, risen from the dead, to say: "*God raised us up with Christ*" (Ephesians 2: 6); Namely, grants us the new resurrected life.

6- This psalm, according to some, suits all believers in all eras; as it represents a cry-out of the soul, thirsty for God, to have His word work in her, and to protect her against the temptations of the enemy who fights her on the inside, as well as on the outside. Some others, though, believe that it rather suits the youth who seek from God to grant them an inner enlightenment, and strength to work and strive by His rich grace, under the leadership of His sweet Word.

7- Some believe that the law, or the Word of God here, occupies the place of God Himself. Actually, from verse 4 on, except for verse 115, every verse is a prayer presented to God, using every kind of supplication. We glorify the divine law, for it expresses God Himself, and proclaims His will to man. It would be difficult to separate "the

Word of God” from Him, being a divine Person, One with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in the same essence of the divine nature.

What the psalmist confirms here is that, the closer we approach the divine Word, the closer we approach God Himself; And the more we live in it, the more we live with God.

8- This psalm bears a **meditating nature**, by which the feelings and emotions of the psalmist appear in the form of prayers and supplications.

9- According to Clark: [Many of the old scholars -- the Greek in particular -- consider it a parade of David’s life, in which all the situations through which he has passed are shown, including all the trials, the persecutions, the helps, and the encouragements he has got. Whereas, according to the Latin fathers, this palm includes all the principles of behavior concerning the gospel; and it controls man’s behavior in all situations of life<sup>1</sup>].

Some believe that David did not write this psalm in a certain situation, but it is rather like a daily<sup>2</sup> diary or memoir, that he started in his early youth, and continued until his old age. All believers are invited to meditate in it, in order that, in it, everyone would somehow find himself, meditating in the precious value, sweetness, and glory of God’s Word,

In these memoirs, David concentrated on that, the Word of God is the subject of his support and sweet meditation since his youth until his old age; And here, he presents it to us, to receive the Word of God, being: “*the Alpha and Omega*” (Revelation 1: 8), the First and Last, in our whole life.

10- Some believe that it is the Lord Christ who talks in this psalm. J. R. Church says: [This psalm refers by the spirit of prophecy to our Lord

Jesus Christ, introduced in the gospel of St. John as “*The Word of God*”]. He also says: [Another reason why I think that, by the spirit of prophecy, it refers to our Lord Jesus Christ, is that there are 8 verses in each of the 22 sections (stichon or Stanza), of this psalm; the figure 8 is the only figure for the ‘new beginning’ (the first day of the week); referring to that, there is no one else but Jesus Christ; For the name “Jesus” in the Greek language, corresponds to the figure 888; contrary to that of the Antichrist – 666, mentioned in the book of Revelation 13: 18].

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<sup>1</sup> Plumer, p. 1018.

<sup>2</sup> Erlig C. Otsen: *Mediations on the Book of Psalms*, N. J, 1985. P. 835.

And Arno C. Gaebelein says: [The figure 8 here refers to ‘life from death’; As the Lord Christ has risen, not on the seventh day, but on the eighth day; which provides us with the key to this book].

And according to the scholar Origen, the use of the figure 8, has its special significance. As the psalm includes 22 sections; and each section begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, to embrace the whole “Theological literature”; the use of the letter eight times means the entrance into the perfection of purity and knowledge; for the defilement continued seven days, in which the world was counted as uncircumcised; until the Lord Christ came, and was circumcised on the eighth day, when, in Him, we enjoyed the purity. This purity was realized by the work of the resurrection of the Lord Christ, who was risen on the eighth day, namely the first day of the new week. The scholar Origen says: [All of us, without exception, were purified in the circumcision of the Lord Christ; We, who, according to the apostle (Romans 6: 4) <sup>1</sup>, “*were buried and were raised together with Him*” <sup>2</sup>].

It is to be noticed that this psalm is alphabetical, including 22 stichons (sections), according to the number of the Hebrew alphabet. Each stichon includes 8 verses, all begin with one letter; the letters came in alphabetical order in Hebrew.

### **Author of the psalm:**

Some recent scholars believe that this psalm is written by Ezra the scribe, who cared for collecting the books of the Old Testament. After the return from captivity; he recorded this psalm to express the activity of the Word of God in the life of believers. Yet, both the Hebrew, as well as the Christian tradition refer it to the prophet David, a view which was also adopted by several of the recent scholars.

### **The guidance words (the key of the book) <sup>3</sup>:**

This psalm uses several synonyms for ‘the divine proclamation’, that describe the Word of God; counted by some as eight; while some add to them the two synonyms: “*the Lord’s Way*”, and, “*the Lord’s Truth*”. They are not mere literal language synonyms, but refer to specific features of the Word of God, referring to its several exaltation and perfections:

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<sup>1</sup> J. R. Curch, p. 330.

<sup>2</sup> Arno C. Gaebelein, p. 439.

<sup>3</sup> Plumer, p. 1019-1022; Nelson: *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, p. 487-8; Scripture Union: *Bible Study Books, Psalms*, o. 98, 99; Henry and Scott: *A Commentary upon the Holy Bible- Job to Solomon's Song*, p. 339.

**(1) The law (Or the torah);** a Hebrew word that refers more to the five books of Moses. It came 25 times in this psalm, found in every one of its 8 stichons (or sections), with the exception of stichon B. The literal meaning of the word “torah” is (teaching); namely, the teaching delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai; translated by the Hellenic Jews, with Greek thought, as “Nomos”, namely, “law”<sup>1</sup>.

The word came derived from a verb, meaning (to direct, lead, guide, or aim ahead). That is how the Word of God, His law, guides us, or leads us to recognize God’s holy will, to bind us to the blessed life (see psalm 1: 1), and to grant us the divine peace and truth, through obeying Him.

We are committed to abide to His law, being our King who guides our life by the law of His kingdom; by which He seeks no authority over us, but proclaims His will, to carry it in us, for our edification and sanctification.

This psalm tells us about the state of beatitude in which those who dwell in the law of the Lord live. Who are they, but those who unite with the Lord Christ – the Head, who, alone, is without blame, and capable of granting His body, obedience to His law; not on the level of the deadly letter, but of the Spirit who edifies?! ... Obedience to the law of the Lord, here, does not mean the literal execution of its statutes, but its consummation in Jesus Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit in us, the Spirit of Christ. ... As no man, on his own, can consummate the law of the Lord, all became in need of the work of the Lord Christ which He consummated for the sake of those who are under the curse. For it is written: “*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which is written in the book of the law, to do them*” (Galatians 3: 10).

❖ Here you see how he proves that those who attach to the law are all under curse; for it is impossible for them to consummate all of it (Galatians 3: 10, 11); Then how faith came bearing this power of justification. ... Christ came to replace this curse by another curse: “*Cursed is everyone hanged on a tree*” ... Christ did not take the curse of non-piety, but the other curse, to take away the curse from the others; although “*He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth*” (Isaiah 53: 9). By His death He saved the dead from death; namely, by carrying the curse in Himself, He saved them from it<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia, col. 12, p. 196.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Gal., ch. 3.*

❖ The law was not given to heal the weak, but to reveal and expose their weakness (Galatians 3: 19)... They got the law which they were not able to consummate. They recognized their ailment, and sought the help of the Physician; they longed to be healed, for they were in agony; something that they could not recognize, except when they were unable to consummate the law they have got<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

(2) **The testimonies** (edoth): Meaning God's testimony about His will, or revealing it, so that the believer would walk according to it. According to some fathers, it means the divine testimony about the true love toward man, which was perfectly realized when the Lord Christ gave the good testimony before Pilate Pontos, delivering His life for the sake of man. These testimonies are also realized by us when we receive this love and respond to it by our love; and "*present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God*" (Romans 12: 1)

The Holy Book is called "A testimony or covenant of God"; for it includes a testimony of God's mind and will; as well as a testimony of God's promises to His people, and its consummation through the cross. Here, there is also a reference to the ark of the testimony or of the covenant . Whoever does not keep the commandments of God would not be counted as a keeper of His covenant with him, but its breaker

(3) **The precepts or commands** (Piqqudim): It came 21 times in this psalm, in all stichons, except for three of them. It came as well in three other locations in the Holy Book; meaning a commitment to a specific duty.

Some believe that the Hebrew word is derived from a word meaning "a commitment by a faithful and a trustworthy man"; Namely, when man is committed, and responsible to fulfill divine things that concern him, through a motive of his inner conscience and faithfulness.

While others believe that it is derived from a word, meaning (to notice), (to care for something), (to listen), or (to evaluate something); as the divine precepts are meant to care for the way of man through God, who cares for him, and listens to him, being the object of His appreciation. At the same time, the commandments proclaim our duty, and guide us to live and walk as is befitting to God's appreciation of us.

(4) **The statutes** (chuqqim): It came in all the stichons, except for four of them. It came in the feminine tense in verse 16; and 19 times in verses 5 to 171.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons on N.T. Lessons, 94: 5.

The word is derived from a verb, meaning (to inscribe), being wisdoms of great value, inscribed as signs on the way to be followed; and any perversion from them would bring our life forth to vanity, loss, and perdition.

The Lord Christ is the true Wisdom who inscribe His cross in our hearts, as a sign on the royal way; He grants us His Holy Spirit, who does not inscribe commandments or wisdoms on stone tablets, but in our hearts, capable to raise us up to the heavenly life, as though by the wings of a dove.

**(5) The commandments** (mitsvot): It came 22 times in this psalm; in all the stichons, except for three of them. The word bears the meaning of authority; as God gave them to us, being the One with authority, to obey; we know what we receive and what we reject. As God gives them to us as a sign of His appreciation of us; we should pay His love back by our obedience to Him; namely pay love back with love.

**(6) The judgments** (misphatim): It came 23 times in all stichons, except for two of them. It refers to a duty put on the shoulder of man by a divine decree. The word is derived from a verb meaning (to judge), (to condemn), or (to decide). The statutes refer to legal divine decisions, to which all are committed to abide; They control all the actions of man, concerning his thoughts, senses, emotions, feelings, his relationships with his brethren, and with all creation, as well as with God. They control his life, not through literal laws, but through divine spiritual thoughts.

They are called ‘judgments’, on account of that they have to become our constitutional way of looking at all things, both hidden and manifest; and through them, as well, God will judge us.

**(7) and (8) The Word and the oracles:** In Hebrew there is distinct discernment between the two terms (imrah, and dabar). The **Word** came 24 times in this psalm; in all the stichons except for three of them; And the **oracles** came 19 times, in all the stichons except for four of them.

The Holy Book is called “the Word of God”, or “His oracles”, that come out of His mouth, and proclaims them to us. The “word” means God’s proclamation of His thought; The Lord Christ is the Eternal and the Everlasting Word; One with the God in Essence, and Equal to Him; He is His Rational Mind, or Rational Uttering. The Word of God is far from that of man; As, while God’s words are not outside Him, nor separate from Him; the word or the sayings of man, once they come out of him, they disappear.

According to **St. Clement of Alexandria**: [The Word of God says: “*I am the Way*” (John 14: 6). In the Word, therefore, the mind meditates<sup>1</sup>].

❖ The Son, being the Word, proclaims the will of His Father.

While the words, literally uttered, have no direct activity in themselves, the Word of God, alone, unutterable, yet having an inner concept, works with activity, living, and has the power of healing. “*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). Do not compare it, therefore to the word coming out of the mouth of man.

❖ They foolishly talk, not knowing the difference between the uttered word and the divine Word, the eternal, begotten from the Father. I say that He is begotten, and not only unutterable, but is the perfection of the eternal deity, and the infinite life..

❖ Yes, “*Who has seen the Son has seen the (image) of the Father*” (John 14: 9-10). Notice what image he talks about. It is the Truth, the Righteousness, and the Power of God. It is not mute, for He is the Word; not rigid, for He is the Wisdom; not vain, for He is the Power; and not dead, for He is the Resurrection<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

**(9) The Way** (dereh): This word came 13 times in this psalm; meaning the foundation on which the care of God is set, as well as our obedience.

The Word of God is called “the Way”; for He presents it to us to walk according to it, as though it is a royal ladder, on which we climb to reach the kingdom of heaven. This Way is the incarnate Word of God Himself, who teaches and trains us, and carries us by His Holy Spirit up to the bosom of the Father; granting us His righteousness, to share with Him the glory of his inheritance.

❖ “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*” (John 14: 6).

If I am the Way, you need no one to hold your hands.

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<sup>1</sup> *Stromata* 5: 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Of the Christian Faith* 4: 7 (73-75), 4: 9 (102); 1: 7 (50).

If I am the only Authority that brings you forth to the Father, You would not reach Him by any other way<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

(10) **The Truth** or Faithfulness (Orach): This Hebrew word came five times in this psalm (30, 75, 86, 90, 138). The incarnate Word of God is called “the Truth”. He, who, alone, has the power and the authority to destroy the vanity of Satan and ignorance, and to reign over our inner life, proclaiming Himself and His secrets, being the eternal Truth, granting us the knowledge as a divine gift.

❖ This Truth, is proclaimed to us by the Lord Christ in His gospel, saying: “*I am the Truth*” (John 14: 6). Therefore, if we are in Christ, and have Christ in us; If we dwell in the Truth, and the Truth dwells in us; let us then, hold fast to those things which are the Truth<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Cyprian)

**We can summarize the ‘guidance words’ of the divine proclamation as follows:**

1- **The law:** That guides and directs us to recognize the divine will. Yet, we have fallen under the curse of disobedience, until He came, who liberates us from the curse.

2- **The testimonies:** That testify to the will of God, and reveal His giving love, proclaimed through the cross.

3- **The precepts:** by which the believer pledges to walk faithfully, in what he is entrusted with.

4- **The statutes:** Which are divine signs set by God on the ground of the heart.

5- **The commandments:** God of Authority commands us, and we have to obey.

6- **The judgments:** The word of God ordains all the behavior of man within himself, with his brethren, and with all creation, as well as with God.

7- **The Word:** To enjoy the divine Person, the divine Word.

8- **The oracles:** That brings us forth to the divine oracle which surpasses all human sayings.

9- **The Way:** The Word of God is the royal Way that brings us forth to the bosom of the Father.

10- **The Truth** or Faithfulness: We enjoy the divine Truth, so as not to live in ignorance.

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<sup>1</sup> In Joan. Hom 73: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ep. 73 (Oxford 74): 9.

## **Psalm 119 (118) and reaching to perfection:**

According to **St. Jerome**, directly following psalm 119, come the fifteen psalms of Ascent (120 to 134); by which the believer ascends the seven steps of the outer court, and the eight steps up to the temple. It is as though, by singing this psalm, man enters into the divine sanctuaries<sup>1</sup>.

We can say that the Word of God, the subject of praise of this psalm, would prepare the human soul in the following way:

- She (the human soul), by the work of the Holy Spirit, ascends to enjoy exaltation above every temporal anguish, and above every oppression of the Truth (psalm 120).

- She lifts her inner eyes up to the holy mountains, to find the Lord, her keeper (Psalm 121)

- She dwells together with the Lord in His heavenly dwelling place (122), where she enjoys the higher Jerusalem. the doors of which will be open before her.

Then, she will truly sing the praise of eternal conquest: *“If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, ... then they would have swallowed us alive; ... Then the swollen waters would have gone over our souls; ... The snare is broken, and we have escaped”* (Psalm 124); *“The Lord has done great things for them; The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad”* (126)

This is the work of the divine Word in our life; to grant us the deposit of the heavenly perfection, and the eternal glory.

## **The position of the Torah for the Jews:**

1- According to the Rabbins, the Torah was there, even before the creation of the world. The origin of the five books, like everything heavenly, is of fire, written by fiery black letters on a white fiery background<sup>2</sup>.

2- The Torah is in the bosom of God: Sitting on the throne of His glory, God has the torah in His bosom.

3- The Torah is the daughter of God.

4- The Torah in the life of the world. Whoever separates himself from the Torah will instantly die<sup>3</sup>; consumed by fire, and go to hell<sup>4</sup>.

5- In the Medrash, commenting on the book of Psalms, it came that [The truth is the Torah].

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<sup>1</sup> *Against Jovinianus, Book 2, 34.*

<sup>2</sup> *Yer. Shek 49 a.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ab. Zarah 3b.*

<sup>4</sup> *B.B. 799 (Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 12. P. 197.*

6- The Torah raises man above the temporal things: [Hallil used to say: You have to learn that, whoever profits from the words of the law, would draw his life away from the world<sup>1</sup>].

7- The Torah is God's wisdom itself; It had counsel with God in the matter of creation. And it was the first divine proclamation by which God revealed Himself<sup>2</sup>.

8- The Torah shines its light forever<sup>3</sup>.

9- The Torah gives glory to whoever studies it: The Gentile who studies the Torah becomes as great as a high priest<sup>4</sup>.

### **Features of the Word of God:**

1- **Delightful** (14, 16): It provides man with, not just a mental pleasure, but with the pleasure of having a blessed life, and of recognizing and enjoying God's will.

2- **Rich**: It is the heritage of the believer (111); more valuable than gold, precious stones (127), and great treasures (162).

3- **Lovable**: (48)

4- **Awesome**: (161).

5- **Settled in heaven forever** (89)

6- **Grants** beatitude (1); spacious and widely-open heart; liberation from sufferings (133); enlightenment (130); Life (93); peace (165); great rejoice (162); and brings forth the mercies of God (41); ... Hence it is the foundation of hope (43).

### **The general frame:**

1- **Beatitude of obedience with an indivisible heart (1-8)**

2- **The commandment ... A hidden treasure (9-16)**

3- **The commandment ... comfort in sojourn (17-24)**

4- **Revive me according to Your Word (25-32).**

5- **Make me walk in the path of Your commandments (33-40).**

6- **Testimony to the Word of God (41-48).**

7- **Your Word is my comfort in my affliction (49-56).**

8- **I entreated Your favor (Your face) with my whole heart (57-64).**

9- **It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes (65-72).**

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<sup>1</sup> *Mishnah: Abot 4: 5.*

<sup>2</sup> *Jewish Encyclopedia, vol 12, p. 197.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *B. k. 38a (Jewish Encyclopedia, p. 197).*

- 10- Your judgments are right (73-80).**
- 11- Hope in the midst of darkness (81-88).**
- 12- Your Word is settled in heaven (89-96).**
- 13- How sweet are Your words to my taste (97-104).**
- 14- Your Word is a lamp to my feet (105-112).**
- 15- Uphold me according to Your Word (113-120).**
- 16- Do not leave me to my oppressors (121-128).**
- 17- Your testimonies are wonderful (129- 136).**
- 18- The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting (137-144).**
- 19- You are near, O Lord (145- 152).**
- 20- Salvation is far from the wicked (153- 160).**
- 21- Great peace have those who love Your law (161- 168).**
- 22- Give me understanding; deliver me; seek Your servant (169-176).**

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119  
LET ME COME CLOSE TO YOUR WORD, TO COME CLOSE  
TO YOU**

- ❖ Your divine Word proclaims to me the greatness of Your love;  
It reveals to me Your divine will;  
It supports me to consummate it. To become a living icon of You;  
With every breath of my life, it motivates me toward perfection;  
My life, with all its strife would become a sweet praise of conquest;  
It turns me into a gospel readable by everyone;  
That testifies to the truth of Your Word, and proclaims its power.
- ❖ Who are the wicked, but those who reject Your Word?  
To oppose it in me, so poor and weak!  
They will definitely fail;  
But as for me, I will enjoy the strength of Your Word.
- ❖ At midnight, I will sing this psalm (119);  
For it is the song of the church anticipating the coming of her Groom;  
watching with the spirit of joy and exultation;  
I praise the Word of God which fills my soul with the comforts of the  
spirit in the journey of my sojourn;  
It turns the worries and troubles of the world into a joyful praise;  
It drives the love of the world away from my depths, to make the  
Word of God my gold and treasure;  
It leads my mind, emotions, and feelings, like a pillar of light in the  
midst of the wilderness;  
It grants life to my heart, which has become a dark grave;  
It gives light to my mind by the divine secrets; and scatters the  
darkness of ignorance surrounding me;  
And above all, it presents to me the incarnate Word of God, a Savior,  
and a personal Friend.
- ❖ This psalm remains a school of prayer, through which I meditate in  
You, O my Lord;  
In it, I become a student all the days of my life;  
In it, I learn the inner prayer from all my heart;  
Of which my mouth, tongue, and my whole being partake;  
Like a harp on which Your Holy Spirit plays a magnificent  
symphony;  
I beseech You to reveal to me Your divine commandment;  
To give me understanding to enter into new depths of Your Word;

Your grace to grant me the good will, and the ability to consummate,  
and to grow in Your commandment.

- ❖ Let me, O Lord, come near to Your word, to come near to You;  
Let me live in Your commandment, to live in, and by You;  
Let me, O Christ, the Word of God, see You, hidden behind the  
letters of the psalm;  
I wish to get to know You, to encounter You, To see You, O the  
Secret of my whole love.
- ❖ What do I see in Your Word, O my Lord?  
It is Your law which I have broken, to fall under the curse;  
Then Your Christ came to carry the curse on my behalf;  
He entered into the circle of the curse, not by breaking Your law, but  
by being hanged on a tree;  
He carried me from the circle of the curse, and brought me forth into  
Your divine bosoms;  
They are Your testimonies, that testify to Your giving love;  
Grant me to testify by shedding my blood; to pay Your love back  
with love;  
They are the precepts given to me, as though to faithful hands;  
They are the statutes, or the wisdom, like signs You put on the way;  
To keep me from perverting to the right or to the left, off the royal  
path;  
Until I enter into heaven itself;  
They are the commandments to which I am committed, as a son  
abiding to his father's commands;  
They are the judgments that control the hidden movements of my  
soul, and my manifest behavior;  
They are for me, a constitution that control my relationship with You,  
O my God; as well as with the heavenlies and the earthlies.  
It is the divine Word; which is not talk and letters, but spirit and life;  
They are Your oracles; not like my sayings that disappear, once they  
come out of my mouth;  
Being one with You, I will acquire it to acquire You;  
It is the royal Way, that brings me forth into Your bosoms;  
It is the Truth that scatters my ignorance, and takes away from me the  
vanities of the devil.
- ❖ By what could I praise Your Word, O my Lord?  
It is sweeter than honey;  
It is a treasure that surpasses gold and precious stones;

It is so awesome, that it nails Your holy fear in my flesh;  
It is so lovable, that it brings me forth into Your heart, flaring with  
love for me;  
It is settled forever, bringing me forth to Your heavens;  
It grants beatitude, spaciousness of heart, and width of mind;  
It is a lamp to my feet; leading me to You, O who dwells in an  
unapproachable light;  
It is satisfying to my soul; grants me the new life, together with great  
joy, and exalted peace;  
Yes, Your Word opens for me the gates of hope;  
And brings me forth to the fellowship of Your heavenly glories.

## **1 (ALEPH)**

# **BEATITUDE OF OBEDIENCE WITH AN INDIVISIBLE HEART**

## **(1 to 8)**

If the sermon on the mount -- the heart of the New Testament, begins with beatitude; The book of psalms – the heart of the Old Testament, begins, as well with beatitude (Psalm 1: 1). And here, psalm 119 – the heart of the book of psalms, namely the **heart of heart**, also begins with beatitude.

This “psalm of the Torah”, or “psalm of the commandment”, begins with beatitude, for the commandment brings man forth into life without blemish; the believer will always keep the truth, and do righteousness (psalm 106: 3), fear the Lord (psalm 112: 1), and walk in His ways (psalm 128: 1; proverb 8: 32; Luke 11: 28). He enters into the blessed life, namely, he returns to the paradisiacal life, which the first man lost through his disobedience of the commandment. The goal of the commandment is the entrance into the kingdom of joy; that the believer would be prepared for the eternal heavenly wedding; as it is written: *“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city”* (revelation 22: 14). They return, not to the garden of Eden, where there was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and where Satan and the serpent deceive; but to the higher Jerusalem, where the Lord Christ Himself, the Tree of Life satisfies and glorifies them.

Now, How would we enjoy such a beatitude of obedience?

- |  |              |
|--|--------------|
| <b>1- Obedience by Christ, our Royal Way</b>                 | <b>1</b>     |
| <b>2- Obedience of practical behavior</b>                    | <b>1</b>     |
| <b>3- Obedience by searching and keeping His testimonies</b> | <b>2</b>     |
| <b>4- Obedience with the whole heart.</b>                    | <b>3</b>     |
| <b>5- Obedience of persistence</b>                           | <b>4 - 5</b> |
| <b>6- Obedience to all the commandments</b>                  | <b>6</b>     |
| <b>7- Obedience with joy</b>                                 | <b>7</b>     |
| <b>8- Obedience amid the afflictions</b>                     | <b>8</b>     |

### **1- OBEDIENCE BY CHRIST, OUR ROYAL WAY:**

*“Blessed are the undefiled in the way” (1)*

Whether it was the prophet David, or any of the saintly men of God, who wrote this psalm, Would he feel worthy of the divine beatitude, through being “*undefiled in the way*” ?

No one in the old, or in the new covenants, was *without sin*, or undefiled, except the Lord Christ, “*the Lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Peter 1: 19) ... Hence, we can say that, whoever intends to enjoy the beatitude, is committed to carry the features of his Holy Lord; namely, to become holy by being attached to the Holy Lord, He who alone could say to us: “*You are clean*” (John 13: 10); for “*the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us of all sin*” (1 John 1: 7); and “*He Himself is the propitiation for our sins*” (1 John 2: 2).

Beatitude is not mere happiness or joy, but it is rather an enjoyment of the fellowship with God; when the believer feels that God is his righteousness, joy, and happiness; And when he sees inside himself, that the law or the commandment of God, is his natural law, his life would conform to the will of God, and his depths would be flooded with holiness as a natural fountain! That is the secret of the exultation of the soul, united with God through the Lord Christ, the divine Word, by the Holy Spirit.

While the world moans with misery, feeling the need and unsatisfaction; the true people of God rejoice and exult with the enjoyment of the heavenly blessed life.

By saying: “*the undefiled in the way*” (1), he means those who keep the divine commandment, by both its positive and negative aspects together. The blessed man is he who consummates the commandment, by doing good, and by refraining of doing evil.

Our Lord Jesus Christ says: “*I am the Way*” (John 14: 6); In Him we reach “*the King’s Highway*” (Numbers 20: 17); “*the one way*” (Galatians 5: 14); “*a living way*” (Hebrew 10: 19); “*the way of love*” (1 Corinthians 12: 31); “*the Highway of holiness*” (Isaiah 35: 8); “*the way of righteousness*” (2 Peter 2: 21); “*of life*” (Matthew 7: 14); “*of truth*” (2 Peter 2: 2); “*of salvation*” (Acts 16: 17); and “*of perfection*” (Matthew 19: 21).

## **2- OBEDIENCE OF PRACTICAL BEHAVIOR:**

If our Christ is the Royal Highway, by, and in whom we are blessed; it is befitting of us to walk in it ; so that the obedience becomes a practical behavior. Hence the psalmist adds:

**“*Who walk in the law of the Lord*” (1)**

Here, the psalmist binds the knowledge to the practical life; For the commandment is not just a dry mental knowledge, but it is a practical living experience. That is why the psalm concerning the Word, begins by revealing the undefiled life, and the practical behavior by the commandment.

**Father Nestorius, in the debates of John Cassian, says:**

- ❖ The psalmist did not initially say: “Blessed are those who seek His testimonies”; then adds: “Blessed are those who walk undefiled in the way”; But he begins by saying: “***Blessed are the undefiled in the way***”; clearly showing that no man would befittingly come to seek the testimonies of God, unless he first walk, undefiled, in the way of Christ, by his practical life. Therefore, those you mentioned do not possess this knowledge, which is not possessed by the defiled; about which the blessed apostle says: “*O Timothy, guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge*” (1 Timothy 6: 20)<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Nestorius).**

The blessed life proclaimed here by the psalmist, which is desired by every true believer, is a reward given to us for the practical living faith.

- ❖ Faith bears a (promise) of eternal life; on account of that it is a good foundation. The good works also bears the same (promise). The righteous is tested by both his words and his works.

Righteousness and knowledge make man blessed. We have already noticed how the beatitude of eternal life is a reward of the good works<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ It is befitting of us to look into God’s commandments, when they are read, or when we bring them to memory; the way man looks in a mirror, according to the words of the apostle James (James 1: 23). Such a man intends to look at God’s commandments as though in a mirror, and would not be confused; for he chooses, not just to hear the commandments, but to work according to them as well. That is why he intends to have his ways go toward keeping the law of God. How could he do that? By the grace of God; For otherwise, if he chooses to

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<sup>1</sup> John Cassian: Conferences 14: 16.

<sup>2</sup> Duties of the Clergy 2: 2: 7; 2: 3: 9.

look at them, and not to work according to them, he would not find in the law of God a source of joy, but rather of confusion.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Now, the way is not prone to fault; Namely, when the Lord Christ says: “*I am the way and the life*”; this way leads to the Father; for he adds: “*No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14: 6)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Agnatius of Antioch)

### 3- OBEDIENCE BY SEARCHING AND KEEPING HIS TESTIMONIES:

#### “Blessed are those who keep His testimonies” (2)

If the Lord Christ is the Royal Way, in which those undefiled walk, to enter into the bosom of the Father by the spirit of obedience to the slain Christ, He, as well, is “*The faithful Witness*”(Revelation 1: 5), who gave the good confession before Pontius Pilate; and testified to the divine love by readily giving His blood for the sake of mankind.

It is therefore, befitting of us, being members of the body of Christ, to seek and to keep His testimonies. As, on our side, having nothing to give, we take from what are His of true testimonies, and present them in His name, saying: “*I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies*” (168)... As long as we live in this world, we should sit at the footstool of the incarnate Word of God, to learn from Him, and be trained for the fellowship with Him by His Holy Spirit.

By Jesus, the Greatest Martyr, we would be counted as martyrs, when we testify to His gospel, by receiving the afflictions with joy.

We should not marvel that the psalmist begins by blessing those undefiled, who walk in the Royal Way; then follows up by blessing those who keep His testimonies. For, as the commandment brings us forth into the undefiled life; This, in turn, brings us forth into a new understanding, and an enlightenment, to get to know the commandment. That is why **St. Athanasius the apostolic** counsels us, saying: [Beside the study and the enjoyment of the true knowledge of the Holy Books; The perfection of life, the purity of the soul, and the imitation of Christ in virtue, are required ... Whoever intends to have a better understanding of the Holy Book, is committed first to get cleansed and purified by the holy life, and to follow the lead of the saints themselves<sup>2</sup>].

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<sup>1</sup> Epistle to Eph., 9.

<sup>2</sup> De incarn. Verbi 57.

#### 4- OBEDIENCE WITH THE WHOLE HEART:

Beatitude belongs to the simple men who seek God, and no other, with their whole hearts. Simplicity is contrary to complication. The simple heart bears one direction, walks in a single way, and has one goal, which is the love of God. Whereas the complicated heart, would falter between one way and another; between the love of God, and that of the world.

##### ***“Who seek Him with the whole heart” (2)***

The heart is the inner insight, by which we can behold God through repentance; for we have lost our enjoyment of beholding Him because of our sins that corrupted our inner insight.

He who is sanctified in Jesus Christ as “the Royal Way”, will have his mind preoccupied with His testimonies, and his heart will seek Him. In other words, he will have all his mental and emotional possibilities sanctified. He will have his mind search the testimonies of the Lord, longing to die together with Him every day; and will seek Him with his heart, to unite with Him, and eternally dwell with Him. He will seek Him with all his heart, burning with the fire of the divine love; that no other will have a place in his heart beside God.

The believer will seek God with all his heart, will not falter between the two ways; As the world, and the sin, with all their pleasures, and the devil with all his tricks and deceptions, will not be able to crawl into his heart.

While the believers seek the Lord with all their hearts, tasting the sweetness of the Lord Christ, their only Way; The non-believers, on the other hand (the Jews), by rejecting Him, deny the prophesies about Him, which are His “ways”, He presented to them along the eras; about which the psalmist says: ***“They also do no iniquity, they walk in His ways”*** (3)

**Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem**, discerning between the Lord Christ “the Way”, and the prophets **“the ways of the Lord”**, says: [In the first verse, the psalmist says: **“the Way”** in the singular tense; Whereas in the third verse he says: “ways” in the plural tense. The “several ways” are the teachings of the prophets, the apostles, and the teachers, who counsel men toward uprightness. Whereas the “One Way” is our Lord Jesus Christ, who says: *“I am the Way and the Truth”*, for He leads those who follow Him to His Father].

While those who do iniquity, do not walk in the ways of God, the true believers seek the Lord with all their hearts; for He is the subject of their love, longing, and pleasure. While the obedience of the righteous to God comes forth out of an inner pleasure and longing for God Himself,

the disobedience of the wicked comes forth out of their dry and cold heart toward God.

## 5- OBEDIENCE OF PERSISTENCE:

Beginning this psalm by proclaiming beatitude for those who encounter the Lord Christ, being “the Way”; “*The Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End*” (Revelation 1: 8), the psalmist seeks from God to let him enjoy that way, and to abide to it with uprightness, saying:

**“Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes” (5)**

It is not enough for us to be called to take the way, to have it; but we should cry out to God to keep us on it, to let our ways be upright through our union with the true Way, who is, alone, without blemish or perversion. The Lord is the Firstborn who lets us start, and who accompanies us until we accomplish our mission by the spirit of persistent strife in the Lord.

The words of the psalmist confirm that God did not present to us His commandment, knowing that keeping it is impossible, as some wrongly assume<sup>1</sup>.

❖ The firstfruit (the start of work), and its consummation *are* the Lord’s. To start walking in the way, I should be called, For “*A man’s steps are of the Lord; How then can a man understand his own way?*” (Proverb 20: 24). And so as not to pervert from the upright way, and not to take a distorted way, I would say: “*Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes*”. For, I would not keep Your statutes, unless my ways are under Your guidance and leadership.

**(The scholar Origen)**

Because our persistence only means our consistent strife by the work of grace in us; we would always cry out together with the psalmist, saying: “*Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes*” (5). As without His grace, we would stumble on the way, and pervert. And as a saintly father says: [As there are several hurdles on the way of virtue, counted as being stumbling blocks obstructing the way of man , thepsalmist prays to God to take those hurdles away, to pave the way before him; according to the words of the Lord: “*Prepare the way; take the stumbling bloc out of the way of My people*” (Isaiah 57: 14; 62: 10). As an example, for the prophet David, the stumbling block was his lust for a woman, and his miserable look at her (2 Samuel 11: 2); For Isau, it

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<sup>1</sup> Bethanu Parallel Commentary on O.T., (Adam Clark), p. 1156.

was a cheap meal of lentils (Genesis 25: 34); and for Saul, it was the love of riches and wealth (1 Kings 20). It is the Lord who paves the way, taking away all those stumbling blocks].

According to **St. Augustine**: [Those things commanded by God will not be consummated except as a gift, and by the help of Him who has presented those commandments; For we would vainly seek them if we could consummate them without the help of His grace<sup>1</sup>].

If all those who seek riches or lust, would keep on watching day and night, working and searching for every way to realize their goals; This should rather be the way of those who seek God, and who desire to dwell eternally with Him. They should persist on keeping His commandments, and on letting their strife become the material of their perpetual prayers. This way, once they enter into the way, they would long to reach new depths, to forget what is behind, and extend to what is ahead; They would seek the work of the grace of God, which supports them up to their last breath. And by so doing, their life harmonizes with their prayers; and their strife with the abundant and free grace of God.

## **6- OBEDIENCE TO ALL THE COMMANDMENTS:**

Persisting on keeping the commandments with an upright heart, we accept the whole law of Christ, and not just a part of it; We receive the new life in Him with its heavenly and spiritual law; We come to understand the secrets of the statutes of the Old and the New Testaments, not on the level of the deadly letter, but on that of the spirit which edifies. By this we can say:

***“Then, I would not be ashamed when I look into all Your commandments” (6).***

❖ As long as we say, that the prophets are the ways, Whenever we read the law, the statutes, and the prophets,, we would be walking uprightly in the way by the Lord; understand and perceive His ways; and never be ashamed; as they would be our own ways, to keep all the commandments of God.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ Whoever keeps one commandment and leaves another, would be denying all the commandments; and would be insulting God who gave them all bound together. For He who said: *“do not commit adultery”*, also said: *“Do not steal”*; And if you steal, you would be breaking the whole law. He who is particular on keeping all the

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<sup>1</sup> On Holy Virginity, 42.

commandments, will not be ashamed in the awesome day of judgment.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

If disobeying the commandment has brought our early parents to shame, when Adam said to God: *“I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself”* (Genesis 3: 1); The obedience of the Lord Christ on the cross has taken away the curse and the shame from the believers, and opened up the gates of paradise, even before the repentant robber. Whoever disobeys the commandment enters into shame and disgrace; Whereas, whoever seeks the whole, and not the partial obedience to them, will gain the fruit of glory, puts on the wedding garment, and joyfully sings: *“Then, I would not be ashamed when I look into all Your commandments”* (6). ...

The commandment is a contract with the divine Word, who grants man splendor and glory before the Father, His angels, and His saints; and grants him awe and authority to tread upon the scorpions and serpents, and all the power of the enemy.

## **7- OBEDIENCE WITH JOY AND PRAISE:**

*“I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments”* (7)

Sanctifying our ways, the Lord Christ *“the Way”*, grants us *“uprightness of heart”*; Then the heart will be flooded with thanksgiving and praise to God. The uprightness of the ways and the heart will not only take away the shame (6), but will also grant us the life of inner joy, that translates to thanksgiving and praise. Without this uprightness, we shall not be able to partake of the praises of the angels, however much we sing praises in the church or in our secret place.

❖ He who has not yet got the uprightness of the heart, but has got perversion; would not be able to give thanks or praises to God; and God would not accept his confession.

**(The scholar Origen)**

Confessing to God for the sake of His work in his life; granting him **the uprightness of the heart**, and presenting to him the knowledge of His judgments, the psalmist give Him thanks, and praises Him.

❖ Here we do not find confession of sins, but praise; as the Lord Christ Himself -- He who is without sin, says: *“I thank You Father, Lord of heaven and earth”* (Matthew 11: 25). Yes, because my ways became upright, I thank You, for it is You who made them so; This is praise to You and not to me.

(St. Augustine)

Having known the judgments of God, the soul of the psalmist exults... The “spiritual knowledge” enjoyed by the believer as a divine gift; that brings him forth into the uprightness of the heart, and the sanctification of the spirit, grants joy; Whereas the “human mental knowledge” would increase sorrow; according to the wise Solomon, who says: “*In much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow*” (Ecclesiastes 1: 18). There is great difference between the human wisdom and the divine wisdom; or between the human knowledge and the spiritual knowledge. While the human knowledge reveals our weakness, yet does not grant the possibility of reform, The divine knowledge, on the other hand, exposes our weakness, to cover it over with the riches of grace ... “*that we may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing*” (James 1: 4). Giving God thanks for the sake of what He granted him of new knowledge, the psalmist opens the door to gain greater and deeper knowledge; as, according to (Mar) Ephram the Syrian: [There is no gift with no increase, but that without thanks]. ... Anyway, noticing in this psalm that the psalmist seeks from God more of the divine knowledge and wisdom, he confirms to us that as long as we are still on earth, it is befitting of us to join the school of the Lord Christ, and sit at His footstool to learn from Him<sup>1</sup>.

## 8- OBEDIENCE AMID THE AFFLICTIONS:

***“I will keep Your statutes; Oh, do not forsake me utterly” (8)***

In order to enjoy beatitude, it is befitting of us to recognize the Lord Christ , the divine Way of Righteousness; hold fast to Him, receive His work in us; submit to his will; and obey His commandments by behavior, talk, and heart; obey them in their wholeness, not obey one of them, and leave the other; but obey them under all circumstances. That was how the psalmist enjoyed them through the uprightness of his heart, which motivated him to keep the statutes of God; as though saying, according to **the scholar Origen**: [I shall not practice anything contrary to the goals of Your statutes].

Here, the psalmist talks with the language of confidence and peaceful will, saying “***I will keep Your statutes***”; turning from prayer and supplication to joy and praise for the sake of the riches pf God’s grace, and His work in him. And lest the confidence would turn into self-pride or human boasting, the way the apostle Peter said to the Lord:

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henery, ps. 119. Verses 7-8.

*“Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You”* (Matthew 26: 35), the psalmist says: *“Do not forsake me utterly”* (8); It is as though he trustingly says: [I will keep Your statutes, for I enjoy Your free grace; Therefore, do not forsake me until the end of my strife].

That was the intention of the psalmist, and that was his pledge in Jesus Christ. Yet, because he feared lest he might become weak before any temptation or sin, he asks the Lord not to forsake or reject him utterly, or till the end.

❖ For my strength is limited when I go through temptation, do not forsake me utterly. *“But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”* (1 Corinthians 10: 13). He would never forsake us utterly. ... He said to those who have forsaken Him: *“You have forsaken Me, and therefore, I also have left you”* (2 Chronicles 12: 5). But we seek not to be rejected, but to be in His hands, *“not forsaken utterly”*. And in case He does forsake us, we shall cry out anew to the Lord Jesus Christ.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ It may so happen that I am forsaken for sometime to be tested in a certain temptation. In case I honorably endure the difficulties, I shall come out from the temptation *with* benefit.... Yes, I would, by the help of God, be crowned at the end of the struggle.... As my enemies are horrible wrestlers, *“Do not forsake me utterly”*, lest I would be defeated.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ *“I will keep Your statutes; Do not forsake me utterly”*. Namely, the worldly tribulations may keep me from keeping Your statutes; but You will not forsake me to be tempted beyond what I am able to endure, for I am weak.

**(Father Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

**St. John Chrysostom** likens God to a compassionate mother raising her little child, and training him to walk; when she puts her hands underneath his little hands, then she draws her hands away from him; and when he falls down, and looks at her in admonishment, she would carry him and kiss him; but would repeat what she did again and again until he learns to walk properly.... That is what God, the Instructor of our souls, does, when He forsakes us for some moments during temptations, to let us experience pain, to grow and become spiritually mature. He would draw His hands from under our hands; yet His eyes

would still be compassionate toward us; and would keep on caring for our life, when we cry out to Him, saying: “*Do not forsake us utterly*”.

We can say that the beatitude of obedience is set upon the following:

1- Obedience in Christ, the Royal Way (1); in whom we faithfully walk, together with continuous growth in the fellowship with Him.

2- Practical obedience in behavior (1)..

3- A whole obedience, searched by the mind, and sought by the heart (2, 3).

4- Obedience of continuous strife (4, 5), in all the commandments, and not in some of them and not the others (6).

5- Obedience that starts by research, together with prayer and supplication; and ends by joy and praise (7)

6- Obedience of trust in the work of grace (8).

7- Obedience with joy and praise amid the afflictions (8).

### **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 (1 – Aleph)**

#### **GRANT ME THE BLESSED LIFE, O OBEDIENT SON**

❖ “*Blessed are the undefiled in the way*”

Who, among us, is undefiled, but You, the True Way?

Grant me to unite with You, to be counted as blessed;

Without You, I am counted as disobedient, and a breaker of the law;

But with You, I would enjoy the spirit of obedience and the consummation of the law;

You came as an Obedient Son, even to death -- death on the cross

You alone did not break the law, but consummated it by obedience

Let me unite with You, to enter into the bosom of Your Father, and to enjoy a unique beatitude.

❖ Although You are the Giver of the law, You were pleased to submit to it by obedience;

Grant me in You the pleasure to walk by it;

To be purified and more to understand Your commandments;

I wonder if I can keep Your commandments, to enjoy the gift of understanding them?!

Or You grant me to understand them, to be pleased by keeping them, and try to reach perfection therein?!

I need of You to give me pleasure in them;.

To grant me the obedience, together with the persistence in the execution;

To grant me the holy will, and the exalted understanding  
My union with You, O Obedient Son, grants me all that.

- ❖ Grant me, O Only-begotten Son, the spirit of obedience;  
Grant me the holy will and the uprightness of heart;  
To rejoice in Your commandments, and to walk in them whatever be the cost;  
Knowing no middle way, I seek all Your commandments;  
My life turns into a fellowship of praise together with the heavenlies
- ❖ The wrestling enemy would never let me exult in obeying You;  
But would keep on embittering my life with afflictions;  
Do not forsake me utterly, O my amazing Savior;  
Turn my life into a series of unceasing conquests;  
Let my strife be for my growth, and not for my destruction;  
Let me grow in You, and exult by You, O Obedient Son.

## 2 – *BETH*

# THE COMMANDMENT IS A HIDDEN TREASURE (9 to 16)

In the first ‘stichon’, the psalmist starts his praise concerning the commandment by the beatitude, to proclaim that God is not the Supreme Commander, but rather the ‘The Philanthropic One’ (The Lover of mankind), who seeks for them the blessed life, the paradisiacal, or the fellowship of the eternal glory.

In the second ‘stichon’, the psalmist talks to the young man, being the treasure in whom God finds pleasure, in presenting to him His commandment as a hidden treasure.

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| 1- “How can a young man cleanse his way?”              | 9.     |
| 2- The commandment sanctifies the heart of a young man | 10-11. |
| 3- The commandment and the life of praise              | 12.    |
| 4- The commandment as testified by the young man       | 13.    |
| 5- The commandment is the riches of the young man      | 14.    |
| 6- The commandment and the life of consistent praise   | 16 .   |

### 1-“HOW CAN A YOUNG MAN CLEANSE HIS WAY?”:

God created man, not to humiliate or to submit him, but to glorify him with honor (psalm 9: 5). Here He presents to him His commandment as a hidden treasure, to make out of him “*the royal daughter*”, whose glory is within (psalm 45: 13).

Now, revealing the commandment as a hidden treasure, He addresses His talk to the young man; to let us perceive that the commandment is not a secondary thing, presented to the simple child, with little understanding; nor to the elder, broken down by age, but is presented to the young man who looks forward to his future with an optimistic eye, with ambition. If the young man happens to be ambitious for glory, riches, or world knowledge; he should first get in touch with the commandment of the Lord, capable of sanctifying his depths, and of supporting his temporal strife, yet without perversion. The Lord’s commandment is the law of the youth, capable of granting them the spirit of purity and chastity.

He, who has become a man for our sake, has passed through the stage of youth, to present to every young man His pure life working in him; dedicating the young life to the account of His kingdom.

- ❖ This could probably be a counsel concerning the age in which we care more to cleanse our way ; as it is written somewhere else: “My son, gather together for yourself teachings in your youth, to find wisdom when your hair turn gray”

(St. Augustine)

By presenting the advice first to the young man, the Holy Book honors him, and proclaims God’s appreciation of his life and capabilities.

Now, Who is this young man who needs to “*cleanse his way by taking heed according to God’s word*”? (9):

a- All the youth in general. As in this age man moves from the simple stage of infancy to that of the striving adolescence; specially with the burning desires of the flesh. That is why he is in need of the Word of God to reveal to him the holiness of his body, the exultation of his emotions, and the ignition of his talents, without extremes nor perversion. About this **the scholar Origen** says: [These God’s words sown in the divine Book,if kept, would never let man walk in a perverted way ... According to the prophet Jeremiah: “*It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth*” (Lamentation 3: 27). For he who bears the yoke after his youth has already gone; namely, after committing sins, and not walking in goodness; ... Such a man is committed to wipe away all his previous sins (through repentance). Whereas he who bears the yoke in his youth, gains goodness early, and would not be weighed down by the heavy burden of sins, it would not be said to him:“What you did not gather in your youth, how would you find in your old age?”

Let us then start our life with the Lord from our youth without postponement, so that, by the Spirit of the Lord, we would gather what would support us in our old age; namely, when we confront a spiritual weakness!

b- According to **the scholar Origen**, many of those who have reached the age of maturity, still walk as though they are still young, inuncontrolled lusts; Whereas there are young men, who walk like experienced elders, with practical spiritual wisdom.

c- Who is this young man who should cleanse his ways by heeding the words of God, but the congregation of the Gentiles who received the “Word of the incarnate Lord”; While the leaders of the Jews, who have got the knowledge of the law and the prophecies, rejected the Word of God, and refused to bear the yoke of His cross.

- ❖ Those people who belonged to the Gentiles in their youth, who used to walk in perverted ways before receiving faith; How could they

cleanse their way, except by taking heed according to the “words of God?!

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ The “young man” refers to the Gentiles who believed in Christ, after having walked in a perverted way; which they cleansed by keeping the “Word of God”, who commanded His disciples to teach the believers; saying: “*Teach them to keep all what I commanded you*”.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

According to **Eusabius of Caesarea**, the word “*cleanse*”, in the translation by ‘Cimachos’ came as “enlighten”. [How would a young man enlighten his way? Here, the psalmist teaches us that the young man, filled with defilement and uncleanness, needs purification and enlightenment; wandering: “*How can a young man cleanse his way?*”. *The answer came as: “by taking heed according to God’s word”]*

If the sin corrupts the heart, namely, the inner insight; we are, therefore, in need of the Words of God, being the light that scatters the darkness.

**St. Ambrose** binds this verse (9), to the words of the psalmist, saying: “*I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle*” (Psalm 39: 1).

[There are ways which we should follow; and there are other ways which we should avoid. We are committed to follow the ways of the Lord; and to guard our own ways, lest they would lead us to sin.

Man can guard his way, if he does not hasten to speak; as according to the law: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One*” (Deuteronomy 6: 4). He did not say: “Talk”, but said “Hear”.

‘Eve’ has fallen because she told her man what she did not hear from the Lord her God. ... The first word of God was “Hear”.

If you hear, you can guard your way; and if you fall, you have to cleanse your way at once; as “*How can a young man cleanse his way, but by taking heed according to God’s words?*” (9). You should, before anything else, keep quiet, and “Hear”, so as not to fall down with your tongue<sup>1</sup>].

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ When the psalmist says: “*Let me not wander from Your commandments*”, some may wonder: Does God let us wander from His commandments? Or as some interpret it: “Does He lead us astray from them?!”.

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<sup>1</sup> *Duties of the Clergy, Book 1: 2: 7.*

The prophet says: Because I sought You, not apparently, nor superficially, but “*I sought You with my whole heart*”; You, therefore will reward me by not letting me wander from Your commandments.... Let us now examine this text, and try to conform it to the words: “*For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away*” (Matthew 25: 29). We can say that that he, who seeks from his whole heart, will be given by the divine help, what he lacks, according to human nature, until he consummates the commandments of God. Whereas, from him, who does not seek with his whole heart, who slothfully practice God’s work; what he assumes he does of God’s work, will be taken away from him.

Indeed God has let the people of circumcision “wander from His commandments”, destroying by this the apparent things of the commandments; ... He destroyed the temple, and everything concerning the worship of the Lord according to the law which they have literally kept.

(The scholar Origen)

Depending **upon the translation** by Aquila of “*Do not let me unconsciously sin*”, Apolinarius says: [The psalmist fears that God’s commandments would be misunderstood, as it happens with many, out of lack of sound perception, that make them understand them, contrary to what they actually mean, and accordingly, walk in non-uprightness; as the wise Solomon says: “*There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death*” (Proverb 14: 12)

## **2- THE COMMANDMENT SANCTIFIES THE HEART OF A YOUNG MAN:**

David might have been a young man when he wrote this psalm, or at least the first parts of it. And as a young man he might have perceived his need for the divine commandment; for the Lord to enlighten his insight, to discover its depths, and experience its strength in his life; Hence he cries out, saying:

**“*With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandment*” (10)**

Having perceived the possibility of the commandment sanctifying his heart, the psalmist seeks from the Lord, with his whole inner energies, not to let him wander from His commandment. And at the same time, the more he enjoys the experience of the commandment in his depths, the more the fire in his heart kindles toward seeking God.

... It is a chain of fiery love, in which the young man practices the perpetual supplication, together with the discovery of the divine commandment; each of the two would support the other.

It is good for the believer to read the commandment, to listen to it, or to know it by heart; Yet all that would not keep him from evil, unless he seeks it and longs for it by his whole heart... That is why we seek from God to lift up the veil from our hearts, to be able to encounter the Word of God in its depths, to debate with it, and to respond to it, for the sake of our salvation.

❖ He, who does not destroy his mind by the temporal things, seeks God with his whole heart; Whereas he, who is preoccupied, sometimes with seeking salvation, and other times with bodily lusts, and with the abhorrent worldly worries, would abide in the later, and becomes far away from understanding God's commandments.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ As remembering God lets us get away from the demonic snares; And as I have dedicated my whole mind and heart to You, O my God, Therefore I am not worthy of staying away of Your commandment.

**(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)**

Delivering his life in the hands of God, the young man seeks from Him not to let him wander from his commandment; Namely, that even if, in some moments of weakness, he longed to forsake the commandment, he seeks from God to stop him by any means, even by firm chastisement. With that same spirit, **St. Augustine** cries out, in the moments of his repentance: [Even if I say to You, O Lord, let me repent tomorrow; Make me instead repent now!].

It is the true love; that the young man would deliver his will in the hands of God, to direct it according to His good will.

It does not stop for the young psalmist, to proclaim his longing that God would not deny him the experience of the commandment, and the perception of the depths of its meanings; but he also confesses that he would receive the commandment from God's hands as a precious treasure, which he would never trust to deposit except in his own heart, to hide it, lest an enemy would crawl and snatch it away from him. He hides the commandment in his heart to meditate in it for his inner edification, and to testify to it before the others in due time. He does not hide it in his mind, for fear that it may be lost from his memory, but he hides it in his heart, so that by love, it would turn into a joyful work. He hides the commandments in his depths to sanctify them, to keep him from sinning against God. He says:

***“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (11)***

- ❖ He sins against God, he who thinks that he is worthy to proclaim the hidden words, which should be hidden from the wicked; and only revealed to those who should not know them. The danger is not only set upon telling lies, but is also set upon telling the truth, through revealing it to those to whom it should not be revealed. *“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine”* (Matthew 6: 7).

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ He who does not receive the teachings of God, to hide them in his heart, to cleanse his thoughts, as well as his intentions, to become free of sin before God who sees the hidden things; does not only commit adultery, but every evil lust. This verse conforms to the words: *“My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding...”* (Proverb 2: 1, 2).

**(St. Dedyms the blind)**

- ❖ If we do not hide the words of God in our hearts, like we do with a precious stone, the wicked enemy will come and snatch it away (Matthew 13: 19).

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

- ❖ The psalmist first sought the divine help, lest he would hide the words of God in his heart without fruit, if he does not follow it up with the works of righteousness. That is why he added: *“Blessed are You, O Lord, Teach me Your statutes”* (12)

Because I hide Your words in my heart, so as not to sin against You, who gave me the law; Grant me, as well, the blessing of Your grace, so that, by doing what is upright, I would learn what You command.

**(St. Augustine)**

**Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem** presents the following three categories of those who hide the words of God in their heart:

[a- Who hides the words of God in his heart, and is aware not to sin, not only in the manifest work, but also in the hidden thoughts; to avoid, not only the abominations, but also the perversion of lusts and their hidden inclinations.

b- Who hides in his heart the secrets of faith, and does not reveal them to nonbelievers, according to the saying of the Lord Himself:

*“Do not cast your pearls before swine”.*

c- Who hides the words of God in his heart, lest they would be snatched by the birds of heaven, namely, by the demons falling from heaven; who would rob them through doubt, pride, or an evil thought].

When the believer hides the commandment of God – his valuable treasure – in his heart -- the center of love and life, and the place of security - the wicked enemy cannot rob it from him. By hiding the commandment of God, no sin can crawl into the heart and hide itself; as the darkness would find no place for itself where light is.

The psalmist probably hid the commandment in his heart, to meditate in it, to preoccupy himself with it, and to let his spiritual stomach digest it. For, as the undigested food does not benefit the body, so is he, who hears the commandment, and does not meditate in it, or preoccupy himself with it; his soul will not benefit from it.

### **3- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE LIFE OF PRAISE:**

By acquiring the commandment as a precious treasure which is worthy of hiding in his heart, to carry it along wherever he goes, It brings forth to the young man the spirit of praise, to say:

*“Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes” (12)*

❖ He who sought God with his whole heart, and hid His divine words; had success in goodness, and became worthy to give Him thanks, saying: *“Blessed are You, O Lord”*.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

There is great difference between the praise coming out of the mouth, but not from the heart; and that which comes out through the satisfaction of the heart with the commandment, and its exultation for the work of God in it; when the believer blesses the Lord for the sake of his secret divine words, with which He entrusted him, to prepare his heart to become a throne and a temple for God, where He would dwell, and flood on it with new secrets and divine knowledge.

The secret of praise is the transfiguration of the divine Word in the heart, as a Teacher who teach us His statutes; grants us the grace to execute His commandment, and leads us in the life of fellowship with the Father, by His Holy Spirit, to partake of the praises of the heavenlies.

❖ By His own mouth, He proclaimed His Word through His many saints, in both the Old and the New Testaments, which the church never cease to utter by her lips along the eras.

(St. Augustine)

#### 4- THE COMMANDMENT AS TESTIFIED BY THE YOUNG MAN:

Hiding the commandment in the heart, as a precious treasure, exhorts the spirit of praise and the inner joy; by which the young man sets forth to testify to the commandment before the others, saying:

*“With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth” (13)*

How could the psalmist reveal all the judgments of God’s mouth, when he, himself says: *“Your judgments are a great deep”* (Psalm 36: 6); And, the apostle says: *“How unsearchable are His judgments”* (Romans 11: 33)?!

**The scholar Origen** answers, saying: [The prophet did not say: ‘With my lips I have declared all Your judgments’, but said: *“With my lips I have declared all the judgments (of Your mouth)”*]. The expression *“the judgments of God’s mouth”* means those judgments which could be declared, uttered to be proclaimed and distributed. *“God’s mouth”*, here, are the “prophets” ... according to what is written: *“The mouth of the Lord has spoken”* (Isaiah 1: 20); namely, the words of the lord as uttered by an interpreter].

**According to Eusabius** of Caesarea: [The hidden teachings and knowledge, I hid in my heart; but those judgments, I declared to all, to be perceived and understood by all mankind; as *“All must appear before the judgment seat of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 5: 10)].

❖ We understand that there is no Way, faster, more secure, short, and exalted, than Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Hence the psalmist says that he has great gladness in that Way, as in all riches.

Those are the testimonies by which the Lord condescended to confirm His love for us.

(St. Augustine)

#### 5- THE COMMANDMENT IS THE RICHES OF THE YOUNG MAN:

*“I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as such as in all riches” (14)*

The prophet David desired to build the house of the Lord; And having got the promise that his son will be the one to build it, he opened up his storehouses to provide the gold, the silver, and everything of

value, not to boast his wealth, but to prepare for his son all the necessary things to build the temple of God ...He might have been denied the honor to build the temple on the Zion Mountain, Yet he was exultant to open up the storehouses of his heart before the abundant riches of the divine commandments, to set a sanctuary for the Lord in his depths, and to turn his life with all its afflictions and troubles, into a testimony to truth for God.

- ❖ We have previously talked about the “testimonies” (the martyrdom). The way of the testimonies would be realized when we give, “*not grudgingly or of necessity*” (2 Corinthians 9: 7), but out of utter joy, according to the words of the prophet David; and of those of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians, saying: “*I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge*” (1 Corinthians 1: 4, 5)... And because riches are diverse, he says: “*you were enriched in everything*”, namely, in every virtue, by work, and by meditation, when work conforms to perception.

He who gets material riches, will rejoice when he gets, not a part of riches, but to have all the riches; including the money and real state. So is he who desires to have spiritual riches, he will rejoice and exult when he gets every kind of riches; when he progresses in giving the testimonies of the Lord, and in practicing the virtues. It is as though he says: Let Your testimonies enrich me in everything; Let them be my rejoice and riches.

(The scholar Origen)

## **6- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE LIFE OF CONSISTENT PRAISE:**

Hiding God’s commandments in his heart, being the unutterable secrets of God, the young man perceives that they are his treasure and spiritual riches. Hence he does not cease to meditate in it; saying:

***“I will meditate in Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways, I will delight myself in Your statutes” (15, 16)***

- ❖ From these words, we learn that it is not possible to understand the ways of the Lord unless we search His statutes to their depths, using “the symbolic interpretation”... “*Isaac went out to meditate in the fields in the evening*” (Genesis 24: 63); and it is often mentioned that the righteous are in good contemplation.

Through spending long time meditating in the commandments of God, we shall “*understand His ways*”; namely the law and the prophets, that lead to the perfect Royal Way (Christ), who said about Himself “*I am the Way*” (John 14: 6).

- ❖ I savor the statutes of God, not as beautiful words and expressions, but by acting accordingly after understanding them; “*For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified*” (Romans 2: 13). By savoring the judgments of God by their works, they would never forget His words.

(The scholar Origen)

Talking about ‘Marcella’ to her close friend ‘Principia’, **St. Jerome** says:

- ❖ [Her gladness was in the divine Books was incredible; She was always saying: “*Your words I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You*”. And those words which describe the perfect man” “*His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law he meditates day and night*” (Psalm 1: 2). She did not understand the law as written words, as the Jewish scribes and Pharisees did, but as work, according to the words of the apostle: “*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10: 31). ... She surely felt that if she so consummates those commandments, she would be allowed to understand the Holy Scripture<sup>1</sup>].

(St. Jerome)

In this verse, it is to be noticed that the psalmist does not separate between God and His commandment. Saying: “*With my whole heart I have sought You*” (10), he adds: “*Let me not wander from Your commandments*”. This is the secret of the riches of the commandment, that whoever acquires it, would acquire God Himself. That is why he addresses the young man about this treasure, saying:

1- O, young man, Acquire the commandment, in order to acquire the enlightened and holy life; when you acquire the Holy God inside you (9-11)

2- The commandment purifies the heart, to long more for God; Longing for God with the whole heart, motivates you to keep the commandment (10). It is a continuous chain of love toward God and His commandment.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 127 to Principia 4.

3- Throwing himself into the bosom of God, the young man feels that he has completely delivered himself into His hands; hence he supplicates to Him, saying: “*Let me not wander from Your commandments*”; as though he says: [If I intend to pervert away from Your commandment, Let me not do that by any means, even if it seems bitter to me].

4- If man’s heart is his most valuable possession, it is befitting of him, therefore, to put in it his treasure “the divine commandment”, so valuable in the sight of God. Hiding the commandment in the heart, the heart would be enlightened, that sin would not be able to crawl into it, or occupy it.

5- The most prominent fruit of that hidden treasure is filling the heart with joy and praise. When the Word of God, Himself, dwells in the heart, to practice His work as a Teacher (12), He would train the soul to keep the commandment with joy, and to partake of the life of praise together with the heavenlies.

6- What the young man secretly enjoys through the dwelling of the commandment in him, would turn into a practical testimony by the mouth and by the work (13). “*What he learn in secret, will be preached on the housetops*” (See Mathew 10: 27).

7- The young man would enjoy the commandments as an abundant wealth, capable of establishing a sanctuary for the Lord inside him.

8- Perceiving the value of these treasures, he would always keep the eyes of his heart on them, would never let anything distract his mind from them; would keep on contemplating (15), meditating day and night in them; and would never forget them (16).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 2 (BETH)  
YOUR COMMANDMENT IS MY RICHES**

- ❖ As long as I am in flesh, I am a young man, in need of continuous cleansing;  
Your commandment cleanses my life and sanctifies my heart;  
Your commandment satisfies all my needs;  
It is my riches and precious treasure.
- ❖ Set a wall around my heart, to keep me from seeking anyone but You;  
If it perverts, correct by Your fatherly chastisements;  
So that I do not wander away from Your commandments;
- ❖ I will keep my whole heart in Your commandments;  
And I will keep Your commandment in my heart;  
I will hide it there, for it is my treasure;  
With my mind, I received Your commandment, I want it to be in my heart;  
In the midst of the worldly seductions, my memory could betray me,  
and let me forget Your commandment;  
Whereas my heart would hide Your commandment, and adore it;  
Neither seductions, nor afflictions could draw them away from inside me;  
Where can I keep Your commandment, so that the enemy would not snatch it?  
My heart, is a secure storehouse, as long as it is protected by Your grace;  
If I hide Your commandment in my heart, sin will not find a place together with it;  
I will hide it in my heart, to meditate in it with my love and all my emotions;  
I will hide it, and will never present it to anyone who may despise it;  
I will hide it, to carry it wherever I go;
- ❖ Your commandment got so attached to my heart;  
That whoever takes it away, would take my heart itself away with it,  
and would deprive me of my life;
- ❖ Hiding Your commandment in my heart, I see it as my whole riches;  
My heart would unceasingly meditate and contemplate in it.  
I would meditate in it, not only by thoughts and words,  
But by practicing it, and by living by, and in it;

In realizing it, I find the pleasure of intimate relationship with You;  
Binding to Your Commandment, I bind to You, O the riches of my  
soul.

### **3 GIMEL**

## **THE COMMANDMENT ... COMFORT IN SOJOURN (17 – 24)**

If the young man needs the divine commandment to sanctify his heart and inner depths, to enjoy it as a treasure worthy of being hidden, to get filled with joy and exultation, to savor meditation in it, to recognize its secrets, to work according to it, and to testify to it before the others; On another aspect, he perceives his position, as a stranger and a sojourners, who finds comfort in it.

Now, what are the blessings of the commandment, for us, being sojourners on earth?

- 1- The commandment is life 17**
- 2- The commandment is enlightenment 18**
- 3- The commandment is a companion in sojourn 9 - 20**
- 4- The commandment and the conquest over the wicked 21**
- 5- The commandment removes reproach from us 22**
- 6- The commandment and the evil plots of the wicked 23**
- 7- The commandment and the spiritual pleasure 24**

He spoke before as a young man who starts his practical life by acquiring the divine commandment that satisfy his longings, and realizes his hopes, being the heavenly treasure. Now, starting the way, he feels sojourn, with no one to support him to confront troubles, except God Himself, being His personal Friend who grants him life itself, with all its possibilities, as a reward; supports him against evil, and takes reproach away from him.

### **1- THE COMMANDMENT IS LIFE:**

The psalmist probably bore the feelings of the prodigal son returning to his father; who looked afar to see his father's hired servants earn their wages and live, while he is dying of hunger (Luke 15); That is why he cried out seeking from his father to give him wages to live as a hired servant, promising him, never again to break his fatherly commandment.

Having been as good as dead because of his disobedience, and forsaking his father's house, the psalmist cries out saying:

***“Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep Your word” (17)***

why does he say: ***“Deal bountifully with Your servant”***?

The words ***“Deal bountifully”*** or ‘reward’ in Hebrew is (Gamal). All the eight verses of this ‘stichon’ (in the Hebrew text) came starting with the letter ‘G’ (Gimel).

The Lord Christ says: ***“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”*** (John 6: 63). Getting attached to the word of God, steadfast forever, death would never be able to get hold of us, but we will live together with the Lord forever, as the reward of the children. Let us therefore seek to be counted as hired servants, so that God will, mercifully, grant us the reward of the children.

Being bound to the commandment, the psalmist seeks “life” as his reward; For, by the commandment he perceives being received by God, that he has the Father as his father, the divine Son as his firstborn and Savior brother; and the Holy Spirit as a Sanctifier and a Leader. That is the “life” desired by the psalmist, as a reward for being bound to the commandment, through the divine grace.

According to **the scholar Origen**: [Our heart, being impure, we do not have the daring to pray to God, saying: ***“Deal bountifully with Your servant”***; Because if He comes, He will deal with us, instead, according to our sins.

Who, like us, has got mercy from God, let him say: “Do not deal with us, O Lord, according to our sins, and our iniquities”. Whereas, he who *has* done nothing that warrants punishment, would have the daring to talk to God with a comfortable conscience, and say to Him: ***“Deal bountifully with Your servant”***. Yet, lest his talk may be tainted with false pride, he would cautiously not say: “Deal bountifully”, but would say: ***“Deal bountifully with Your servant”***; being Your servant who serves You].

What kind of life does the psalmist seek from God as a reward of being His hired servant?

❖ By saying ***“that I may live”***, He does not seek a long natural life, but he seeks one which pleases God; hence he adds: ***“that I keep Your word”***. For keeping God’s words, and doing according to His commandments, are the true age, and the cause of eternal life.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ The words ***“that I may live”***, inspires a movement of life in the future. He does not think about this life; but saying ***“that I may live”***, surely conforms to the true life.

Let us hear what the apostle Paul says about himself and those like him: “*For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*” (Colossians 3: 3, 4).

Let us then understand the words: “*that I may live*”, as concerning the future; and, saying: “*hide Your words*”, will be an actual thing, and not in a mirror or a riddle.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ Not feeling that I would consummate Your commandments without a reward; Give me, therefore, as a reward, a happy eternal life to live and keep Your words.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

❖ Who could deny that the gift of life is the work of the Great Divinity? ... Saying “*that Your servant may live*” (17), means that He gives life to him who is a servant, namely, to him, who, previously had no life, then he got it as a gift<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

## **2- THE COMMANDMENT IS ENLIGHTENMENT:**

“*Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law*” (18)

❖ The prophets were called “Seers” (1 Samuel 9: 9); for they saw what others could not see.

“*Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad*” (John 8: 56).

While heavens were sealed shut before the disobedient people, they were opened before the prophet Ezekiel.

The law is spiritual (Romans 7: 14); but there is need for a divine proclamation to help us understand it; when God reveals His face to see and to behold His glory<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ I wish we, who intend to *be* perfect, according to our human weakness, think this way. We have not yet received, nor perceived, nor became perfect. And being not perfect, let us pray together with

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<sup>1</sup> *On the Holy Spirit, Book 2: 4: 29.*

<sup>2</sup> *Letter 53: 4.*

David, saying: “*Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law*”<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ If such a great prophet like David, confesses that he is in the darkness of ignorance, how much more would you think, be the night of our non-perception, in us, who are no more than suckling babes<sup>2</sup>?!  
(St. Jerome)

- ❖ We should, therefore, approach God, and say: “*Open our eyes that we may see wondrous things from Your law*”. For, then, Christ will be proclaimed to us<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Alexandria)

Perceiving that his life is a reward or a gift from God, the psalmist feels a commitment to dedicate this life to the account of God, to His service, and for the growth of His kingdom.

The word (unveil) or (open) my eyes, here, means lifting up the veil from the eyes. “*Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law*” (18). Although the law was found in the hands of the Jews, yet they did not enjoy its wondrous things, namely, the Lord Christ, whose name was called “wonderful” (Isaiah 9: 6); For, according to the apostle Paul: “*Their minds were hardened. For until this day the same veil remains un-lifted in the reading of the old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ ... But 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: 14, 18). It is as though the apostle seeks the uplifting of the veil of the letter, in order to understand the commandments of the Old Testament, its symbols, and prophecies; he also seeks the uplifting of the veil of sin, so that, in our new life, we would enter from glory to glory, and be qualified to behold God.

In other words, the psalmist, while still under the shadows of the Old Testament, seeks to enjoy the enlightenment, namely, that God would uplift from over his eyes the veil of the letter in reading His word, and would grant him a life of perpetual growth in the spirit.... By this he would behold the glory of the Lord Christ, namely, “the wondrous things in His law”.

The pride that veiled the eyes of the Jews from perceiving the Person of the Messiah, despite the obvious prophecies about Him, will,

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<sup>1</sup> *Against Pelagians. Book 1, 14.*

<sup>2</sup> *Letter 108: 9.*

<sup>3</sup> *Comm.. on Luke, hom. 53.*

as well, deprive the Christian of perceiving the power of the gospel in his practical life.

❖ The prophet revealed that his eyes were covered with a veil; like when we have in us, evil and corruption, because of “*the old man with his deeds*” (Colossians 3: 9). No one can take away this corruption except the Word of God, as “He sent His Word and healed them, and rid them of their corruption”. The Word of God came and unveiled the eyes. “*When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away*” (2 Corinthians 3: 16; Exodus 34: 34).

The prophet, knowing that, when the commandments reigns, it would let us practice the good works, he tries to know the blessing of the commandment, not in the literal way the Jews knew it, but with strength and spirituality; hence he says: “***Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your law***”. For, once we have the unveiled face, we shall have the glory of Christ proclaimed in us like in a mirror; and will be transformed into this image, and meditate in the wondrous things of God and His law.

❖ The outer man, as well as the inner man, have two eyes; as it is written: “*Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death*” (Psalm 13 (12): 3).

By keeping the commandment of God, we shall not have the physical sharp vision, but we shall have that of the sharp mind.

The eyes of the inner man see more perfectly: “***Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law***”.

Only Jesus can open them up, to let us understand the Holy Books, and meditate in what is vaguely expressed<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

Let us perpetually cry out to God, in the land our sojourn, to grant us the spirit of enlightenment, to see His commandments in their depths, and to perceive the secrets of the work of the Holy Trinity in our life; so that our souls would soar up as with the wings of the spirit, and get in touch with the deposit of glory prepared for us; to say: “*He raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 2: 6).

After seeking help from God in his sojourn, that he may live, the psalmist now, seeks the enlightenment; For, what would he benefit if he lives in darkness, in which he cannot see the flood of God’s graces and goodness on him?!

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<sup>1</sup> Dial. With Heravrides, 156.

Using this verse (18), **St. Augustine** says to God: [You know my weakness! Teach me, and heal me<sup>1</sup>].

We are in need of God's work – the Unique Teacher -- who can present the interpretation of the Holy Book, not only to satisfy the mind, but to open up the insight, to let it strongly enjoy the gladness and the riches of the Word.

❖ I wish we ask Him “*He who has the key of David; He, who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*” (Revelation 3: 7); to open to us the chambers of the gospel, to say together with the psalmist: “*Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law*”

We beseech the Lord to bring us forth into His secrets, and His secret place, and allow us to say together with the bride of the song: “*The King has brought me into His chambers*” (Song 1: 4 LXXX).

The apostle says that a veil was put on Moses' (face) (2 Corinthians 3: 13-17). And I say, that there is a veil, not only on the law, but on the gospel as well, to him who does not *understand* it ... Let us, therefore, forsake the letter of the Jews, and follow the Spirit of Jesus; not that we despise the letter of the gospel; but everything has come to express – as it is written – but, by ascending certain steps, we would reach up to the higher places<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

### 3- THE COMMANDMENT IS A COMPANION IN SOJOURN:

*“I an a stranger in the earth, Do not hide Your commandment from me” (19)*

Although David, the prophet, the king, and the psalmist, has been someone with reputation, possibilities, and experience, Yet he counted himself a stranger, in need of God's commandments, to be his leader, guide, companion, and comfort in his sojourn.

The main work of the divine commandment is to prepare man for the heavenly citizenship, by which he perceives his position as a stranger and a pilgrim, to join the men of faith \*see Hebrew 11: 13-16). At the same time, feeling sojourn, motivates him to get more attached to the commandment to support him all the days of his sojourn, and to lift him up to the heavenly life.

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<sup>1</sup> *Confessions, 10: 70.*

<sup>2</sup> *Hom 76 on Mark 1: 13 etc.*

❖ He who loves the earthly things and their lusts, does not think about being with Christ after his departure from this life; and would not be able to say: *“I am a stranger in the earth”*, for he only cares for the things of the earth. Whereas he, who says: *“Do not hide Your commandments from me”* is a saint ... That is why the prophet seeks from God to reveal to Him the wondrous things from His commandments for the heavenly life.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ The strangers on earth are in need of the commandments of God to protect them against the works of the body, and the love of the world.

He who follows these commandments, his soul will get so used to them that the world would not be able to overcome him.

Yet, there are many commandments written in symbols; like: *“Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house”* (Matthew 24: 17; Mark 13: 15; Luke 17: 31); and, *“Let the dead bury their own dead”* (Matthew 8: 22). ... All those may be vague in meaning; together with the statutes concerning the sacrifices, the feasts, the clean, and unclean animals ... That is why, it is befitting of the stranger on earth, to seek from God to enlighten His commandments to him, and not to hide them from him, in order to be able to consummate, and love them, and to be without blame.

(Eusabius of Caesarea)

❖ We are strangers or hired servants on earth; for our city is up there, where we get that deposit; And once we reach it, we shall never depart.

The true believer sees God’s commandment as a companion in his sojourn, like an intimate friend who would support him in life; a source of comfort amid afflictions, and of spiritual pleasure, that turns the valley of tears, into a joyful paradisiacal life. That is why, he does not practice the commandment out of necessity, but with pleasure.

*“My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times”*

(20)

According to **St. Hilary, bishop of Poitier**, the psalmist did not dare to say that he wishes to have the judgments of God, but said that he longs to have the purity of heart, together with the works, to be able to receive the judgments of God at all times.

The psalmist has previously sought from God to open His commandments to him, that he may enjoy them; and sought from Him as well, to open his inner eyes to perceive their secrets, and to enjoy their

knowledge. Now he seeks from Him to open up his soul, to bear a fiery will, burning with longing toward the commandments of the Lord. By that, the commandment would become open, the insight open, and the depths open, to enjoy the commandment with spiritual pleasure.

- ❖ I mean to say that my soul desires to keep Your judgments, to do them with longing, will and consistence, and not with boredom .

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Why didn't he say: "My soul longs for Your judgment", but *said*: "*My soul breaks with longing for Your judgment*"? Couldn't we long for God's judgments?

It is not possible for everyone to long for God's judgments at all times; For some do not commit sin at a certain time, and commit it at other time. When those people long for the judgments, they long for the reward; Whereas the perfect man is able to long for the judgment at all times.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ He did not say "Your precepts", but said "*Your judgments*". Let us understand that God's judgments will save by His divine compassion; hence the prophet desires to long for them at all times; intending, not to consummate them out of grief nor of necessity; like those who consummate them for fear of punishment, but out of love and of true desire. By that he consistently endure, not only the mild judgments, but the harsh ones as well; walking with all strength in every good work.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

- ❖ Being a stranger on earth, the psalmist prays to God not to hide His commandments from him; for he enjoys God's love as something unique or essential. Now, he declares that he longs to have the love for the sake of God's judgments – a longing worthy of commendation, and not of condemnation.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ That is the love of the saints at all times; those who never cease to offer perpetual sacrifices to the Lord, free of hindrance.; but are always thirsty, and always seeking from the Lord to drink; saying together with the prophet David: "*My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments, at all times*" (20) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Paschal Letters 20: 1.*

#### **4- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE CONQUEST OVER THE WICKED:**

If the commandment brings pleasure to the soul, On another aspect, it gives strength to strive against the evil plots of the proud who stray from the commandments of the Lord; And gives as well, the strength of conquest over the spirit of pride that provokes us to stray from them.

*“You rebuke the proud – the cursed, who stray from Your commandment” (21)*

God rebuked the proud Satan, and drove him out of heaven; And rebuked Pharaoh, king Saul, Nebuchadnezzar, etc. ... *“God resists the proud”* (James 4: 6; 1 Peter 5: 5), *“halts their arrogance”* (Isaiah 13: 11); *“scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts”* (Luke 1: 51); and gives grace to the humble.

❖ There is no hindrance in the way of getting the judgments of God, except not desiring it....as its light is shining and obvious.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Because pride is the cause of straying away from Your commandments, You, O Lord, rebuked the proud by saying in the prophet Jeremiah, that the Israelites, in their pride, said: *‘We have departed, and will never return to You’*; And curses were set in the law of Moses, not only on those who do against Your commandments, but also on those who pervert from their upright course.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ The proud stray away from the commandments of God. ... Not to consummate the commandments of God, out of weakness, or ignorance, is something; and straying away from them out of pride, is something else.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ When will the wicked have no strength in his battle against us?

The wicked fights us, not only to provoke us to consistently commit sin ...; but also to become proud, and to feel that we are perfect. But knowing that *“God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble”* (Proverbs 3: 34; James 4: 6; 1 Peter 5: 5), the more we become humble, we shall rise high, and *“will find favor in the sight of the Lord”* (Sirach 3: 18).

As God's commandment is upright, whoever strays away from it is "*cursed*"; not only those who do not follow it, but also those who stray away from it, even a little bit.

**(The scholar Origen)**

Together with all the blessings, the psalmist enjoys along the way of his sojourn, because of his attachment to the commandment, he gains, as well, a true humility, yet without fear from the proud wicked. He gets the precious spirit of meekness; to be like his Lord, the Lamb, delivered for the sake of mankind; the Lion who comes out of the tribe of Judah, in His resistance against the devil and all his hosts.

## **5- THE COMMANDMENT REMOVES REPROACH FROM US:**

*"Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept Your testimonies" (22)*

What reproach does the psalmist seek from God to remove from him, but that of sin? As iniquity brings forth true insult and disgrace in the sight of God. The sinner who persists on his sin insults the Son of Man, and feels ashamed of Him, counting His cross a deprivation, reproach and disgrace; Hence the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him (Luke 9: 26). Whereas the true believer will say, together with the apostle: "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*" (Romans 1: 16); and say, together with the psalmist: "*I will speak of Your testimonies before kings, and will not be ashamed*" (Psalm 119: 46). That is why the psalmist seeks from God to remove from him the reproach and contempt, to testify to His gospel even before the oppressors; by his true faith, his sound repentance, and his spiritual growth.

According to the psalmist, the wicked have rolled a huge rock on him, counting him as a tomb which should be closed shut by a rock. And now, being utterly unable to remove that rock, he seeks the divine intervention.

❖ Sins deserve reproach and contempt. "*On the day of Judgment, the sinners shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt*" (Daniel 12: 2).

There are two kinds of reproach: On one aspect, "*God has chosen the base things of the world, and the things which are despised*" (1 Corinthians 1: 28). And on another aspect, "*In His eyes a vile person is despised*" (Psalm 15: 4).

I say: "*Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept Your testimonies*" (22). Do not count me worthy of reproach and

contempt, for I have kept Your testimonies, about which is said: “*Blessed are those who keep His testimonies*”(2).

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ As the wicked bring on me reproach and contempt, because I keep Your testimonies, “***Remove, O Lord, from me their reproach***” ...

How could the reproach and contempt be removed?... When those who bring on me reproach and contempt, and consider me as nothing, come to the knowledge of the truth; and keep Your commandments together with me.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

- ❖ In the time of persecution, when the wicked cover me with reproach and contempt, I seek Your protection, to make their reproach of no avail.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

The supplication of the psalmist here, probably refers to the role of God the Father in the resurrection of the Lord Christ. For the wicked rolled a large stone against the door of His tomb, and sought from Pilate to guard and seal it, to be sure that he will not rise again. They assumed that they have rolled on him reproach and contempt, even though He has not committed anything other than longing for the testimonies of the Father; namely, the testimony to His exalted love toward humanity, through delivering Himself for their sake.

Entering into the promised land, the people of Israel set the tabernacle of the meeting in “*Gilgal*”; which means (rolling away), And the Lord said to Joshua: “*This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you*” (Joshua 5: 9). So the commandment accompanies us until it brings us forth from the bondage of the devil (the Pharaoh of Egypt); and brings us forth in the worthiness of the blood into the promised land; namely, to the new life, risen in Christ Jesus.

David looks forward to the divine Word (the Commandment), who rolls the reproach away from us, not caring for the evil plots of the wicked, both the hidden and the manifest, that roll the reproach on Him; .... Sitting with the divine Word is greater than being preoccupied with the plots of the wicked.

- ❖ In both Greek and Latin languages, testimonies are called “*martyria*”. Those who, for the sake of their testimony to Christ, and for the sake of the Truth, were crushed by many afflictions, even to the point of death, are called “*Martyrs*” in Greek. Therefore, whenever we hear this term, which became popular, we could count the psalmist as

though saying: “Remove from me the reproach and contempt, for I intend to be a martyr for Your sake”....When the body of the Lord Christ (the church) so utters, would it be counted as a punishment, when she is rebuked and reproached by the wicked and the proud; if by those ways, she earns a crown?

Martyrdom in the name of Christ, is not a reproach, but a great adornment; not only in the sight of the Lord, but even in the sight of men; “*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints*” (Psalm 116: 15). Notice how His saints who are despised will gain great honors

(St. Augustine)

## **6- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE EVIL PLOTS OF THE WICKED:**

*“Princes also sit and speak against me, but Your servant meditates in Your statutes” (23)*

Some believe that the sitting of the princes here, conforms to what happened before the Babylonian invasion, when the rulers and the princes sat together with the kings of Babylon, and spoke evil against the Jews to provoke them against them<sup>1</sup>. It is an actual portrait that repeats itself along the generations, when some sit to provoke the rulers against the righteous, with no apparent reason, but an oppression on the divine Truth Himself in the person of the pious.

That was realized once and many times in the life of the psalmist David, when king Saul sat together with his counselors speaking evil about him, and plotting to kill him. Then it so happened when his own son Absalom did the same with his counselor Ahitophel ... David did them no harm; Yet they rolled the stone of reproach and contempt on him, for only one reason, namely, they couldnot endure his care for the statutes of God.

In all that, the prophet David has been a symbol of the Lord Christ, against whom, both the religious and the civil leadership sat, spoke, and on whose tomb they rolled a great stone, to remain in reproach and contempt; when He was caring for the statutes of God the Father; namely, the realization of His justice and love for our salvation, by delivering Himself a sacrifice for our sake.

As what have been realized in the death and burial of the Lord Christ, still happens every day in the life of the church, which is His body; Hence the believer cries out seeking from God to remove from him the stone of reproach and contempt, to grant him the life risen in

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<sup>1</sup> *Bethany Parallel Commentary on the O.T. (Adam Clarke). P. 1157.*

Christ Jesus... for the affliction that dwells upon him is through the plots and counsels of the wicked.

❖ This text bears a deeper meaning, which is that the rulers of this age (1 Corinthians 2: 6) concentrate their sight on the righteous; as is written about Christ: *“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed”* (Psalm 2: 2). Yes, the rulers of this world, *“those who have the wisdom of this age”* (1 Corinthians 2: 6), concentrate their eyes on the righteous, and set their nets to catch them. ... Let them speak as they will; for the righteous will do nothing except to speak the statutes of God, which are not human words.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ Sometimes they admonish me for certain old faults; and other times they insult me, counting me as nobody of any real standing. Yet, I sit alone, with my spirit directed toward the divine words... Your statutes are my counsel.

**(Eusabius of Caesarea)**

❖ Among the statutes of God, there is nothing more difficult, yet more worthy of admiration, than, for man, to be committed to love his enemies.

**(St. Augustine)**

## **7- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE SPIRITUAL PLEASURE:**

*“Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors”* (24)

It is as though the psalmist says: Even if the rulers of temporal authority have gathered together to bring me forth into the tomb of reproach and contempt, and to seal it to make sure that I do not rise again; Yet I do not care for their counsels and intrigues, for I am only preoccupied with searching Your testimonies, and having pleasure in Your statutes, which are *“my delight and my counselors”*; or as it came in the translation of ‘Aquila’: “Your testimonies are my delight, for they are my counselors”; or that of ‘Simachos’: “Your testimonies are the cause of my delight, like someone close to my heart”. It is as though he says: [let all the wicked attack me with everything they may use of their abilities and possibilities; but Your commandment will remain my only friend, very close to my heart; and even the source of my strength, conquest, pleasure, and satisfaction.

❖ The rulers of this world slander the servants of God and speak against them; but they do not care, for they are only preoccupied with persistently meditating in the statutes of God.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

Perceiving that he is in the land of sojourn, the psalmist seeks from the Lord:

1- To count him, even as a servant who works for a wage, after being close to death among the swine; He promised not again to disobey His commandment (17)

2- In his sojourn, it would not be enough for him just to exist, but he needs to get enlightened (18), to be able to behold wondrous things from God's work. For what would be his benefit, from having precious treasures and huge riches, if he cannot behold what is around him, or what goes on inside him?!

3- The commandment reveals to the believer his actual position as a stranger on earth (19), and reminds him of his sojourn, to exhort him, instead, to seek the citizenship of heaven. It is an amazing companion who enters into the depths of his heart to keep him company all along the way, and to kindle his longing toward the eternal glory (20).

4- The commandment grants the stranger an inner satisfaction, and a support in his strife; and gives him as well, the strength to oppose evil, without fear of the proud wicked; and the spirit of meekness, to become like his Lord, the meek Lamb, delivered for the sake of others; and the Lion who opposed and destroyed evil (21).

5- The commandment accompanies us in our sojourn, until it brings us forth, as though into "Gilgal", namely, into the promised land, or to the new life, to roll away from us the reproach of sin.

6- Being attached to the commandment in the land of his sojourn, will preoccupy him away from the plots of the wicked, who do everything possible to roll over him the reproach and contempt (23).

7- Instead of confronting the plots and evil plans of the wicked with counter plots, the psalmist would be preoccupied with meditating in the word of God, and seeking the divine counsel (24).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 (3 - GIMEL)  
YOUR COMMANDMENT IS MY SUPPORT IN MY SOJOURN**

- ❖ In my sojourn, I often search my depths, to find no life;  
Grant me Your commandment, to enjoy Your life inside me;  
To enjoy the true life, when You hide in my depths.
- ❖ Your commandment grants me the sharp sight;  
Not the outer, but the insight of the heart;  
And its secrets, proclaimed inside me;  
To see my Savior transfigured in my depths, and the heaven not far  
from me;  
When You remove from me the veil of the letter, I can see Your  
kingdom by the power of the spirit;  
Open my eyes to make me enjoy Your secrets;  
Open before me the chambers of Your Holy Book, to let me enter and  
settle down in it;  
There, I would enjoy You in Your secret place, O heavenly Groom;  
Open my soul by love, to let her perpetually desire Your  
commandment, and exalt high up to Your heavens.
- ❖ I am a sojourner in earth;  
Your commandment is my companion, comforter, and guide;  
It reveals to me my heavenly citizenship, to make me get up and  
hasten toward it.
- ❖ Your commandment is a stranger to the proud;  
Grant me humility to attach myself to it in my sojourn;  
And not to fall into the curse, together with those hating it.
- ❖ The proud reproach me, and accuse me of contempt;  
Let me receive their reproach and contempt for the sake of Your  
commandment;  
Let me not fall under the reproach of straying from it;  
Let me not have the contempt of those breaking it;  
The wicked roll on me a great stone, as though on the door of a tomb;  
Roll their reproach away from me;  
And proclaim in me the power of Your resurrection and its gladness;  
Reveal the Truth to them, to know Your commandment;  
So that, instead of insulting me, they would honor You in me, O the  
One exalted in His glory!
- ❖ Let the proud stand against me for the sake of Your testimonies;

For I long to become a martyr for Your sake;  
Their afflictions against me, would turn into a crown of glory, which  
I desire;  
The reproaches of the wicked against You on the cross, would  
become salvation for me;  
Grant me that their reproach, would turn into a glorification to You in  
me;  
Your commandment is my glory in my sojourn, even amid my  
afflictions

#### 4 (DALETH)

## REVIVE ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD [25-32]

In the previous stichon, the psalmist perceived his need for the divine commandment amid his sojourn in this world, to keep him against sins, the pride in particular, and to support him against the wicked who seek not less than his life, and intend to bring him forth into the grave, and roll on its door a great stone of reproach and contempt, for no reason, except his attachment to the commandment. In his seclusion, the psalmist found his comfort in this commandment. It is the true friend who supports him against evil and the wicked; and turns their reproaches to glories. Now, having entered into the grave, he cries out, seeking from the Lord not to deprive him of his Word -- the life-giver (John 6: 63).

- 1- **The commandment and the resurrected life** 25
- 2- **The commandment and the joyful confession** 26, 27
- 3- **The commandment and the liberation from the deadly grief** 28
- 4- **The commandment and the liberation from the spirit of lying** 29 -31
- 5- **The commandment and the enlarged heart** 32

### 1- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE RESURRECTED LIFE:

As the spiritual rulers, namely the devils, plotted against the psalmist David, set nets, and provoked him to fall into sins, one after another; he, perceiving that the sacrifices in which God shall be pleased, are a broken spirit and a contrite heart (Psalm 51: 17), he bowed with contrition even to the dust, saying: "*Our soul is bowed down to the dust, our body clings to the ground*" (Psalm 44: 25). He knew that there is no salvation for his soul by his own strife; but he needs the "Word of God" and His grace to bring him over from the dust of the grave, and to let his soul enjoy the resurrected life; hence he says:

*"My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your word" (25)*

The Word of God is life which reacts with the soul of man, to make him live by God; Through it, the believer enjoys a secret union with God, the Source of his life.

Some refer this verse to the Person of the Lord of Glory Jesus Christ in the moments of His passion, where he carried our sins, and accepted to enter into death on our behalf, saying: *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even to death”* (Matthew 26: 38).. Yet others believe that the speaker here, is the prophet David, who, when his soul troubled him, he sat on the ground and covered himself with dust, according to the old custom of the people of east, the way the righteous ‘Job’ did (Job 1: 20), as well as his friends, about whom it is written: *“When they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept, and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven”* (Job 2: 12).

The psalmist probably felt that the cords of the sin wrapped around him, and the temptation got stronger and stronger, because of his sin, which brought him down to the dust; as though he utters the words of the apostle Paul: *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (Romans 7: 24). His outer affliction revealed his inner weakness; Or his cry-out here, is probably for the sake of the two afflictions together.

The psalmist confesses, that his soul is no more attached to God as it used to be; And finding himself fallen into sin, his soul attached to the dust, for the sin destroyed its status, and its natural exaltation.

Indeed, every sinning soul is attached to the dust; hence it is written in the law: *“You shall walk after the Lord Your God, and ... hold fast to Him”* (Deuteronomy 13: 4; 6: 13; 10: 30).

The psalmist sees his soul brought *down* to the grave, where it attaches to the dust, to become food for the ancient serpent, the devil; to which it was said: *“On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life”* (Genesis 3: 14). That is why, he cried out to the divine Word to carry him by His Holy Spirit out of the grave, to scatter the dust from him, and grant him the new life, exalted to heaven, where the serpent would not be able to reach and swallow him.

Who can remove from us the dust of this world, except the Word of God, the Grantor of life and freedom? ... God promised us, saying: *“I kill, and I make alive”* (Deuteronomy 32: 39); And the Lord Christ says: *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”* (John 19: 10)

The enjoyment of this resurrected life needs from us to be open and clear. The more open we are to the Word of God, and confess our ways which bring us down to the pit, the more God will open up our insight, to enjoy His secrets and wondrous things with us.

❖ God wishes to rescue us from the earthly things, to say with the apostle: “*Our citizenship is in heaven*”. For getting attached to the earthly things is a death for the soul; contrary to life, for which the psalmist prays, saying: “*Revive me*”.

(St. Augustine)

We are told by **Theodoret**, how Emperor Theodosius used this verse to issue a decree, for which many have fallen victims. Then he came to bishop Ambrose to present repentance. Bishop Ambrose told Rophinos that he decided to ban the emperor from entrance into the sanctuaries, even if it costs him his own life.... Delivering this message to the emperor, the later said: [I shall go to the bishop and receive the reproach I deserve].... Encountering the bishop, he said to him: [I ask you for absolution; according to the mercy of our Lord; ... I beg from you not to shut before me His door, open before all the repentant]. To which the bishop said: [The faithful emperor daringly came to the holy sanctuary to pray to God, not standing, and not even kneeling down, but casting himself flat on the ground, crying out the words of the prophet David: “*My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your word*”<sup>1</sup>].

## 2- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE JOYFUL CONFESSION:

The prophet David practiced the confession, as it was always his custom in its two aspects: confessing his sin, or his weakness, even reaching down to the dust of the grave; and confessing the work of God’s grace, Grantor of the amazing salvation.

In the sacrament of repentance and confession, we declare that we are dead to sin, and raised up by the amazing work of God; Or in other word, we declare that walking in our own way is like being cast into the dust of the grave; whereas receiving the way of the Lord, is the enjoyment of His wondrous works. Hence the prophet David, having opened up the depths of his heart before God, confesses, saying:

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<sup>1</sup> Theodoret: *Ecc. His. 5: 17.*

***“I have declared my way, and You answered me; Teach me Your statutes; Make me understand the way of Your precepts, so that I meditate in Your wondrous work” (26, 27)***

Here the psalmist presents his whole case before God; who, alone, may listen to his prayer, respond to it, and turn his life into wondrous works. By “*wondrous work*”, he probably means receiving unutterable, and inexpressible divine comforts, which would turn his life into a wonder, ... when it is continually renewed.

The psalmist presents all the details of his worries before the Lord, to recognize His divine will

❖ He who walks by his body lusts, walks according to his own will; Whereas, he who avoids the transgressions, walks along a way that brings him forth to God; and God will respond to his prayer for forgiveness, leads him to His justice, teaches him His righteousness, gives him understanding of the ways of His statutes, and makes him think about His wondrous works.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ “*When we conduct ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind*” (Ephesians 2: 3), we are walking according to our ways. On the contrary, when we separate ourselves from sin, and dedicate ourselves to the Lord, seeking from Him to purify us, and to make us walk in His ways (see Deuteronomy 10: 12); Then we are not walking in our own ways, but we are walking in the ways of the Lord, and making progress in them.

The same thought is found in the words: “*I acknowledged my sin to You*” (Psalm 32: 5); You listened to my confession that I have transgressed against You, and received my repentance. I also beseech You, being my Lord, to judge me according to Your statutes; taking into consideration that nobody can consummate them in their wholeness.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ “***I have declared Your ways***”; namely, the ways that lead to You, the ways that lead to the virtues. I have declared them, O Lord, by my works, and by my intentions, full of zeal, that correspond to my intentions; Then, “*You answered me*”. I beseech You to “***Make me understand the way of Your precepts***<sup>1</sup>”.

**(St. Dedyms the blind)**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Institutes 10: 4.*

- ❖ In some versions, it came as “*Your ways*”, while, according to the more correct Greek text, it came as “*my ways*”, namely, my evil ways.

It so seems that he says: I confess my sins, and You listen to me, and forgive them. ... Teach me to work, and not only to know what I should do. ... As it is said that “the Lord knows no sin”, which is understood as “He does no sin”; So it is befitting to say that he who does the righteousness, knows the righteousness. That is the prayer of him who grows with progress.

(St. Augustine)

As we reject our own ways, and receive our Christ “*the Royal Way*”, we gain the gift of knowledge, which keeps on growing through seeking it or walking in it. Saying: “*Make me understand the ways of Your precepts, so shall I meditate in Your wondrous works*” (27), the psalmist proclaims our need for perpetually seeking the understanding, and to appreciate this talent by keeping the commandment, or by practicing it; for practicing it bears a testimony to it before the others, and gives us the chance to grow in it.

Having enjoyed the understanding, the apostle Paul talked about the righteousness, and the judgment to come; not the theoretical philosophy, but that of living experience; which has filled the governor (who listened to him) with fear (See Acts 24: 25). ... Aquila translates the word “*meditate*” as (keep); whereas Simachos translates it as, (narrate) or (recite).

- ❖ Let us then understand this text as: “*Learn to do good*” (Isaiah 1: 17) Together with learning the commandments, it is befitting of us to perceive their ways; Namely, doing according to the commandment conforms with perceiving its goal.

(St. Dedyms the blind)

- ❖ I can perceive “*the way*” of the secrets of Your commandments, if I get the “*understanding*” from you; to be able to walk along this way, and to enjoy the “*understanding*” of the “*wondrous works*”. By this I may talk about Your commandments through understanding their goals.

(The scholar Origen)

### **3- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE LIBERATION FROM THE DEADLY GRIEF:**

“*My soul melts away for sorrow, Strengthen me according to Your word*” (28)

If the commandment supports man even in the moments of his weakness, to confess his sins, and to talk about the grace of God, the Grantor of the amazing righteousness of Christ; It supports the lukewarm soul in the moments of its slumber, softness, or grief; to revive it, and to give it strength to strive. The word “*my soul melts*” as it came in King James version, came as “*My soul slumbers*” in other versions.

The psalmist might have passed through a condition of intense despair during a certain time; and cried out to God to grant him the joyful hope in His divine promises and oracles.

- ❖ The psalmist knows that we cannot drive away the spirit of “sorrow” except by meditating in the divine teachings; hence, we should be alert, as the Lord says in Matthew: “*Watch and pray*” (Matthew 26: 41).

**(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)**

- ❖ Taking the translation: “*My soul slumbers for sorrow*”. He means to say, that being in a condition of sorrow and grief, the soul loses its alertness, and falls into slumber, a condition warned against in the saying: “*Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids*” (Proverb 6: 4).

The other translation: “*My soul melts away for sorrow*”, adopted by the majority of scholars: confirms that the soul of the righteous is sturdy, enduring, and does not allow a single drop to melt from it; contrary to that of the wicked, which cannot hide the Word of God inside it, but melts in drops; An idea (hinted to), in the proverbs: “*My son do not let them depart from your eyes, keep sound wisdom and discretion*” (Proverb 3: 21); And in words by Paul’s epistle to his epistle to the Hebrews, saying: “*We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away*” (Hebrew 2:1). .... Then the psalmist adds: “*Strengthen me according to Your word*”; namely, make me steadfast, not shaken, nor changeable in any way.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ “*My soul slumbers for sorrow*”. As “**slumber**” precedes fallingasleep; namely, a relaxation of the senses; it is used by the psalmist to liken it as a precedent of sin.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ With an admirable expression, David summarizes the drawbacks of that condition in one sentence: “*My soul slumbers for sorrow*”. Namely, for the tribulation. He does not say “My body slumbers”, but

says: “**My soul slumbers**”; for it is the soul that is more vulnerable to be affected by the heaviness of sorrow.

(St. John Cassian)

- ❖ As relaxation precedes sleep; So we say about the soul beginning to sin, that it relaxes, as though, being drawn to the slumber of sin; it has to wake up by the remembrance of goodness.

(Eusabius of Caesarea)

#### **4- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE LIBERATION FROM THE SPIRIT OF LYING:**

If the commandment supports the frail soul, which surrenders to the slumber, or came to melt in drops; On another aspect it keeps it against the spirit of lying, namely, the spirit of the devil; and grants it, instead, the spirit of truth, namely, the Spirit of Christ, so that it would not be put to shame.

*“Remove from me the way of lying, and graciously, teach me Your law” (29)*

- ❖ He could say: “**Remove me from the way of lying**”, but he said: “Remove from me the way of lying”; because this way is right inside me, within me.

Indeed, as long as we are wicked, the way of lying is inside us. We should exert all effort to forsake this way out of our souls; particularly seeking the help of the Lord to remove it; Then we could say: “**Graciously, teach me Your law**”; seeking God’s mercy, by the law He has granted us. ... The same way we say to the physician: [Do according to the requirements of Your medical experience, to cure my illness; by any means you see convenient.

As long as the way of lying has not yet been removed from us, we shall not be granted the mercy of God, according to His law.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ He who distances himself from the way of lying, and chooses to come close to the law of God, would be intending to have the (columns) of his soul completely sound, and supported by the law of the Lord, which leads to the consummation of all goodness.

He who hates ignorance, would have a contradictory intention, which is knowledge. ... He who cannot, on his own, keep away from ignorance, let him lean upon faith (truth), seeking from his Lord: “*Remove me from the way of (ignorance); and graciously teach me Your law*”

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

The word “lying”, came eight times; being a feature of the sinful life.

It is not enough to have the negative aspect, namely, taking the way the spirit of lying -- the devil and his kingdom, away from the heart; but we should have the positive aspect as well; namely, the enjoyment of the Lord Christ, with His Kingdom “the way of the truth”, or “*the way of faith*”, according to some versions.

**“I have chosen the way of truth (faith); Your judgments I have laid before me” (30)**

The word “truth” or (emunah), came derived from (aman), namely, (to hold fast, not to change, to settle down, to trust, to believe). For these are the features of the divine law, by the authority of God, who does not lie, nor deceive<sup>1</sup>.

❖ He so utters, who despises the seen things, namely, the mortal temporal things, but looks at the things which are not seen, the eternal things (see 2 Corinthians 4: 18); who talks of nothing but them; and to them he intends to go; for “*the way of the truth*”, is not the way chosen by him who is preoccupied, here on earth, by riches and earthly glory.

He who chooses to walk along “*the way of the truth*”, would never forget the judgments of God, nor His rewards.

**(The scholar Origen)**

His choice of “*the way of the truth*”, and perpetual remembrance of God’s judgments, will hold him fast to the testimonies of the Lord.

If the commandment motivates us to be faithfulness to ourselves, to confess our ways, and to repent our sins; It also reveals the amazing grace of God, which turns our weakness into strength; and our preoccupation with the dust, to meditation in the godly things. By that, the commandment takes us out from the sin, destructive to the soul, and liberates us from the deadly sorrow; as though it awakens us from slumber and slothfulness, to the *gladness* of work in the kingdom of God.

**“I cling to Your testimonies; O Lord, Do not put me to shame” (31)**

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<sup>1</sup> Bethany Panallel Commentary on O.T. (Adam Clark), p. 1158.

Having previously complained against himself, saying: “*My soul clings to the dust*” (25), seeking from God to take him up from the dust of the grave, and to grant him the resurrected life; Now, he seeks to be attached to the testimonies of the Lord, to hold fast to this new life in Christ Jesus.

❖ He who gets united with the words delivered for the sake of the testimonies of heaven and earth (to God), and never gets away from them, will have the assurance that whatever actions he may take that may bring shame on him (because of his human weakness), he would have the daring to seek forgiveness from God, saying: “*O Lord, Do not put me to shame*”, and would become worthy of hearing God say to him: “*I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins*” (Isaiah 44: 22). He will not be put to shame; for the divine Word (the virtue) dwelling in the soul of man who sinned, would utterly blot out all her previous sins, and would grant her the forgiveness of sins. Justice would dwell instead of oppression; chastity instead of defilements, courage instead of cowardice, and reason instead of folly. By this the forgiveness of sins would be realized, for the sake of which the Son of God came to grant us.

(The scholar Origen)

## **5- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE ENLARGED HEART:**

If the sin brings the soul down to the dust of the grave (25), that the soul becomes in perpetual slumber (28), walks in the way of oppression and death (29), and on her, reproach and contempt would dwell (31); Yet the work of the divine Word is to lift up from the dust of the grave, to present the heavenly knowledge, and to realize divine wonders; so that the soul would live in the way of truth by faith, would be taken away from reproach, and would become enlarged by love for God, and for His heavenly and earthly creation. He would bring the soul forth to the narrow way, yet with an enlarged heart; contrary to the sin, which brings us forth to the broad way, yet with a narrow heart.

***“I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart” (32)***

❖ The way of God’s commandments is narrow; but the heart of him who runs in them is enlarged, for it is the dwelling place of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit .... Whereas the evil way of the

wicked is broad, but their hearts are narrow; for God has no place in it.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ *“Difficult and narrow is the way which leads to life”* (Matthew 7: 14); Whereas the heart which walks in it, namely in the way of God’s commandments, is enlarged by the divine Word; is holy, and beholds God.

On the contrary, *“Wide and broad is the way that leads to destruction”* (Matthew 7: 13); while the heart that walks in it is narrow, and cannot have the Father and the Son dwell in it (John 14: 23).

Let us also meditate in how Solomon instructs us to inscribe the divine Words on the two tablets of our hearts (Proverbs 3: 4; 7: 3; 22: 20), by saying: *“Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares”* (Proverbs 1: 20). By saying *“outside”*, he does not mean (in the streets), but he talks about the hearts, hoping for them to be enlarged by God.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ It is befitting of our hearts to be, as enlarged and widened as possible; not to be narrow through cowardice, and not to be filled by the energy of sweeping wrath, that makes us unable to gain what the prophet calls *“the wide and broad way”* of the commandments of God in our narrow hearts; or to say together with the prophet: *“I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart”*<sup>1</sup> (32).

**(Father Yousef)**

- ❖ I would not be able to run (in the way of Your commandments), unless You enlarge my heart ... If the Lord asks him: Can you do that on your own?; he would answer “No, I can not”; For it is not by my own will, as though it is in no need of Your help, but because You have enlarged my heart.

The enlargement of the heart is a gladness we get in righteousness, a gift from God, which keeps us from getting disturbed by His commandments, through fear of punishment, but to have our hearts enlarged through love and gladness in righteousness.

**(St. Augustine)**

## **The commandment, the grantor of life:**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Cassian: Conferences, 16: 27.

Feeling that sin has brought him down to be attached to the dust in a dark grave, the psalmist seeks the divine commandment to get attached to the Savior, the Word of God, the Grantor of life.

1- The psalmist seeks the help of the commandment to lift him up from the dust (25), so that the ancient serpent would not swallow him (Genesis 3: 14).

2- The repentance and the confession are the secure way, by receiving the work of the Word, the Grantor of life (26). Talking frankly to God about our weakness, He would, in turn, talk to us frankly about His wonders and secrets. By the enlargement of our hearts, we would reveal what we have; and by the enlargement of His heart, He would reveal what He has concerning us.

3- Although repentance would be accompanied by sorrow, yet it would grant us the inner peace and joy in the Lord. Whereas sin would destroy the soul by the inner sorrow and despair... The divine commandment would take away from us the deadly sorrow, and liberate us from it.

4- By the commandment we would be liberated from the spirit, or the way of lying, the root of which the devil put deep into us; to let the way of the truth occupy its place (29, 30); We would be liberated from the bondage of the devil, to receive the kingdom of Christ.

5- By the commandment, the soul is liberated from being attached to the dust, to get attached instead to the testimonies of the Lord.

6- By the commandment, we receive the narrow way by an enlarged heart, instead of receiving by sin, the broad way by a narrow heart.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 (Daleth)**  
**YOUR COMMANDMENT IS MY LIFE**

- ❖ My sin brought me forth into the grave, and buried me there;  
Whereas Your Word lifts me up from the dust, and grants me the eternal life;  
By Your commandment, I discover and confess my death;  
And by it I perceive what I should do, and grants me the strength to do it;  
By it I confess Your resurrection, O Grantor of life.
- ❖ I lost my life because of the condition of despair that has dwelt on me;  
and my soul slumbered out of sorrow;  
Who can grant me life except the joyful hope, brought forth by Your commandment?!  
My soul slothfully slept the sleep of sin;  
Let Your commandment wake her up, by the exaltation of Your resurrection.
- ❖ I was destroyed by the lying, the way of vanity and ignorance;  
Let Your law come close to me, the way of truth and knowledge;  
He who connects himself to the way of vanity, would, himself, become vain;  
And he who attaches himself to the way of truth, would live by the truth forever.
- ❖ By sin, my soul became a narrow grave;  
But by Your commandment, my soul became enlarged by love, to accommodate all;  
The way of sin is broad, yet it makes my heart narrow toward the others;  
Whereas the way of Your commandments, although narrow, yet it gives my soul enlargement for all.

## **5 HE**

# **MAKE ME WALK IN THE PATH OF YOUR COMMANDMENTS**

**(33 – 40)**

The Word of God, the Grantor of the resurrected life, after the death of sin, is the true Leader of the heart, who, alone can enter into the depths of the soul, to grant it the width and enlargement amid the narrowness of this world, and lead her along the way of love instead of oppression; of the truth instead of vanity; of the fear of the Lord instead of the fear of men; of the glory of the righteousness of Christ instead of the reproach of sin; and of the sweetness of God's judgments instead of the temporal pleasures.

Although the divine Word leads the inner soul, and directs all its energies, Yet the believer does not stand negatively, but responds to the work of the Word, follows, and loves Him.

<b>1- The Lord, Giver of the law</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>2- The Lord, Grantor of understanding</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>3- The Lord, Leader of the soul</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>4- The Lord brings us out of the way of covetousness (greed)</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>5- The Lord enlightens the eyes with the eternities</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>6- The Lord grants us the divine fear</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>7- The Lord turns away from us the reproach of sin</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>8- The Lord grants us the sweetness of the Spirit</b>	<b>40</b>

### **1- THE LORD, GIVER OF THE LAW:**

*“Teach me, O Lord the way of Your statutes, and I will observe it to the end” (33)*

Why does the psalmist seek from the Lord to teach him the way of His statutes? Is the law within his hands, that was given by God to the prophet Moses, not enough for him? ... He prays to God to receive the leadership of his life, as a personal leadership, capable of granting his soul the freedom of movement, together with sweetness in observing the commandment.

a- The Lord delivered His law to mankind through His church, whether in the Old or the New Covenants. Yet there is the need for every member to enjoy the law of God on a personal level, as a message that touches his life without separation from the congregation; Hence the

psalmist says: **“Teach me”**, as though he says: [Give me Your law, working personally in me].

b- The word **“teach”** does not mean to set new statutes, but to let His statutes work in his life; so that they would become for him, the natural and sweet law of his inner life. In other word, the commandment would not be a matter of **“Do”** and **“Do not”**, but a gift and a promise; because, when the Lord, Himself, puts His law in the soul, He grants her the strength to live by it; Hence the psalmist says: **“I will observe it to the end”**; The divine law would become the law of my life, from which I would never stray.

❖ The psalmist teaches us that the way of truth needs to be put by God, and to be searched and meditated by man, and to be sought and observed by him, not just for some time, but to the end of his life.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ Those who believe in Christ and come under His leadership, have many ways along which they are committed to walk, before they would enter into the holy land. For after they come out of Egypt, and go through all the stages mentioned in the Holy Book (Numbers 33: 1, 2), they would find rest... . Who has set the ways through which the children of Israel had to go along those different stages, but God Himself? Who set those ways by the pillars of fire and cloud.

Now contemplate! The same thing spiritually happens in your present journey; if you come out of Egypt, and were able to follow the Savior Jesus (Joshua), who will bring you forth to the promised land.

Although Moses (the law) was the leader, yet Joshua was there beside him. He waited until Moses consummated his time; then **“the Fullness of Time”** (Galatians 4: 4) would come, for Jesus to lead, receive the teaching of the people, and openly present His commandments... Let us then walk according to them, and pray, saying: **“Teach me, O lord, the ways of Your statutes, and I will observe it to he end”** (33). ... I shall follow **“the ways of His statutes”**, which is not an easy way, which needs, not two or three days, or even ten days, but actually needs the whole life to cross.

In the same way, I need to find **“the way of testimony”**, **“I have rejoiced in the way of your testimonies, as much as in all riches”** (14); ... as well as **“the way of the commandments”**, **“I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart”** (32)... All these ways are originally one way, He who says: **“I am the Way”** (John 14: 6); Let us then walk in all these ways until we reach their ultimate goal – the Lord Christ.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ What does he mean by saying: “*I shall keep it to the end*”?

Does it mean: as long as I live here, where we perpetually grow in grace? Or even after this life. As he, who lives a virtuous life here, will become perfect there.

❖ Here, the law of God is searched, as long as we make progress in it, through recognizing it and loving it; Whereas there, we get its perfection to enjoy, not to be tested.

There, we do not seek to find the face of God, for we can see Him face to face.

Here, we search for Him to hold fast to Him; Whereas there, we shall not need to strive, lest we may lose Him.

**(St. Augustine)**

Many may take the role of teaching and leading, but it is only One, who can enter into the depth of the heart, present to it the law of love, and grant it the strength to work. To him, the psalmist cries out, asking Him to take this role, that his heart would follow Him in complete obedience.

The divine Teacher deals with His disciples, not on the level of commanding them what they should do, and what they should not; but on the level of love and appreciation .... He seeks obedience to His commandment, and, at the same time, He grants them the understanding, to receive them with joy, aware of its blessing and activity in their life.

## **2- THE LORD, GRANTOR OF UNDERSTANDING:**

If the Lord, is Himself “the Way”, who brings us forth to Him, and holds fast in us to follow Him all the days of our life, without any slothfulness; Being in Him, we need Him to grant us the understanding to meditate in the commandment and search it, day and night, with an enlightened mind, and a heart, enlarged with love.

***“Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart” (34)***

The Lord Himself, will grant us the understanding to perceive His secrets, and the strength to keep it in our hearts without perversion; to say together with ‘Eliho’: “*Behold, God is exalted by His power; Who teaches like Him?*” (Job 36: 22); ... And, at the same time, the psalmist promises to be a faithful disciple to his divine Teacher; to keep His law with his whole heart, not divided between his discipleship to His Teacher, and his love for the world, and to dedicate all his energies to God.

- ❖ Give me the understanding to become able to experience and practice Your statutes, practically, and with befitting alertness. Give me the understanding pertaining to the work and the meditation; by which I can *“observe it with my whole heart”*; and approach it *without hesitation*.

If the wisdom is needed to understand the law; what would be the wisdom needed to be granted by the Lord to the psalmist to perceive its goal?!

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ In order to know the law of the depths of God, and the secrets hidden in it, we need God to be our Teacher; We are committed to seek from the Lord, *“the understanding to keep His law”*; and, at the same time, to promise Him, *“to observe it with our whole heart”*.

(Eusabius of Caesarea)

The scholar Origen often resorted to his audience to partake of his prayers to His heavenly Teacher, to grant him the spirit of understanding, by His Holy Spirit, the Grantor of enlightenment<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ The Lord is the Spirit, to whom we are committed to pray, to lift from us the veil of the letter, and to grant us the splendor of His Spirit<sup>2</sup>.

. (The scholar Origen)

Man would probably be able to keep the law in its literal or apparent form; Yet, it is only God, who is able to change the heart to keep the law by the spirit in the depths, through the perfection of His love.

### 3- THE LORD, LEADER OF THE SOUL:

*“Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it” (35)*

It would not be enough for the soul to enjoy the divine understanding to search the law of the Lord, nor the strength to keep it with the whole heart (34); but she needs to have God, Himself, hold her hand, and make her walk in His path, in which she will find pleasure. Yet He would not lead her against her own will, but according to her request and pleasure. For, according to the apostle: *“it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”* (Philippians 2: 13).

- ❖ There is *“the way of the commandments”*, ... the “path” of behavior, walked by many of the righteous before us. Yet, unless we take the

<sup>1</sup> In Ezek. Hom 4: 3 (Die Griechischen Christlichen Schrifsteller, 8: 363).

<sup>2</sup> In Gen. hom, 6: 1 PG 12: 195.

Lord as our Leader, we shall not be able to keep His commandments. We are committed to be “*followers of Christ*” (Ephesians 5: 1; 1 Thessalonians 1: 6); and to “*carry our cross and follow Him*” (Matthew 10: 38; 16: 24).

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ My own desire would be helpless, unless You Yourself walk together with me wherever I intend to. This is surely the way to God’s commandments, in which the psalmist previously said he ran, when God enlarged his heart (32); he called it “a path”; For, as it is a narrow way that leads to life, he cannot run in it except be an enlarged heart.

**(St. Augustine)**

The apostle Paul cries out, saying: “*To will is present with me, but how to perform what is good, I do not find*” (Romans 7: 18). It is as though he says: [You made me long for Your way; I wish to enter into it, and move in it; Therefore, carry me in it by Yourself, and hold my hand, for my possibilities are helpless to realize, even what I wish of goodness].

And the psalmist proclaims his true desire for a holy life, and his readiness to work; Yet he cannot start the way, nor walk in it, without the grace of God, to say, together with the apostle: “*God is the One who works in us to wish and to work for His pleasure*”.

#### **4- THE LORD BRINGS US OUT OF THE WAY OF COVETOUSNESS (GREED):**

*“Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness” (36)*

If the psalmist previously proclaimed that he delights in the path or the way of God (35), Yet he does not intend to walk in it on his own, but he seeks from God, his divine Leader and Guide, not only to hold his hand, but to kindle his heart with love, to draw him to His testimonies, even to the point of death, as a testimony to the righteousness of God and His commandments; and to keep him from the love of vain and temporal things, of greed and covetousness

- ❖ By saying: “*Incline my heart to Your testimonies*” (36), and keep my eyes away from vain things, the psalmist teaches us to avoid evil, and to hold fast to goodness. Yes, that may be within our authority and ability to do ourselves; Yet we are in need of the help and support of God; according to His own words: “*Without Me, you can do nothing*” (John 15: 5).

Someone may object, saying: [If I refer everything to God, What then would concern me?].... Let us then discern between what concern God and what concern us!

The psalmist says: “*Teach me, O Lord, the ways of Your statutes*”; That is what concerns God. And what concerns me is: “***I shall keep it to the end***” (33)

And again: “*Give me understanding*”; That is what concerns God. What concerns me is: “***and I will keep Your law***” (34).

And again: “*Make me walk in the path of Your commandment*”; That is what concerns God. What concerns me is: “***For I delight in it***” (35)

Let us then seek what would come to us from God, to have it; Yet, let us, as well, promise to do what concerns us, and to keep our promise, so as not to break the covenant that binds us to the Lord.

Here, the psalmist says: “***Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness***” (36); knowing for sure, that covetousness (greed) is evil, called by the apostle: “idol-worshipping”. ... Covetousness does not conform to the testimonies of God.

(The scholar Origen)

**Apolinarius** says: [As “*God saw that all flesh has corrupted its way upon the earth*” (Genesis 6: 12), we need the Lord to turn our hearts to righteousness; Namely, we need the Lord to lead our will, the same way He leads the events, by the work of the Holy Spirit in us].

- ❖ If our heart is not inclined toward covetousness (greed), we fear God for His own sake; that He, alone, would be our reward for our ministry to Him. Let us, then, love Him for His own sake; Let us love Him inside us; Let us love Him in our neighbors, whom we love like ourselves; whether they have God, or for the sake of letting them have Him.
- ❖ “***Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness***”. On account of that our heart and mind are not under our authority; When they become blind all of a sudden, the mind and the spirit would come to be in a state of confusion, and would be led to a direction contrary to what You intend for them to be; they would be led to, and mixed with, the worldly and the temporal pleasures and seductions. And at the time we should get ready to lift our minds up high, we would be over-ridden with vain thoughts, and would be cast toward worldly things<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Flight from the world, 1: 1.*

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ I shall quote the words of the prophet, saying: “*Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness*” (36). For the grace of the Word is of benefit, and would not stir up in us the love of riches<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

## 5- THE LORD ENLIGHTENS THE EYES WITH THE ETERNITIES:

*“Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way” (37)*

According to **Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic**: [We are given the eyes to behold our Creator in His creation; not to concentrate our sight on the worthless, and temporary temporal things; which would draw our hearts to love them, to be bound to them, and to be alienated from God and the godly things. Hence the psalmist cries out to God, to grant him, by His care, and His divine grace, to draw his eyes away from the temporal things. He would not shut our eyes from seeing them, but would grant them, not to concentrate long on them.

- ❖ The “*worthless things*” (the vanity) are what is unbecoming of deceptive sceneries, the corrupt and chaotic thoughts; which were identified by the apostle Paul, saying: “*They walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God*” (Ephesians 4: 17, 18).

By “*the futility of mind*”, the apostle Paul means that man, instead of using the intelligence granted to him by God, to meditate in the truth, he deliver it to the devil who binds it in chains... That is the grace for which the psalmist prays, saying: “*Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things*”; namely, to live in the way of the Lord; who, Himself says: “*I am the Way*” (John 14: 6).

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ Whoever turns his eyes away from looking at worthless things (vanity), walks in the Upright Way, who is our Lord, saying: “*I am the Way and the life*”; and will be delivered from death, as did the righteous ‘Lot’..... Whereas, whoever inclines his eyes toward the temporal things, walks in the way of death, and, according to the blessed Paul, being alienated from the life of God; he will end up having the destiny of the wife of ‘Lot’, who looked backward toward what is vain (See Genesis 19: 26).

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<sup>1</sup> Duties of the Clergy, Book 2: 6: 26.

**(Onesimos, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ The vanity and the Truth directly contradict one another. The lusts of this world are vanity; Whereas the Lord Christ, who liberates us from this world, is the Truth; and is as well, the Way, and the Life; according to His own words: *“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”*.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ What is vanity, if it is not the dedication to the riches, and running after the worldly pleasures?! As confirmed by the wise Solomon, who said: *“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity”* (Ecclesiastes 1; 2) <sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Valerian)**

❖ Now, brethren, we have restored in Christ the eyes of the heart, which we have lost in Adam. Let us then give thanks to Him who condescended to enlighten us to behold Him, with no worthiness on our part. Let us strive with all our strength and energy; for, by His help, we can open our eyes on what is good, and close them shut on what is evil; according to what the prophet sought from the Lord, saying: *“Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things”*<sup>2</sup>

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

Let us deliver our senses, as well as our hearts, in the hands of our divine Teacher through sight. Adam fell into disobedience, and his heart was corrupted by vanity. Hence the psalmist cries out, seeking from God to sanctify his eyes, to turn them away from looking at worthless things, that could crawl into his heart.

## **6- THE LORD GRANTS US THE DIVINE FEAR:**

*“Establish Your word to Your servant, who is devoted to fearing You”* (38)

As our inner insight turns away from “worthless things” (vanities) to the true Way, namely to the Lord, *“the Way and the Life”*, We seek from God to establish us in Him, and in His promises, by making us devoted to fearing Him; not the fear of the guilty and disturbed servants, but that of the children, who fear lest they may hurt the feelings of their father.

❖ The Word of God is not established in those who take it away from themselves, and do what contradict it; But it is steadfast in those who establish it in themselves.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom., 6 (Frs. Of the Church).

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 172: 4.

- ❖ I wish I have the proper kind of fear, based on reason and perception; I wish I have, neither the fear without perception, nor the perception without fear.

(The scholar Origen)

According to **St. Ambrose**, it is only possible to establish the house of wisdom, if the fear of God is deeply established in the soul.

## **7- THE LORD TURNS AWAY FROM US THE REPROACH OF SIN:**

*“Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your judgments are good” (39)*

We previously talked about two kinds of reproach: The reproach of sin that dwells upon us before God; and the reproach of the cross that dwells upon us before men. The former brings grief, whereas the later brings sweetness to the soul. ... Here, the psalmist seeks from God to take away from him the reproach of sin, and not the vain rebukes of men; To take away from him the reproach which makes him lose his peace with God, and offends the others, when they blaspheme God because of him. Taking away that kind of reproach is realized by having the sweetness of the divine commandment in the heart instead of the pleasure of the sin.

- ❖ Having committed sin, being human, the psalmist, by the spirit of prophecy, saw the reproach accompanying him before the divine tribunal following the resurrection, hence he presents this supplication to the Lord.

By so saying, he does not mean to say: “Take away Your reproach”. Indeed, when I endure the reproach because of Christ (Hebrew 11: 26), that would not be counted as “my reproach”, but that of Christ. But when I suffer the reproach because of my own sins, and do not repent, I shall be committed to say: “Turn away my reproach which I dread, for Your judgments are good”

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ I trust that You will turn away the reproach which I dread, for I am sure that Your judgments are full of goodness and the love of man.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

The psalmist says *“Your judgments are good”*; The Word of God is satisfying and sweet to the soul. That is why **the scholar Origen** admonishes the congregation for their lukewarm attitude, when listening to his sermons, saying:

❖ [The church moans with grief when you reluctantly, and with difficulty, come to hear the Word of God, even in the days of feasts; and when you do come, you do not care much to listen attentively to the divine Word! ... God has entrusted me to provide His household with their portion of spiritual nutrition, namely the ministry of the Word, in its due time ... But, how can I do that?! ... Where, and when, can I find the proper time to do that; when you spend the greater time of your life, or may I even say, all the time of your life, preoccupied with the worldly temporal, and non-spiritual things?! ... There is seldom among you, those who care for the Word of God!... And why should I complain against those who are not present, when even those who are, are not listening as they should <sup>1</sup>?!]

(The scholar Origen)

## **8- THE LORD GRANTS US THE SWEETNESS OF THE SPIRIT:**

*“Behold, I long for Your precepts; Revive me in Your righteousness” (40)*

It did not stop at his love for the commandments, but it went even further to have his heart burning with love, that turned into a holy lust to recognize, practice, and teach it.

❖ He says: [As much as I long for Your precepts, Revive me according to Your righteousness; And reward me, not on account of that I have consummated Your commandments, but because I am burning with the love of them.

As the Righteousness of the Father is the Son; Whoever intends to live in the Son, is committed to utter these words: “For In it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith” (Romans 1: 17).

(The scholar Origen).

❖ For the righteousness of God, according to the blessed Paul, is our Lord Jesus Christ; He who, lovingly, keeps the commandments of God, will find eternal life through our Savior Jesus Christ.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

## **God, the Leader, the Teacher, and the Guide:**

God, who has created the heart, He alone can enter into it, present to it His law, and guide it in His royal way (33). He can grant it the obedience, and the good will, until it reaches the ultimate end.

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<sup>1</sup> In Gen, hom. 10: 1; PG 12: 215.

God grants us the understanding (34), to perceive the secrets of the commandment, and to respond to it with reason, awareness, joy, and gladness of the heart.

God, alone, can hold the heart fast, guide, and lead it by Himself to His ways, that brings pleasure to the believer. He grants the good will, as well as the good work, yet, not with slothfulness on our part (35).

God leads us along the way of righteousness and love; and not of oppression and covetousness (36).

God sanctifies our senses, particularly our eyes (37); As the holy eyes will also keep the heart holy; whereas, through the slothful eye, the love of vanities will crawl.

God grants us His fear, which is the beginning of every true knowledge (38).

God gives sweetness to the soul in receiving His judgments, even against the reproach of all men.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 (He)**  
**WHO IS A TEACHER LIKE YOU, O WORD OF GOD?!**

- ❖ You, O Divine Teacher, who presented Your law to all Your people;  
Set it, by Yourself, in my depths;  
To make me perceive that it is a personal message directed to me;  
Be my Leader and the Instructor of my soul in the execution of Your law;  
Shade me as a cloud during the day;  
And lighten me like a fire by night.
- ❖ There are a multitude of teachers and guides;  
Yet, who among them can enter into my heart, but You, O Word of God?!  
Who can turn the commandment into work, but You?  
Who can grant my heart the understanding to search Your law, day and night, but You?  
Who is a teacher like You, O Word of God?!
- ❖ Let me pray for the sake of every preacher of the Word, to be granted the understanding by the heavenly Teacher!  
And let every preacher of the Word pray to the heavenly Teacher, to grant His people the understanding!  
The Word of God is the Teacher of the preacher, and the Instructor of the listeners!  
He gives the word of truth to the preacher; and the sweetness of listening to the listener.
- ❖ My possibilities are utterly weak to execute Your commandment;  
You are my heavenly Teacher;  
You work in me to intend, and to work for the sake of Your pleasure;  
Holding my right hand, You provoke in me the love of Your judgments;  
And You enlarge my heart to consummate Your commandments.
- ❖ The covetousness is killing me; and the love of the world is destroying my soul.  
Incline my heart to Your testimonies;  
To make me a martyr, and dead to the world;  
Let me be crucified together with You, to live by You, O my Good Teacher!

❖ Enlighten my eyes, to keep them from concentrating upon the vain temporal things;  
Let them meditate in Your cross, and rejoice in Your resurrection;  
Open my eyes up, but not on evil, as it was with our early parents, but to behold Your salvation;  
Turn my mind away from the world to Your kingdom;  
Let me not look backward, so as not to become a pillar of salt like Lot's wife;  
Indeed, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

## **6- WAW**

# **THE TESTIMONY TO THE WORD OF GOD (41 – 48)**

The psalmist found in God Himself, the Leader and the Guide, who plants inside him the law of the New Covenant (33); grants him the wisdom and understanding (34), and the strength to keep it with his whole heart; inclines his heart to Him, not to the love of the world (36); opens up his insight on the truth, instead of on vanity (37); grants him the fear of God; and takes away from him the reproach of sin (38).

Now, How was the psalmist's response to the divine Teacher? ... He experiences the divine salvation that comes out of the mercies of God and His free grace; and not because of his self-righteousness;... By bearing the true testimony to the gospel of Christ, even before those who reproach and disturb him; by testifying by his mouth which utters only the truth, by his whole life keeping the law of God, by his enlarged heart and his love for all, and by his courage to testify before everyone. In all that, he perpetually lifts up his hands toward the commandment, with which he entered into a relationship of friendship, supporting him in his spiritual life, and helping him to testify to the evangelic truth.

<b>1- The testimony and salvation</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>2-The testimony and those who reproach</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>3- The testimony and the steadfastness in the truth</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>4- The testimony and keeping the commandment</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>5- The testimony and love</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>6-The testimony and courage</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>7- The testimony and friendship with the commandment</b>	<b>47, 48</b>

### **1- THE TESTIMONY AND SALVATION:**

The testimony of the believer to the work of God, is set upon his own enjoyment of His amazing salvation, set upon the giving love of God, and His infinite mercies. Hence the psalmist starts his praise here, concerning the testimony, by seeking God's mercies, or the enjoyment of the Savior Messiah. Having experienced God's mercies, new every day, yet, anticipating longingly, the coming of the Son of David who will proclaim the infinite divine mercies through the work of the cross; he prays to God, saying:

***“Let Your mercies come also to me, O Lord – Your salvation according to Your Word” (41)***

There is no security for man more than his humility before God, seeking His divine mercies to enjoy the eternal salvation – the salvation granted by the hope in the forgiveness of his past sins; and the trust in God’s support in the present, to walk in the royal way, and to enjoy the eternal glory, together with strength to oppose evil.

❖ After saying “***Your mercies***”, he directly added: “***Your salvation***”. For once You cover me with Your mercies, I shall enjoy Your salvation.

The expression “***the mercy of the Lord***”, truly means “***the salvation which He gives***”

The psalmist was right to start his prayer, not by seeking the salvation which God grants, then His mercies; but to take the opposite sequence.

If I am saved, it is according to God’s mercy, and not according to my own works.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ It is befitting of us to wonder whether all that refer to the Word of God; Christ who is God’s mercy and salvation. We are therefore, committed to seek in our prayer, God’s mercy, and His salvation, according to His mercy. As, once the mercy covers us, we are saved. By that we respond to those who have reproached us, as being denied the mercy of the Lord and His salvation.

**(St. Dedyms the blind)**

❖ Mercy and salvation are referred to our Lord Jesus Christ, who, for the sake of the abundance of His mercies, He came incarnate, to give salvation to mankind.

Inspired that the Son of God will come incarnate for the sake of the salvation of the world, the psalmist, through his human nature supplicates God, saying: “***Let Your mercies come also to me, O Lord; Your salvation according to Your word to Your prophets***”.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem):**

❖ For what does he pray, except that, through the mercies filled with love of him who presented the commandments, he could consummate those commandments which he desires?!

**(St. Augustine)**

Now, as the incarnate Word of God has already come, and proclaimed the mercies to perfection, presenting to us the free salvation; We should raise the same supplication: “**Let Your mercies come...**”.

The Lord Christ has come once, to present salvation to the whole world; and He will perpetually come to dwell in the hearts of His believers, proclaiming Himself a Savior of every believer. Hence the psalmist confirms: “**Let Your mercies come also to me, O Lord**”. Namely, I, personally, is in need of Your mercy, and of the enjoyment of Your salvation, working in me.

With every morning the savior has His personal role in the life of the believer, who, every day counts that he recognizes Him for the first time.

To testify to the salvation work of God, the psalmist needs God, not only as a Teacher and a Leader (33-40), but he seeks Him, as well, as a personal Savior, out of His divine mercies. Feeling his ignorance, the psalmist sought from God, his Teacher, the understanding and the leadership of his depths. And feeling sin, he sought from Him mercies and free salvation; not for the sake of his self-worthiness, but according to His words, namely to His divine promises, uttered by His prophets.

And as his enjoyment of mercies and salvation, would stir the devil up against him, he seeks from the Lord, as well, the strength to help him testify to Him in such an horrible atmosphere.

## **2- THE TESTIMONY AND THOSE WHO REPROACH:**

As God’s mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3: 23), there would be, as well, opponents and those who reproach every day. The believer would need to hide in the crucified Word of God, who, alone, can overcome the devil, and corrupt all his evil tricks. The psalmist, feeling that the Word of God is his only weapon against the enemy, and that the secret of his strength and riches, he enjoys by faith, through the experience of salvation he enjoys by the mercies of God. He says:

**“So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me; for I trust in Your word” (42)**

❖ When I have Your mercy and salvation, according to Your word; I shall have an answer for those who reproach me, revealing to them that he, who has such doctrines, would never be put to shame. To he “aliens to faith”, who consider these doctrines as foolishness, I shall confirm that they are actually, full of reason and wisdom.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ Having qualified me for the grace of Your mercy and salvation, I can debate against those who reproach our faith, and ridicule our leaning on You and trusting in Your words; And we can respond to them by a clear and convincing proof.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Those who count the crucified Christ as an offense and ignorance, by which they reproach us; they do not know that “The Word has incarnated and dwelt among us”, and that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1: 1). ... I wish You are not terrified or disturbed by their reproach.

**(St. Augustine)**

The believer presents his proofs, not through barren debate, but through the power of the Spirit. As the gladness of his salvation, the increasing fruit of the Spirit in him, the satisfaction of his soul, and the exultation of his heart, are all things that the atheists could not oppose.

Having experienced the sweetness of salvation, the psalmist perceived that, by the help of the Lord, he is capable of confronting the slanders of the enemy. But being more preoccupied with his inner testimony to the Savior, through his steadfastness in the truth to the end, he seeks from God his Savior, not to deny his mouth the utterance of the truth, nor from his life the experience of salvation.

### **3- THE TESTIMONY AND THE STEADFASTNESS IN THE TRUTH:**

Lest man would assume that, once he experiences the sweetness of salvation, he would enjoy it forever, the psalmist confirms the necessity of keeping steadfast in Christ, namely in the continuous strife, leaning upon the free grace; and consummates his supplication by saying:

***“And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for I have hoped in Your ordinances” (43)***

The psalmist seeks from God to settle down His Word in his mouth, to let him bear wisdom and courage, together with holiness, to testify to the Word of God for the edification of his brethren, and to justify his living faith. Having coveted to hide the word of God in his heart, to love, to keep, and to meditate in it; Now he recites it with his mouth, to preach it with his tongue, as well as by his holy life.

❖ He utters this phrase, on account of that, he who has received “the utterance of the truth”, God would probably take it out of his mouth, if he becomes unworthy of it.

It is also said: “*Do not neglect the gift that is in you*” (1 Timothy 4: 14). Negligence may happen, not only in planting the gift, or in not making it grow, but when it does not conform to man’s practical life.

On another aspect, we may wonder, whether the utterance of the truth may only be taken out of the mouth, and not out of the heart as well, until the change (the repentance) is confirmed, on account of the presence of the “utterance of the truth”, which man has once got.

It is said: “To the wicked, God says: ‘What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth?’” (Psalm 49 (50): 16)

. He did not say: “.. *to (think) about my statutes ...*”.

If the sinner persists on his sin, the “utterance of the truth” may probably be taken out of his heart, having become darkened, and blinded to the knowledge of the truth.

We have also to explain the meaning of taking “the word of the truth utterly”; for the text is very vague. It probably means that, even if You take it out of my mouth, Do not take it out utterly; Or it may mean that the Word which is already in me, keep it in me, and do not take it out of my mouth.

Having hoped in Your ordinances, and having put my hopes in them; my hope continuously increase; for the word of truth in my depths, makes me hope in Your ordinances.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ In case it so happens one day, that I find difficulty to interpret the divine care, and I cannot give an answer that takes away the controversies in those who stir up the problem, Graciously, O Lord, give me Your Word that proclaims the truth at the opening of my mouth; “Take not the word of truth utterly of my mouth”..

To become able to talk one way or another, about these difficult issues, “I have hoped in Your ordinances”; namely, hoped in Your balanced and well-experienced words; those ordinances through which You ordain men and care for them.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

According to St. Augustine, it is the Lord Christ who talks here, from whose mouth the word of truth will never be taken out; and the church – His body – who utters the truth in this world, as well as in the

world to come; and the congregation of saints, being members in the body of Christ.

- ❖ This law should be understood according to the saying of the apostle: “Love is the perfection of the law” ; that is why it is kept by the saints, from whose mouth the word of truth is not taken out; Namely, through the church of Christ herself, not only in this world, and not even at the end of time, but in the endless world to come,

(St. Augustine)

#### **4- THE TESTIMONY AND KEEPING THE COMMANDMENT:**

He, who has hope in God’s ordinances, and perceives His divine care even in the moments of affliction, will keep the commandment, and hold fast to it. And by that, his testimony will be true, practical, and perpetual. Hence the psalmist says:

*“So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever” (44)*

- ❖ He says: *“I shall keep Your law”*. He will not keep it sometimes, and forsake it some other times; ... He will even keep it in this life, as well as in the life to come.

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- ❖ Your law will perpetually be kept, not only in this world, but forever.... the law that was kept by the Jews through the shadows, we are committed to keep forever through the good things to come.

(The scholar Origen)

The testimony to the Word of God:

To testify to the Word of God, the believer is committed to:

Personally enjoy the Word of God, the Grantor of salvation; Namely, to enjoy the Lord Christ, who proclaimed the divine mercies through His salvation work, which He previously promised through the prophets (41).

Being supported against the devil and his hosts, by the enjoyment of the gladness of salvation, its joyful fruits, and the strength of the spirit (42).

Continually enjoy the salvation of God to the end (43), supporting him to testify to the work of the Savior.

The testimony is realized by the inner gladness in the salvation, and by talking about the work of God, as well as by the enlargement and width of the heart (45); by courage even before kings (41); liberated from all fear.

By entering into a relationship of friendship with the Word of God, by raising his hands in supplication, together with the practical behavior.

## **5- THE TESTIMONY AND LOVE:**

As the testimony is eternal, the true believer perpetually keeps it, testifies to it before himself, and before the others by his practical behavior. Although the way of this commandment is difficult and narrow, yet it gives the enlargement and width of the heart to all, even to the adversaries. Whereas the way of evil, though broad and wide, yet it gives the heart selfishness and narrowness.

***“And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts” (45)***

❖ He who loves God would not be hesitant in confronting all kinds of afflictions and sorrows; and would not be disturbed, but would be joyful, and have an enlarged and wide heart; for love perseveres, and seeks goodness,

“Love does not envy, does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13: 4 – 5)... Hence the apostles Paul wrote to the Corinthians, saying: “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus, also be manifested in our body...” (2 Corinthians 4: 8-10).

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ “He ***“will walk at liberty”***, even if he is afflicted; as it is written: “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed” (2 Corinthians 4: 8).

The apostle Paul says concerning himself, and accusing the Corinthians: “You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your affections” (2 Corinthians 6: 12). For the wicked is restricted in himself by his evil deeds. whereas the psalmist says: ***“I walk in liberty”***; then, to clarify why he walks in liberty, he adds: ***“for I seek Your precepts”*** (45).

**(The scholar Origen)**

## **6- THE TESTINONY AND COURAGE:**

Through the enlargement of heart enjoyed by the psalmist by the divine grace, he practices the commandments with the gladness of heart, and finds no more pleasant talk, even in the presence of the elites, than

the testimony to the commandment of the Lord, and His salvation work, for both his and their benefit.

After talking about the enlargement of the heart by love, even in the time of affliction, the psalmist was not ashamed to proclaim his courage in testifying to the commandment before kings; as it would be irresponsible to have courage without love; and love exhorts man to testify to the truth with no fear. A living example of this is the stand of three young men in the land of captivity who were accused of not paying due regard to the king (see Daniel 3: 12). With great courage they said to the king: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and will deliver us from your hand. Let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3: 17, 18)..The apostles Peter and John, addressing the Jewish Sanhedrin, also said” We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4: 20).

***“I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed” (46)***

In a message sent to Emperor Theodosius, **St. Ambrose** says that he could not keep quiet, for that would be dangerous for both of them; And that although the emperor feared God, yet he was committed not to pervert from His precepts.

❖ An emperor is committed not to reject the liberty of speech; nor a priest to refrain from uttering the truth. The good leader loves freedom, whereas the bad seeks submission and complete servitude. And the most dangerous thing for a priest is to refrain from proclaiming, with complete freedom, the things pertaining to God, for the sake of his congregation; according to the words of the psalmist: ***“I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed”*** (46); and of the words of God to the prophet Ezekiel: “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; ... when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity; ... because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, ... but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless, if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul” (Ezekiel 3: 17, 20, 21) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St, Ambrose)**

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 40: 2.

❖ I clearly addressed the most compassionate emperor Theodosius, and did not hesitate to proclaim to him the word of truth; ... He graciously received my words, for he knew that what I said was not for my own benefit, but for the sake of both of us (46) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ That is how should be the daring of those who bear the cross. ... Let us follow this example; For, although the time is not that of war, yet it is of courage in proclaiming the truth, according to the words of the psalmist: ***“I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed”*** (46). ... If we find ourselves among heathens, let us close their mouths shut, without anger or violence<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ A strife for the sake of truth should be even to death; without shame even before kings.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ A sign of your love for God, is to speak of His testimonies before kings, with daring and courage; the way the apostles and martyrs did. Our works and words should be befitting of the King of kings talking in us; We should speak of His testimonies with love and confidence, not with boredom or slothfulness.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ He who does not speak the word of good news with courage, would be speaking with shame; whereas he who says: “I speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed”, utters what is worthy of glory, and not of shame.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ We may truly apply this text to those who are brought before governors and kings as witnesses to the name of Christ (Mathew 10: 18). And may apply it as well to those who open up their mouths before the saints (who are truly kings in their spirits), speaking of God’s testimonies.

He who refuses to attach himself to the dust, and intends to live according to the Word of God, namely, according to the inspired Holy divine Scripture , would seek the divine help to live. Together with uttering the words of the Lord, his good works and behavior would support his words.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 57: 4.

<sup>2</sup> The Acts of the Apostles, hom. 17.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ Having reached the maximum level of affliction, and having become persecuted by the tyrants; I seek to be saved according to the promise of God, “to draw me out of many waters” (Psalm 18: 16).

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

## 7- THE TESTIMONY AND FRIENDSHIP WITH THE COMMANDMENT:

Finally, the psalmist, in his testimony, does not consider the commandment as commands to be obeyed and not to be rejected, but as a being, with whom he deals, meditates, entreats by lifting up his arms in prayer, and enters into a relationship of friendship and love; saying:

*“And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love. My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate in Your statutes” (47, 48)*

It is obvious that he talks about the commandment as being “the Word of the living God”, with whom he enters into a relationship of love, and to whom he prays.

**Lifting up the hands** is an old, natural, and time-respected rite of worship, that refers to supplication; as well as to work according to the commandment, by the right arm, as well as by the left arm; Namely, in our spiritual worship, and our daily behavior; Or in the time of comfort, as well as in that of affliction. The psalmist directs his heart toward the divine commandments by the perpetual prayers, together with the continuous strife; according to his words in another psalm: “Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your Holy sanctuary” (Psalm 28: 2).

- ❖ The goal of finding delight in the commandments of God is to act according to them

He who says: “I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love”, directly adds: *“My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments , which I love”*. How beautiful it would be to find delight in the commandments, understand their meanings, then lift up our arms to do according to them.

We should not consummate the commandments “grudgingly, or of necessity” (2 Corinthians 9: 7), but with joy.

Finding delight in them, and acting according to them, we should, as well, “talk of them” (Deuteronomy 6: 7); hence he adds: *“And I will meditate in Your statutes” (48)*; Namely, that because of my love

of Your commandments, I will not cease talking of them; “I will greatly delight myself in Your commandments, which I love”

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ Commenting on these two verses, **St. Augustine** says: [The psalmist loved God’s commandments because “he walked at liberty”, namely, by the Holy Spirit, through whom love spreads and the hearts of believers become enlarged. ... He loved them by both his mind and work. Concerning the mind, he says: “I will delight”, and concerning work, he says: “My hands also I will lift up” ].
- ❖ He who walk according to God’s commandments, his soul will get attached to God Himself; Whereas he who disobeys them, his soul will attach to the dust, and will become earthly. As it came in the Book of Deuteronomy: “You shall fear the Lord Your God; You shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast” (Deuteronomy 10: 20).

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

He who gets rich after being utterly poor, cannot help but keep watching his treasures, and the eyes of his heart would never separate from them.... A young man, likewise, keeps meditating in God’s commandments which he hides in his heart; And in his perpetual meditation in them, he would understand them more and more, day after day, with new depths, to become eventually the subject of his meditations and delight day and night.

In other words, discovering his riches with the commandments, man would practice a life of perpetual meditation, that would not separate from his practical life, by.:

Meditating in the commandment.

Understanding them by the Spirit of God dwelling in him.

Contemplating in them with great delight.

Testifying to them, daringly, and without fear.

Never forgetting them; Namely, no one, or anything, would draw his mind and memory away from them.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 6 WAW  
BY YOUR COMMANDMENT, I TESTIFY TO YOUR MERCY  
AND SALVATION**

- ❖ I saw You, O my Good Teacher, granting me the understanding,  
together with the holy will;  
Now, I see You, the Merciful, and the Savior of sinners;  
Have mercy on me, and save me according to Your true promises to  
me.
  
- ❖ The wicked, those who cannot endure Your salvation, oppress me;  
But, by Your commandment working in me, I can overcome them;  
Take not the word of truth, utterly out of my mouth;  
Nor from my life the experience of Your salvation;  
To be able to destroy the slanders of the enemy, by both words and  
work;  
Your commandment, which I hide in my heart, is proclaimed now by  
my mouth and by my life;  
What I utter with my mouth testify to what live and do.
  
- ❖ By keeping Your commandment, I perpetually and forever testify;  
It is my perpetual constitution;  
In the present life, as well as in the life to come;  
I would never hold fast to it sometimes, and disregard it some other  
time;  
For Your words are steadfast and unchangeable forever.
  
- ❖ My testimony to Your commandment is not by mental debate;  
But by the enlargement of the heart with love for all;  
I will walk at liberty to bear all in my heart  
For I love Your commandment.
  
- ❖ Grant me to testify to Your commandments with courage before the  
elites;  
And mix my courage with love, so as not to be arrogant.
  
- ❖ Grant me to love Your commandments;  
And to enter into a relationship of love with them;

Let us become mutual companions  
Let no one or anything destroy my friendship with them  
By that I would testify to them, a testimony of a friend to another.

## 7 ZAYIN

# YOUR WORDS HAVE COMFORTED ME IN MY HUMILITY

(49 – 56)

In the last stichon, the psalmist talked about his testimony to the commandment or to the Word of God, by prayer and words, together with work, specially through the enlargement of his heart, or his love for his adversaries, by the spirit of courage, and not of submission. And he ended his talk by revealing his delight in the commandment, and his enjoyment of a relation of friendship and of great love for it. Now, perceiving that he is a stranger on earth, and fallen under affliction and weakness, he finds in the divine commandment his comfort; and finds in the Word of God his settlement amid the tribulations.

1- Comfort in death	49, 50
2- Comfort in afflictions	51, 52
3- Comfort in ministry	53
4- Comfort in personal worship	54 – 56

### 1- COMFORT IN DEATH:

*“Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life” (49, 50)*

If I am living in the world of sojourn in strong affliction; the secret of my comfort are your promises that lift the believer up from affliction, and give him life; as God opens before him the door of hope in the eternal life.

❖ You said that You will give salvation to those who keep Your commandments, and will punish those who do not. And we, as well, say that You, O Lord, have promised to be with us always to the end of time; and by so saying, You have redeemed our will and our trust in You. Now, Remember Your word to Your servant, and fulfill Your promises, by which I find comfort in my affliction, and which give me life. For the word of God, if kept by man and consummated by work, his life will have the life pertaining to the soul, namely, the eternal life.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- ❖ Having desired the heavenly things, and sought the eternal, Your ‘Word’ of promise, has given us wings to support us, so as not to care for the present world; and to keep striving, and persisting on seeking the fulfillment of that promise.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ What are the “words” he seeks from God to “remember”, but the promise he gave to His disciples “*I am with you always to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28: 20); which was to them a great comfort amid the persecutions?!

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- ❖ What does he mean by: “*my comfort in my affliction*”?

It is the hope I had by Your words, that gave me courage even if I go through danger, illness, death, loss of wealth, or persecution, etc. My hope in You is my comfort in my affliction.

It is an age of tribulations and temptations, when the soul is humiliated and forsaken to strive against the adversary hosts...Hence, Your words give me life; For nothing revives the soul like the Word of God; the more of which man perceives and his soul receives, the more life will grow in him; the good life here in this world, to be followed by the eternal life by God.

The psalmist started his supplication to God, the Grantor of comfort by reminding Him of His divine promises. God will never forget His promises, Yet he seeks from us to remind Him; for by this, our trust in Him, and our faith in the truth of His promises, would be renewed, and we would respond to *His* love. We are not reminding Him of our ministry, strife, or our righteousness, but of His promises and covenants with us. By such a spirit, the repentant right-hand robber cried out saying: “*Lord, remember be when You come to Your kingdom*” (Luke 24: 42). It is a cry-out of someone who trusts in the love of his Savior, and confesses his own unworthiness. With the same spirit, the prophet David says: “*Now, O Lord, the word which You have spoken, concerning Your servant, and concerning his house, let it be established forever, and do as You have said*” (1 Chronicles 17: 23). It is as though he says: [I know You are faithful in Your promises, and will never break Your word; You have promised; And I am full of hope that You are capable of saving even to death; And here I am living by Your word].

The psalmist finds satisfaction for all his needs in God’s love and His true promise; He who raises from the dead, and gives life. Outside the divine promise, the psalmist feels affliction, and says: “*This is my comfort in my affliction*”...

Nothing would take my affliction away except Your divine promise! He probably refers here to that God looks at the humble, and lifts up the humble souls

- ❖ We get hope from God, to whom we say: *“Upon which You caused me to hope”* (49) <sup>1</sup>
- ❖ By “hope”, I mean that hope which is given to the humble, according to the Holy Scripture, saying: *“God resist the proud, and gives grace to the humble”*.

**(St. Augustine)**

## **2- COMFORT IN AFFLICTIONS:**

If sin causes me to lose hope in the eternal life; The Word of God, having come to grant it to me, I have no more fear of the troubles and afflictions of this present time.

I find comfort in Your words; but the proud ridicule me, counting my hope in Your promise, my trust in Your word, and my faith in You, deceptive and frail things. Yet I shall certainly consummate my sojourn, and proceed with my caravan, not caring for the barks of the dogs.

*“The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from Your law. I remembered Your judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself”* (51, 52)

- ❖ By disregarding Your law, O Lord, the proud not only commit iniquity, but they also ridicule those who do. But I, keeping on holding fast to it, and remembering how, of the old, You have sometimes allowed for Your believers to fall into tribulations; and how You hastened to deliver and to glorify them; I comforted myself.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ The proud have greatly ridiculed Your law, yet I never turned aside from it. You have ordained my life, and kept my spirit, *“lest there be a wicked thought in my heart”* contrary to the law (see Deuteronomy 15: 9).
- ❖ Let us also meditate in the words uttered by the blessed apostle Paul that, remembering the judgments of God of old, would give comfort to everyone, that he no more would know sorrow or anxiety; saying: *“I consider that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be*

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons N.T Lessons, 55: 5.*

*compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8: 18).*

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ Intending to let the proud understand that they are the persecutors of the pious, the psalmist adds: *“Yet I do not turn aside from Your law”*; something the proud attempted to commit him to do.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Although the heretics glorify themselves by breaking the law; yet I would never cease to meditate in it without the slightest weakness, nor hesitate to receive it.

**(St. Dedyms the blind)**

- ❖ I find comfort in remembering Your judgments of old against the persecutors of Israel, for then, I know that I shall never be forsaken during persecutions; and that all what happen to man are according to the judgments of God.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

The psalmist does not seek from God the destruction of the proud adversaries, who persecute him for keeping the commandments of God, but seeks from Him to keep him from perversion because of them, and from turning aside from the royal way, to the right or to the left. He seeks from God to make him preoccupied with the comfort given to him by the Holy Spirit, and to make him care for the judgments of God. It is as though he says: [I do not want to be preoccupied with the negatives, namely with the charges directed against me, but with the positives, namely, with meditating in Your judgments, and enjoying Your comforts; For by that, I do not give the wicked a chance to realize their intentions against me].

When the wicked Sanballat and Geshem tried to preoccupy Nehemiah from the positive work, by engaging him in theoretical debates, to waste his time instead of building anew the walls of Jerusalem, he sent to them messengers, saying: *“I am doing a great work, so I cannot come down; Why should the work ceases while I leave it and go down to you?”* (Nehemiah 6: 3). They kept sending him the same words several times, and he kept sending the same answer back to them.

Let the wicked do as they wish, and let them use all the ways of violence, threats, or deceptive sweet words. For in all that, the believer keeps walking in his royal way, the way of the commandment, and would never turn aside from it to the right or to the left. In this he would

be supported by the dealings of God with His children since the beginning of the history of mankind: ***“I remembered Your judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself”*** (52).

Since man was created, God remained faithful in His promises to His people, and has never forsaken His believers. He also did not let the rod of the wicked come down on the portion of the righteous. ... He previously covered the wicked by the great flood; confused the tongues of the people of Babel; cause Pharaoh and his soldiers to drown in the Red Sea ... In short, ***“He who sits in heaven shall laugh, the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure”*** (Psalm 2: 4,5).

Meditation in God’s dealings in both the Old and the New testaments, and in the history of the church along the generations, gives us much comfort, that we should have no fear from the evil plots and threats of the proud.

### **3- COMFORT IN MINISTRY:**

God’s judgments against the proud, who persist on persecuting the pious, holding fast to His commandments, fills the heart of the psalmist with divine comfort. He does not adopt the position of gloat, but that of grief on their fallen souls; he moans with indignation, on account of that they insult God, the Source of salvation, glorify the devil the deceptive and the destroyer, as well as they destroy themselves. In his indignation, hoping for their return in repentance to God, he says:

***“Indignation has taken hold of me because of the wicked who forsake Your law”*** (53)

❖ When the righteous see someone of the children of the law, disobey it, grief and indignation take hold of them; for, when a member of the body suffers, all the other members suffer together with him.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ Many among the wicked sin without the law (Romans 2: 12), for they do not know it; and many others sin in the law, for, by breaking it, they insult it. Indignation has taken hold of me for the sake of the sinners who forsake Your law. ***“When one member of the body suffers, all the other members suffer together with it; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it”*** (1 Corinthians 12: 26). Therefore, it is befitting of us to follow the lead of the blessed psalmist, and suffer for the sake of our sinning brethren.

**(St. Dedyms the blind)**

❖ He who sheds warm tears on the sins of his neighbor, will, himself be healed by his grief on him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Basil the Great)

❖ Let us then shed tears for their sake, not one day, but all the days of our life<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### 4- COMFORT IN PERSONAL WORSHIP:

Looking at the proud who persist on not repenting, the heart of the psalmist gets filled with grief and indignation, not fearing of them, but on them. He longs to see them enjoy the inner glory, and the comfort and sweetness of the Word of God. Amid these sufferings that take hold of his ministering soul, longing for the salvation of all, The psalmist perceives that, entering into the depth of the commandment will bring back to him his joy and exultation amid his feeling of sojourn. He finds the commandment turn into a praise of love that brings him forth to the inner joy, with the exultation of the heart, and the praise of the mouth.

By the 'songs' in verse (54), he probably means a lamentation full of hope; according to his words: "*Do not be silent at my tears, for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were*" (Psalm 39: 12). Any way, as a king, dwelling in a royal palace, David always anticipated the time of his departure from this world; and this feeling turned his sufferings into psalms.

*"Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (54)*

❖ The world for the righteous is called "*a house of pilgrimage*", for in it, they dwell as strangers who always care for their return to their real home in eternity, where the statutes of God are their songs.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

According to **St. Augustine**, this verse is uttered by the believer while he is in the land of sojourn; having departed from paradise, and from the higher Jerusalem, and gone down to 'Jericho', where the robbers attacked and wounded him; but our Christ "the Good Samaritan" passed by him, and presented to him the divine commandments, a praise of the divine mercies that brought joy to his heart while in "the house of his pilgrimage". While grieving on those who forsake the law of God,

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<sup>1</sup> PG 31: 257 D.

<sup>2</sup> In Epis, ad Phil. 3: 4.

his soul exults and anticipates the day of the reward, when the wheat is separated from tares.

The wicked may rejoice in the tribulation of the others, and may exult for some time; but their joy will eventually turn into bitterness. The saints, on the other hand, grieve on the perdition of the wicked, and sing for God's work with them, turning their tribulation to glories.

If our temporal life, compared to the eternal life, is counted as a dark night, because of what we suffer of afflictions, weaknesses, and alienation from the Lord – the Sun of Righteousness; Yet, remembering God's commandment, promises, and judgments, will bring forth into us the inner joy, when we enjoy the righteousness of Christ.

***“I remember Your name in the night, O Lord, and I keep Your law. This has become mine, because I kept Your precepts” (55, 56)***

While all were sleeping by night, the prophet David used to keep awake remembering the name of the Lord, as his support and the subject of his exultation.

If the wicked world has turned David's life into a dark night through suffering, yet he knew how to go through that night in peace, by holding fast to the name of the Lord.

While the wicked were preoccupied with setting evil plots in the darkness, David, on the other hand, cared to hold fast to the name of the Lord, his Savior from all temptations.

❖ We actually need to remember the name of the Lord all the time, particularly when darkness surrounds us; namely, when a defiled lust happens to enter into our souls, and threatens to make us lose our mind. Then, we are committed to remember God's teachings concerning self-control.

On another aspect, with a symbolic interpretation of what is said, convenient times (the times of joy), are to be counted as 'daylight', whereas the times of affliction are counted as 'darkness'.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ The night is a state of failure, with troubles of corruption.... The night for the proud, is the time of practicing evil to a great extent....The night is the time of fear on the wicked who forsake the law of God; ... Finally, the night is 'the house of pilgrimage', until the Lord comes; sheds light on the hidden corners of the darkness; proclaims the counsels of the hearts; and when the commendation of every man is from God.... Hence, in that night, it is befitting of man

to remember the Lord's name; that "*whoever boasts, let him boast in the Lord*".

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ For your spiritual benefit, it would not be enough to listen to the divine sermons in the church, But, while among your households at home, you should partake of the holy readings for hours by night; so that you may gather the spiritual wheat in the storehouses of your hearts, and the jewels of the Holy Book in your souls. And when the time comes for you to stand in the divine court before the tribunal held by the eternal Judge in the final day, you would be, according to the apostle: "clothed and not naked"<sup>1</sup>.

### **Comforts of the word of God:**

1- Are not set upon our self-worthiness, but upon the promises of God, and His Word, the Giver of life (49, 50); saying, together with the apostle: "*For I know whom I have believed*" (2 Timothy 1: 12); And trusting in the saying of the Savior:

*"I will not leave you orphans"* (John 14: 18).

2- We would not be troubled by the oppression of the proud wicked, but would positively care, not to turn aside from God's judgments, to the right (by self-righteousness), or to the left (by falling into sins); and think about the joyful comforts of God (51).

3- We would not grieve on being ridiculed by the proud wicked, but grieve for perceiving their destiny and perdition (53).

As for ourselves, perceiving that their ridicule will turn into our glory, His judgments concerning us would turn into joyful praises, that support us in the days of our sojourn (54).

4- As the world has become like a dark night because of the oppression of the wicked; it is befitting of us to wake up, and not to sleep like the others; to remember the name of the Lord, and to keep His law (55). While the wicked find their pleasure in noisy parties all along the night, the saints, on the other hand, find comfort in the spiritual watching, in their fellowship with God, and in their continuous life of praise.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 7: 1.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 (7 Zayin)**  
**LET YOUR PROMISES COMFORT ME IN MY AFFLICTION**

- ❖ I remind You, O Lord, of Your promises;  
That You will be always with me to the end of ages;  
Your promises are wings by which my soul would fly up to settle  
down in Your heavens.  
I will not care for afflictions;  
I will even find comfort in death;  
For I long to encounter You  
What could afflict me, as long as You realize Your promises to me?!
- ❖ Your comforts preoccupy me;  
They so support me, that I would not covet evil for my enemies;  
They lift me up above all events;  
I do not seek revenge against sinners;  
But my soul moans for the sake of their salvation;  
I weep for their sake, not for one day, or even for several days, but all  
my life.
- ❖ Your comforts confirm to me my sojourn;  
I would not completely settle down, until I find for myself a place in  
the divine bosoms;  
I am wounded by the wayside;  
Come, O Good Samaritan, and carry me on Your shoulders;  
Bring me forth to Your church, which is Your inn;  
There, You would care for my needs, until You come on the great  
day.
- ❖ I shall remember Your name, which brings comfort to my soul;  
By night, the wicked set their evil plans of oppression;  
And by night I anticipate Your coming, O the secret of my comfort'  
By Your Holy Name, the night of my life will pass by, to bring me  
forth to a day with no night;  
And to enjoy Jerusalem, lighted by the Sun of Righteousness who  
will never set.  
While those who ridicule find fun in their parties by night;  
I find in it a chance to watch, and to anticipate Your coming, O  
Eternal Groom.

## 8 HETH

# YOU ARE MY PORTION, O LORD

(57 – 64)

If the commandment is man's comfort in the land of his sojourn; On another aspect it prepares the soul as a bride to encounter her Groom, to receive Him as her portion, and to offer herself a portion to the Lord. Here, the psalmist experiences new depths of the riches of the grace of God that binds him to Him; not only to get His abundant gifts, or to enjoy continuous conquests; but to get God Himself as his portion, to become His own, and to hear the divine words: "*You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them*" (Numbers 18: 20); To which he would respond by singing: "*You, O Lord are the portion of my inheritance and my cup*" (Psalm 16: 5); "*The Lord is my portion, says my soul, Therefore I hope in Him. The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him*" (Lamentations 3: 24, 25).

- 1- By the commandment, we receive God as our portion 57
- 2- By the commandment, we see our heavenly Groom 58
- 3- By the commandment, we walk in the way of the wedding 59
- 4- By the commandment we get prepared for the wedding.60, 61
- 5- By the commandment, we practice the joyful life of the wedding 62
- 6- By the commandment, we practice the collective life of the wedding 63
- 7- By the commandment, we anticipate the day of the Judge Groom 64

### 1- BY THE COMMANDMENT, WE RECEIVE GOD AS OUR PORTION:

The goal of the commandment is to present the Lord as a Groom for our souls, to unite with Him, and to get the fellowship of the divine nature; Namely, to enjoy His features in us, to be prepared for the eternal wedding. His main feature is "love"; He presents Himself a Gift to His beloved; presents His life given as a precious gift, or as a deposit for the wedding, or as a dowry for us; Hence the psalmist says:

*"You are my portion, O Lord; I have said that I would keep Your words"* (57)

❖ The Lord said to Aaron and the Levites: *“You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance”* (Numbers 18: 20)... This was also said concerning all those who reject the worldly possessions, and forsake the earthly things; For the Lord is their portion, and they keep His words, saying: *“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on”* (Matthew 6: 25).

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ He, who forsakes the things of this life, has no portion in the land, and has no desire for it, but is satisfied with the Lord alone instead of all. Such a man would say: *“The Lord is my portion”*, and adds: *“I would keep Your words”*; Namely, I would keep the spiritual law, about which the apostle Paul says: *“We know the law is spirited”* (Romans 7: 14), etc.... How could he have the Lord as his portion, unless he keeps His law?

**(The scholar Origen)**

The prophet David often heard the joyful cry-outs of the conquerors, when they get their portions of the spoils of the battle;

While the cry-outs of His own heart were greater and stronger, for he found in the Lord Himself, the Creator of all, an inheritance for himself, and a greater spoil. He found out that He, who is greater than all the treasures of the world, has become his own possession, and that he, himself, has become the Lord’s possession; something that would never be realized, unless his heart is purified by keeping the commandment, or the spiritual law, which is consummated by love.

The Lord Christ said: *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him”* (John14: 23).

## **2- BY THE COMMANDMENT WE SEE OUR HEAVENY GROOM:**

If the divine commandment motivates us to seek the Lord as our portion, instead of the temporal things; When our heart is burning by our longing for him, we seek to see Him by our insight, namely by our heart; so that through getting mercy, we can later on, see Him face to face. It is as though our love for Him will increase our longing for Him, so as not to find rest until we see Him eternally.

*“I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; Be merciful to me according to Your word”* (58)

❖ The face of God the Father (“His favor” in King James version) is His Son, as we previously said; according to the words of the apostle, ‘*He is the brightness of His glory, and the Image of His person*’ (Hebrew 1: 3). We, Christians, therefore entreat Him with all our hearts in purity; for the pure in heart can see God; We, as well, seek His mercy, according to His Word, namely, according to His promise.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ The face of God is the image of His Person (Hebrew 1: 3). Whoever longs for God’s face, meditates in it by a pure heart, and concentrates his sight on it, will have mercy, according to the words of the Lord (Matthew 5: 8). Such a man can utter the words before us.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

❖ “*Be merciful to me according to Your word*” (58). Mercy should come according to his Word, and not contrary to the law ... “*God is Light*” (John 1: 5); and He is “*consuming fire*” (Deuteronomy 4: 24). He is light for the righteous, and fire for the wicked.

Knowing that nobody is pure of defilement, the prophet David, after committing his grave sin, sought mercy; yet not on present sins, but on previous ones. For “*the word of the Lord*” proclaims forgiveness for the sinners, on condition of having a complete change in the soul, and leaving no *trace* of sin in it.

Without God’s mercy and help, no one can see the face of God, for God reveals Himself to him who seeks mercy.

Anyway, the Holy Book does not mention that anyone has ever seen God (John 1: 18); but it is said that God is (revealed) to the righteous.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ He knows that, at the present time, he cannot see what “*eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man*” (1 Corinthians 2: 9). He knows that God’s glory could not be seen by human eyes<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers)**

The psalmist, does not cease supplicating to see God’s face; In that he does not lean upon his self-righteousness, or upon his own capacities, but according to the promises of God the Merciful. Hence he cries out, saying: “*Be merciful to me according to Your word*”; as

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 118: Heth 7.

though he says: [My heart will remain suffering until it experiences Your mercy which You promised me, that makes me see Your face].

- ❖ The words: “*Be merciful to me*”, here, imply a feeling of deprivation, which would not go away except by the mercy of God, and in whatever way it chooses to be proclaimed. God’s mercies could be proclaimed through His longsuffering and compassion; or through His chastisements; God confirms our salvation by chastisement, for God loves man. The psalmist does not care for the way it is proclaimed, as long as he is within the circle of God’s mercy, that would bring him forth to see God’s face.

(Father Theodoret)

### 3- BY THE COMMANDMENT WE WALK IN THE WAY OF THE WEDDING:

Seeing Him by faith through the purity of heart, we would only think about His royal way, turn our feet to His testimonies; make haste, and do not delay, and make His testimonies the law of our walk and behavior, from which we do not pervert.

*“I thought about (Your) ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies” (59)*

- ❖ I mean to say that I shall always think about Your works; and walk according to Your commandments, being the truth, and good for those who think about them.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- ❖ “*I thought about (my) ways*” (“*my ways*” according to some versions), means that I have never uttered irresponsibly, or without thinking whether I should talk or keep silent; or whether my behavior is befitting or not.

As our ways include thoughts and works, he means to say that he did everything according to reason; and that he “*turned his feet to God’s testimonies*”, so as not to pervert away from them, but was keen to have his will attached to God’s commandments.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ I turned my feet from my own ways, in which I find pleasure; so as to follow Your testimonies, and there, to find their way .... That, rather refers to the grace of God, according to the words of the apostle: “*It is God who works in us*” (Philippians 2: 13).

(St. Augustine)

Almost dying of hunger, not even able to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, the prodigal son “*came to himself*” (Luke 15: 17), to perceive his father’s riches and love. The psalmist, here, with his heart burning for the Lord, his

Portion, started to “*think about His ways*” (59), to rise and go to the house of his heavenly Groom, through walking in God’s testimonies without perversion.

How amazing it is, that the prophet David never hesitated to reconsider his ways every now and then, to turn his feet to the testimonies of the Lord. He felt that, as long as he still lives on this earth, he would be subject to perversion, even a little thereof. He indeed was privileged with an alert and an enlarged heart, which did not cease to reconsider its position every now and then. He was convinced that salvation is realized through the way of continuous repentance; the return to the soul under the leadership of the spirit; and the daily renewal, through turning the feet to the Lord’s testimonies.

#### **4- BY THE COMMANDMENT, WE GET PREPARED FOR THE WEDDING:**

Now, having entered into the royal wedding, Your commandment works in me, to prepare me for the wedding, under all circumstances, even the tough ones; I make haste without delay, enduring any suffering to encounter You, keeping Your commandment.

❖ I made myself ready to endure the temptations that may probably come over me all of a sudden, and may keep me from following Your commandment.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ “*I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandment*” (60)

If we are drawn to the Groom, and if we are prepared and all set for the wedding, as we should, we would make haste and would not delay; lest the adversary hosts would hinder us from keeping the divine commandments; according to the words of the apostle: “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution?*” (Romans 8: 35).

**(The scholar Origen)**

The more I get prepared for the wedding, the more the devil does his best, and uses all his tricks to corrupt my life in the Lord, in an attempt to deny me the enjoyment of the wedding. Hence the psalmist cries out, saying:

***“The cords of the wicked have bound me; but I have not forgotten Your law” (61)***

According to **St. Augustine**, the cords of the wicked refer to the oppression of the enemies, whether the spiritual, like the devil and his hosts; or the carnal like the children of disobedience in whom Satan works to cast strong and rough cords around the righteous, through an allowance of God.

❖ Anything that happens unexpected, would be serious, and may lead even the courageous among men to disturbance. But if man takes into consideration that it may probably happen, that would somewhat alleviate its impact; which is probably the meaning of: *“I thought about my ways”*. That is why the Holy Book, inspired by God, says to those who desire the glory through their holy behavior: *“My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing”* (Sirach 2: 1). ... And that is why the Savior of all, to prepare His disciples for what is to come, kept telling them before hand that He will be crucified and die, once he reaches Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Alexandria)**

❖ What are those cords but the evil thoughts and the evil hosts that fight against the righteous, attempting to keep him away from his steadfastness in God? But these cords they cast around the righteous would come to no avail, as long as he puts all his interest in keeping God’s commandments.

Likewise, the tribulations caused by the wicked to dwell upon the righteous, are counted as their cords, which the righteous endure with courage, when he does not forget the law of God.

Those, as well, who provoke the righteous to commit sin by their deceptive words, cast them around him like cords. But being alert, he would never forget the law of God.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

Let the wicked cast their cords around me; they will never be able to prevail, for He who is with me is greater and mightier than those against me! .. My Savior, who supports me all along the way!

## **5- BY THE COMMANDMENT, WE PRACTICE THE JOYFUL LIFE OF THE WEDDING:**

If the devil exerts all his energies to turn our temporal life into a pitch dark night, to destroy us through evil thoughts and lusts; through

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<sup>1</sup> *Comm.. on Luke.*

the cords cast around us by his wicked followers, and the snares set along our ways; Yet, through enjoying the righteousness of Christ, our nights would turn into thanksgiving, praise, and joy.

***“At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments” (62)***

It does not stop at raising prayers, and supplications; but the prophet David is keen on having a life of thanksgiving in the midst of the night of tribulations and troubles. He does not thank God on account of that He saves him from the temptations, but because of His righteous judgments; turning the temptations into holy blessings. He does not thank God only among his people in the collective worship, but he thanks Him before going to sleep; and rises up from his sleep at midnight – probably – in the colder winter – to give God thanks from the heart, which reveals a secret relationship between him and God, His savior. ... At midnight Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 11: 4). And at midnight the two apostles Paul and Silas praised God and sang hymns to him in the inner prison (Acts 16: 25). And the prophet David says: *“At midnight, in my bed, I meditate in You”*.

**St. Jerome** presented to us these words of the psalmist as an example of the commitment to watch the night praying; saying that the Lord Christ, commands us to *“watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation”* \*Matthew 26: 40, 41); And He, Himself, *“continued all night in prayer to God”* (Luke 6: 12); And the apostles spent their night in prison praising God with psalms, and singing hymns to Him (Acts 6: 12); And the apostle Paul advises us to *“continue earnestly in prayer”* (Colossians 4: 2); and, about himself, Paul says: *“... in sleeplessness”* (2 Corinthians 11: 27). And St. Jerome rebuked ‘Vigilantius’, whose name means (watching), for stubbornly refusing and opposing the idea of watching,

Let ‘Vigilantius’ sleep as deep as he wishes, to perish on the hand of the angel who destroyed Egypt and the Egyptians. As for as, we say together with the prophet David: *“Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep”* (Psalm 121: 4). ... Let the watching Holy One come to find us watching the night; And if He, because of our sins, happens to fall asleep, let us say to Him: *“Awake, Why do You sleep, O Lord?”* (Psalm 44: 23). And whenever our boat is struck by mighty waves, let us wake Him up, saying: *“Lord, Save us, we are perishing”* (Matthew 8: 25; Luke 8: 24) <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 109: 3.

❖ This fact that the cords of the sinner have bound the righteous, is, itself one of God's righteous judgments, about which the apostle Peter says: "*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God*" (1 Peter 4: 17); by which he refers to the persecutions suffered by the church bound by the cords of the sinners. As to saying "*at midnight*" (62), he probably refers to the difficult times of troubles; and saying: "*I will rise*", he means to say that the tribulations have not destroyed him, but have actually revived him, and caused him to grow, and to present a better confession at the time of affliction.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ This teaches us, Christians, to recite the midnight prayer, for the Groom, mentioned in the gospel, comes to the virgins at midnight to bring them forth to his heavenly secret place.

He means to say here, that our time is like a dark night, during which the Lord comes to us at a time we do not expect; We should then be alert, anticipate His coming with the lamps of purity and mercy, and should not slumber, lest we would be left out of the kingdom of God. That is why the two apostles Paul and Silas were praying at midnight in prison.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ By his words, the prophet David intends to say that he never disregards the midnight prayer, rising up from his deep sleep to do it. In the book of Acts we read that the apostles did likewise, And Paul and Silas, while in prison, used to pray and praise God at midnight, and the other prisoners listened to them (Acts 16: 25). For at that time the adversary hosts become more active; and at that time the firstborns of the Egyptians were killed on the hand of the destroyer angel (Exodus 12: 23). On the contrary, the holy hosts become more active at mid day: "*The Lord appeared to Abraham In the heat of the day,... Abraham looked up and saw three men standing near him, whom he received as guests*" (Genesis 18: 1-5). Those events were symbols.

When would the divine apparition be realized, if not at mid day? ... According to the spiritual concept, those who acquire the spirit of Christ, and on them, the true Light shines, are considered as 'day'; whereas those who fall into evil, and on them, corruption prevails, are considered as 'night'. Waking up, therefore, should be at midnight, when the evil hosts choose to work. ... That is why, the psalmist rose, by

both his body and spirit, to thank God because of His righteous judgments.

Believing that the night, and not the day, is the time for temptations and danger; the psalmist did not surrender to the temptations; but God's Word waked up his spirit, to give Him thanks, to confess his sins, and to praise His grace.

Any way, we are committed to thank God for His righteous judgments; for everything comes through God's judgment, whether in this life or in the life to come. Indeed, as all God's judgments proclaim His righteousness, it is befitting of us to thank Him at all times; not only in day time, but at night as well.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ Who could be a Friend, greater than Him who delivered His body for our sake?!

From Him, David sought experiences at midnight (See Luke 11: 5-8), which he got; saying: "*At midnight I gave thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments*" (62). At midnight he got those experiences which became his nourishment; and he did not fear to wake God up, because he knows that "He never slumber nor sleep", but always watches and works.

Let us then, remember what came in the Holy Book, pray day and night, and supplicate for the forgiveness of our sins; For, if such a saint like David, who was responsible for running a kingdom, used to praise God seven times a day (Psalm 119: 164); and to offer sacrifices day and night; how much more should we do, with the multitudes of our falls, because of the weakness of our bodies and spirits; so as not to lack "*the bread which strengthens man's heart*" (Psalm 104: 14, 15); being exhausted by the ways of this world and life<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ Do not let the love of this vain world have dominion over you! ... How could that be, when all are deep asleep, while you are awake praying at midnight?!

Do not be lazy and slothful! ... How could that be, when your souls are alert in such great things?!

After such nights of watching, sweet sleep, and amazing proclamations, will dwell over you!

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<sup>1</sup> In Luc. 11: 5-13.

Let this be done, not only by men, but by women as well. Let our home be like churches that gather both men and women<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

The times of prayer should cover the whole life. Yet, if, at certain times, there is some need to stop worshipping, and singing Psalms, to be preoccupied with other necessities of life, We are committed to keep the hours for praying fixed by the saints. The prophet David says: “*At mid night I will rise to thank You because of Your righteous judgments*”; and, “... *night, morning and mid day*” ; and Paul and Silas follow suit, by praying and singing hymns to God at midnight while in prison (Acts 16: 25)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril, the Great)**

❖ Sleep should not turn into a way to weaken the body, but to give it rest and relaxation after hard work. We should, therefore, sleep, in such a way from which we would easily wake up (See Luke 12: 35-37) ... For there is no use for someone asleep like dead. We should rise at midnight and bless God; for blessed are those who seek Him, and become like angels, whom we call “the watchers”<sup>3</sup>

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

According to **St. Athanasius the apostolic**, the life of saints are like an unceasing feast, and an inner joy. The prophet

David found in the perpetual prayer a joyful feast.

❖ Through such tendencies and behavior, the saints, by their life, were as though in a perpetual feast: Some of them found comfort in praying to God, like David who used to rise at midnight to pray (62); And others were known for their songs of praise, like Moses for his conquest over Pharaoh and his army (Exodus 15); While others were in a state of a perpetual joy, like the blessed Samuel and Elijah<sup>4</sup>.

**(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

## **6- BY THE COMMANDMENT WE PRACTICE THE LIFE OF COLLECTIVE WEDDING:**

It is good for man to practice the life of thanksgiving and praise at midnight in his secret place; Yet he should do that wherever he goes, at home, or in the church. Being a member in the holy congregation,

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<sup>1</sup> *In Acts hom. 26.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Ascetical Discourse.*

<sup>3</sup> *Paidagogus, 2: 9.*

<sup>4</sup> *Paschal Letters, 11.*

what he practices would be in the name of the congregation as a whole, as a companion of those who fear the Lord and who keep His precepts.

***“I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts” (63)***

The prophet David found pleasure in the company of the saints ***“those who fear the Lord”***; feeling that he belongs to them; to the rich, the poor, the elite, the commons, men, women, elders, youth, and children, whom he describes as *“The saints who are on the earth, the excellent ones in whom is all my delight”* (Psalm 16: 3). About the company with the saints in the time of affliction, the apostle Paul says: *“Partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions with those who were so treated”* (Hebrew 10: 33).

❖ Whoever is perfect and righteous would unite in his feelings with all his brethren in faith, would never separate himself from them, and would be able to utter the verse we now interpret.

*“Those who fear the Lord”*, are followed by ***“those who keep His precepts”***; those who are richer in love, for they are partners in the love of God.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ It could be said that the perfect man is a “partner” of Christ, according to the verse: *“We have become partners of Christ”* (Hebrew 3: 14). But the psalmist says: *“I am a companion (or a partner) of those who fear You”* (63); and “of those who, in their fear, keep the divine precepts. A sign of the fear of God is to keep His precepts.

**(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ We, as well, understand the word “partner” as a friend, or a companion; in the same sense that came in the book of Ecclesiastes: *“If they fall, one will lift his companion”* (Ecclesiastes 4: 10).

He probably intends to say: [I am a friend and companion of all those who fear God and who keep His precepts, for I also fear Him and keep His precepts.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

According to **St. Augustine**, the One who talks here, is the Lord Christ who made us His brethren, friends, partners, and even members of His body, through His salvation work.

❖ It concerns the Head Himself, as according to the epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul says: “*For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren*” (Hebrew 2: 11). That is why, in this prophecy, Jesus Himself talks about things that concern His members and the unity of His body, as though of one man, spread all over the world, who appeared subsequently through the ages; And talks about things that concern Him as our Head. Hence the Lord became in the company of His brethren: God with mankind; the Immortal with the mortals; the seed fell to the ground, so that by its death, it would produce a plenty of fruits. About this fruit the psalmist goes on to say: “*The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy*” (64) ... When will this be realized, but when the sinner is justified? ... To grow in this grace, he adds: “*Teach me Your statutes*” (64).

(St Augustine)

## **7- BY THE COMMANDMENT, WE ANTICIPATE THE DAY OF THE JUDGE GROOM:**

Finally, having enjoyed the hope to enter the way of the wedding, and having prepared himself for the wedding with the life of thanksgiving and the worship by the spirit of collective love, The psalmist, partaking of the praises and the tribulations of those who fear God; and they, in turn, partaking of His gladness by the Lord, and of his troubles; he proclaims that he has experienced the mercy of God that filled the whole earth; that was realized through preaching the cross. And now, he anticipates the day of His righteousness; namely, the great day of judgment.

“*The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy; Teach me Your statutes*” (64)

Heaven is full of God’s glory, and earth is full of His mercy, that He pours on all; although only a few perceive it, and know its secrets. Hence the psalmist cries out: “*Teach me Your statutes*”.

❖ Saying: “*The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy*”, is on account of that “*He makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust*” (Matthew 5: 45); And also because the incarnation of His Son has filled the earth of His mercy.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

❖ He prophecies about the future (namely, about the new covenant), saying: “*The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy*”, through those who

fear You; which could not be realized, except because of Your mercy, when You present Yourself a Teacher of mankind (by the cross).

**(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ If we consider all the wicked as infidel, on account of that they justify oppression in their talk; and if we consider the longsuffering of God before this multitude of evil, “*making His sun rise on the evil and the good; and sending His rain on the just and the unjust*”, We may say: “*The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy; Teach me Your statutes*” (64).

God readily teaches those who seek Him, ... He teaches man knowledge.

**(The scholar Origen)**

If the earth refers to the body, the psalmist, having perceived that even his body, with all its feelings, emotions, and possibilities, is sanctified through God’s mercies; he seeks the great day of the Just God, when sets this body, together with the soul, in glory.

### **The Lord is my portion:**

The Word of God is our comfort on the way of our sojourn; We receive Him as a Groom who grants us Himself.

1- The Lord finds pleasure in the heart that keeps His precepts; “*To him He will come, and with him He will make His home*” (John 14: 23); And He presents Himself to the heart that delivers itself to Him – mutual love.

2- Through such mutual possession between God and His bride – the soul that fears Him – the heart burns with longing for Him; and would never find comfort until it sees Him face to face, forever (58).

3- Let us keep our feet on the royal way of the Groom; namely, on the way of repentance, through turning back to the soul under the leadership of the Spirit; and turning the feet to the testimonies of the Lord (59).

4- It is befitting of us to make haste on the royal way, and not to delay (60).

5- We should not care for the cords of the wicked that bind us, in an attempt to seal all the ways to salvation before us; For the Word of God is capable of keeping and protecting us all along the way (61).

6- The way of the Groom is joyful. And if the wicked turn it into a pitch dark night, we shall rise at midnight to praise our Groom with a song of love and an exultant spirit (62).

7- The way of the groom is collective, in which man experiences his personal relationship with the Groom of his soul, being a living member in the church (63).

8- This way is not impossible; for the mercy of God fills the earth (64).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 8 Heth**  
**YOU ARE MY PORTION, O GROOM OF MY SOUL**  
**AND WITH YOU, I SEEK NOTHING MORE**

- ❖ All what is around me testify to God's care for me;  
But Your commandment gives me what is greater;  
It presents You to me, a heavenly Groom;  
You are my Portion; You are mine, and I am Yours;  
What more should I seek, having acquired the Giver of gifts?!
- ❖ I seek to see Your face, O Father;  
In Your incarnate Word, I see Your face and the splendor of Your  
glory;  
I shall never have comfort, O Groom of my soul, until I see You with  
the eyes of my heart.
- ❖ Seeing You with my heart, I seek Your royal way;  
I shall turn my feet to the way of Your testimonies, which You set for  
me;  
I shall make haste, and shall not delay, until I enjoy Your bosoms;  
In all my steps, I shall take care not to pervert away from Your way;  
As long as I am still in the body, I shall not hesitate to reconsider  
myself;  
I shall weigh my thoughts, words, and works, with the balance of  
Your commandments  
Every day, I shall confess my weakness and sins, to let You work in  
me;  
By that, I shall be prepared for the day of my wedding!
- ❖ You have never deceived me, O my Groom;  
You told me beforehand what will dwell on me by the enemies;  
By that, You prepared me, so as not to get disturbed;  
Let them cast their cords around me; For You are greater and stronger  
than them.
- ❖ When the tribulations become intense, I consider myself at midnight;  
I cry out to You, not to seek revenge;  
But to give You thanks for Your righteous judgments;  
For that is the way of my crown and glory.
- ❖ At midnight, when all fall asleep;  
I find my chance to encounter You, who neither slumber nor sleep;  
I encounter You through the life of thanksgiving and praise;

At midnight, when no one can see me;  
I encounter You in secret, away from every vain human glory;  
Grant me, if possible, to be like the angels, and not to sleep;  
Grant me to become a companion of those who fear You, and who  
keep Your precepts.

- ❖ If the wicked have turned my life into a pitch dark night;  
At midnight I rise to praise You, O Sun of Righteousness.  
Then my life would turn into a splendid day;  
Finally, I anticipate Your coming;  
Come, O Groom of my soul.

## 9 TETH

# IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED

(65 – 72)

If the commandment – in the eyes of the psalmist – prepares the believer for the heavenly wedding, and turns all his time – even the midnight – into a life of thanksgiving and praise, he is in need of the compassionate and, at the same time, the chastising, hand of God, to motivate him to seek His commandments. In this ‘stichon’, the psalmist sees harmony between the compassion of God and His chastisements. As in His exalted care for his children, He turns the afflictions by the wicked, into edification of the souls of His children; and counts it as chastisements for the sake of their growth.

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|---|---------|
| 1- The goal of God’s compassion                                     | 65- 66  |
| 2- The divine chastisement and keeping the commandment              | 67      |
| 3- The chastisement and the thanksgiving                            | 68      |
| 4- Between the chastisements of God and the oppression of the proud | 69 – 72 |

### 1- THE GOAL OF GOD’S COMPASSION:

*“You have dealt well with Your servant, O Lord, according to your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments” (65, 66)*

The psalmist’s feelings were, that God dealt well with him; even though it may seem as being in bitterness. For it is God the “Beneficent”, who presents to us more than what we deserve; who loves and cares for us, even if his care seems firm; and who perpetually plans for our salvation, growth, and glory.

According to **St. Augustine**, The Greek word, translated as (**well**), means (**sweetness**), as God gives sweetness to the soul, when it practices well, and when it keeps the commandment. We can say that what God does to His servant, even when He allows for him to go through afflictions and humiliation, bears spiritual sweetness, the goal and fruits of which he may not perceive. Yet some translators prefer to translate it as (well), on account of that the word (sweetness) could be used for the carnal pleasures, and evil lusts.

- ❖ I assume that the words “*You have dealt well with Your servant*”, could be understood as: [You made me feel pleasure in doing what is good].

To feel glad for doing what is good, is a great gift from God. Whereas, to practice the good work commanded by the law, out of fear of punishment, and not for the sake of the sweetness of the righteousness; Namely, when man fears God, but does not love Him, he is practicing the work of the slaves and not of the free (see John 8: 35; 1 John 4: 18).

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ According to the apostle Paul, God is both Good and Severe (Romans 11: 22). The goodness toward those who are steadfast in faith; and the severity toward those who have gone astray from faith.

When the saint is steadfast in faith, he says: “*You have dealt well with Your servant*”. By saying “*with Your servant*”, he means to confirm that God’s compassion and goodness are not enjoyed by anyone by chance, but by him who serves God. And by saying: “*according to Your word*”, clarifies that God’s compassion is presented to man with a sound provocation and goal. Wishing to know the wise and sound sign of that compassion, the psalmist seeks no other teacher but God to instruct him.

**“Teach me good judgment and knowledge” (66)**

He calls the virtues like humility, chastity, and self-satisfaction, as “*good judgment*”. And he calls the mental virtues, as “*knowledge*”; according to the saying of the wise Solomon: “*Receive my instruction, and not silver, and knowledge, rather than choice gold*” (Proverbs 8: 10).

- ❖ So he can have both the benefits of practical gifts (*good judgments*), and mental ones (*knowledge*).

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ ‘Simachus’ translated “*You dealt (well) with Your servant*”, as “*You did (good) to Your servant*’... so that he who is educated in the divine issues, would perceive the divine work with him, and would know that the compassion of the Lord, would only come upon those who put God before them, to be qualified to bear the title “servants of the Lord”.

(Eusabius of Caesarea)

In the verse: “*You have dealt well with Your servant*” (65), the psalmist summarized his whole life experience, on all its aspects: the

spiritual, and the familial, and even the physical; feeling in it, the hand of the God, the 'Beneficent', who always turns everything, even the oppression of the enemies to our good; to say together with the righteous Joseph: "*You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good*" (Genesis 50: 20).

Having seen in God, the Groom of his soul, and her eternal portion, Now, seeing Him the 'Beneficent', dealing personally with him, and turning his tribulations to his own good, his lamentations became joyful praises.... Again, to confirm that what is realized is set on the true promises of God, he says: "***According to Your word, teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments***" (66).

Concerning us, "*When we have done all those things which we are commanded, we say, 'we are unprofitable servants'*" (Luke 17: 10). What blessings we get, are according to the generous promises of God.

The psalmist, for fear that God would be seen by some as cruel and violent, when he allows for a harsh temptation, he, even though he believes in God's commandments and promises (66), he entreats Him not to cease teaching him the "*good judgment and knowledge*" (66); as though he says: [Amid my tribulations, I see You God, the Good, the Disciplinarian, and the Giver of Knowledge].

What knowledge did the psalmist enjoy amid his tribulations?

He knew that God is "Good", He saved him from slothfulness and perversion, by His chastisements, or by letting him enter into a state of humiliation. The tempests of temptations have shaken him, not to destroy him, but rather to bring him back to his sense, through keeping the commandment.

**St. Clement of Alexandria**, sees in this verse presented by the prophet: "***good judgment and knowledge***", in an obvious way; an exalted foundation that leads to perfection<sup>1</sup>.

❖ "*For I believe Your commandments*". Having meditated with wisdom in the commandments You gave me, I believed and kept them. Grant me, therefore, the wisdom, by teaching me the good judgment and knowledge. This supplication conforms to the saying: "*My son, if you desire wisdom, keep the commandments, and the Lord will lavish her upon you*" (Sirach 1: 26).

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

Perceiving that 'the understanding' is a divine gift, the psalmist says: "*I am your servant, Give me understanding*" (125). That is why he

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<sup>1</sup> *Stromata* 7: 7: 36.

keeps crying out to God to teach him, and to grant him an increasing “*good judgment and knowledge*” (66).

❖ He prays for the sake of these things, to increase to perfection; the same way, those who said: “*Lord, Increase our faith*” (Luke 17: 5), had faith.

As long as we live in this world, these words give us progress; yet the psalmist adds the word “*understanding*”, or, as it came in most versions: “*discipline*”<sup>1</sup>.

The word “discipline” in Greek, is used in the Holy Book to mean (teaching through chastisement); the way it came in the epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews: “*For whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives*” (Hebrew 12: 6); and, “*No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous*” (Hebrew 12: 11).

That is why, the psalmist, with whom God deals with sweetness, namely, in whom by His mercy, He brings into him the gladness to do good, he does not cease to pray to God to let this gift grow in him, to make him despise all the other pleasures, compared to it; and be prepared to endure any portion of sufferings for its sake.... So, in a sound way, discipline is added to sweetness. Such gift (the discipline), should not be sought in a little measure of grace and goodness, namely of the holy love, but in a great measure, so as not to be quenched by chastisement.

(St. Augustine)

## **2- THE DIVINE CHASTISEMENT AND KEEPING THE COMMANDMENT:**

“*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word*” (67)

Many, through affliction, get to know themselves, perceive their weakness, become humble before God, and worship Him faithfully and seriously. Without affliction they would probably never enjoy all that. The prophet David, himself, has experienced it. At the time of his affliction, he has been very attached to God, and his heart was a living icon of God’s heart. But, having built a palace for himself, having forsaken the leadership of his battle to others, and walking on the roof of the king’s house, he perverted to commit a series of sins; and almost perished, if it was not for the mercy of God who sent the prophet Nathan

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to wake him up; after which he has been unceasingly tempted by troubles and afflictions.

- ❖ He says that, because of the sins he has committed, God humiliated him to make him perceive that all the chastisements that dwelt upon him were to discipline him.

**(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)**

- ❖ God's judgments on some are because of their sins; and on others to test them, and to proclaim their worthiness.. Acknowledging his miserable situation, the psalmist confesses that he has sinned; yet he says: "***Now, I keep Your word***". Namely, although I am humiliated because of committing that serious sin, yet I got rid of my humiliation, for I kept Your Word, and kept it uprightly.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

- ❖ According to **Origen and Theodorus**: [We sin by our mind before falling completely into the disobedience that brings us forth under the dominion of the devil. By receiving the sin, and meditating in it in our mind, we open the door for it to enter into our soul.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

It so seems that the Origanists have misunderstood this verse, as well as others, like the saying of the psalmist: "*Bring my soul out of prison*" (Psalm 142: 7); assuming that, through sin and going astray, the soul is punished by being buried in a human body<sup>1</sup>.

### **3- THE CHASTISEMENT AND THE THANKSGIVING:**

As the chastisement of God comes out of His goodness and His love for us, to make us keep His commandments instead of our disobedience; We, therefore, should give Him thanks for everything that dwell upon us, counting His chastisements as a sign of His divine care. Instead of murmur, we should give Him thanks; and instead of protesting His judgments, we should seek from Him to teach us His wisdom.

***"You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes" (68)***

- ❖ Some may say: "***You are good, O Lord***", or "***You are sweet, O Lord***". And "***By Your sweetness, teach me Your statutes***"; He, who so says, desires to practice the righteousness of God,

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Jerme: Letter 130: 16, To Pammachius againat John of Jerusalem, 7.

❖ Through searching myself, I know that I am a sinner; And through perceiving Your goodness, I know that *“You are good, and do good”* That is why I seek from You to teach me Your statutes and judgments; Yours, and of no one else’s.

**St. Dedyms the blind)**

**According to Eusabius of Caesarea**, the Greek word does not mean “good” as a feature of God, but it touches His Essence, being

“Goodness” in Himself. The psalmist surely knows that God is “Goodness”; Yet he is in need of God, Himself, to guide him, and to teach him His statutes and judgments, and to let him understand the significance of “goodness”.

There is a great difference between the absolute mental knowledge that God is ‘Goodness’ and ‘Love’; and for God to reveal to us His Goodness, Love, and Compassion; to let us taste Him, practically in our life. God, the whole Goodness, turns our corrupt souls into the fellowship of his nature. That brings into us the spirit of thanksgiving and praise to God “the Goodness”. In other words, We do not praise Him by our mouths, and give Him thanks by our tongues; but We praise Him by our hearts; and our nature would meditate in Him through having fellowship in His life, and an enjoyment of the experience of His *“Goodness”* in her.

Together with every true knowledge, the heart would be filled with joy, and the tongue with praise. And together with every ignorance, the soul would be filled with murmur, and the heart with narrowness... That is why the psalmist is not ashamed to perpetually seek from God to teach him.

#### **4- BETWEEN THE CHASTISEMENTS OF GOD AND THE OPPRESSION OF THE PROUD:**

Our souls praise the Goodness of God, who renews our nature by the work of His grace, using compassion, firmness and chastisement. His dealings with us is different from those of men, particularly of the proud. The Lord chastens through His compassionate fatherhood; while the proud provoke into us the spirit of oppression.

*“The proud have forged a lie against me; but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart” (69)*

If the oppression of the proud have profusely come upon the psalmist; Yet it did not make him lose his keeping the precepts of God with all his heart; That was because of his experience of the sweetness of the commandment.

❖ He means to say; [With the abundance of oppression, the love in me will not grow cold” (See Mathew 24: 12).

As though he says: [He who has the sweetness of God will learn His righteousness. Concerning the commandments of Him who helps him, as much as it is sweet, he seeks it, consummates it, as he recognizes it, and learns it through practicing it; ... For it is more perfectly understood through practicing it.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The closer the righteous is to God, the more he would be filled with His peace; and at the same time, the more will the proud come against him as strong wrestlers; those who wish him evil, whether they are men or evil spiritual hosts.. Anyway, as this happens, the righteous will never stop keeping God’s commandments with all his heart, in order to be able to understand and consummate them. The heart of those proud adversaries turns from compassion to cruelty; and as the psalmist says: “***Their heart is as fat as grease, but I delight in Your law***” (70) Before pride, their heart was soft, meek, and good, to be compared to nourishing milk; but, being clothed with pride, their heart hardened and the milk turned into grease. According to the psalmist, “*They have closed up their fat hearts; With their mouths they speak proudly*” (Psalm 17:10); and to the prophet Isaiah, “*Their heart became dull*” (Isaiah 6: 10).

This text probably means that, the heart of the wise, is like two (breasts) full of nourishing milk “*the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*” (1 Peter 2: 2); but once it turn to evil, their good milk turns to grease; As this so happen to the proud, the righteous would say: “***The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart***” (69).

(The scholar Origen)

❖ The proud have plotted every kind of evil snares against me, but I was not drawn to partake of their corruption, for I kept Your precepts.

(Father Theodoret)

❖ Many of those who rebelled against Your precepts, have caused me much trouble by their oppression, because their deceptive words may destroy Your precepts in the life of Your believers, and may lead those who are not steadfast in the Lord, to go astray. But I, in my zeal and longing toward these precepts, have kept them with my whole heart.... Through such tough temptation, meditating in the beauty of Your precepts, I condemned all those who intend to destroy them.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

- ❖ Their arrogance and pride have reached the extent, that “*their heart became as fat as grease*”, because of their material nature.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

- ❖ After being provided by “*the pure milk of the word, that they may grow thereby*” (1 Peter 2: 2), they could not digest it, and it turned into grease in their hearts ... “*But I delight in Your law*” (70); I use all my zeal to understand it; for its wisdom, not only scatters the mist, but destroys, as well, the hardness of the material nature.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

If the wicked proud exert all energy to destroy my bond with the commandment, using every kind of deception and oppression, Yet, they actually lose the pure milk of the Word, that turns in their fat hearts into corrupt grease. As for me, their behavior only brings me forth to humility, and contrition, to learn more the statutes of God.

**“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (71)**

The wicked probably ridiculed him, saying that, while they live in prosperity, and succeed in all their ways; his life, on the contrary, is full of troubles and distresses. Yet, he loved them, knowing that the way of affliction will certainly bring him forth to the divine knowledge.

- ❖ Receiving those tough temptations and difficulties, which he used to call “*afflictions*”, he still says: “**It is good for me that I have been afflicted**”;... Namely, using the words of the apostle Paul: “*I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake*” (see 2 Corinthians 12: 10); through enduring these sufferings, I would be qualified to learn Your statutes, which no one would know, unless he is afflicted, and endures so many sufferings.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ These distresses are beneficial to the saints, and are allowed by God, to make them practice moderation and humility; and to keep them from becoming puffed-up by the wonders and miracles, they are given to perform. We hear both the prophet David, and the apostle Paul say the same thing: The former says: “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes*” (71); and the later says: “*I was caught up to the third heaven; caught up into paradise ... And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the*

*revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me*<sup>1</sup>” (2 Corinthians 12: 2, 4, 7).

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ If it is good for the great and the good to be chastised, how much more would it be for us<sup>2</sup>?!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ When we are afflicted, giving Him thanks, would bring us closer to God, as though He is indebted to us. But, if we thank Him while being in prosperity, we would be the indebted party, and would be required to pay back the debt... When King ‘Hezekiah’ got blessings and was free of tribulations, his heart “*was exalted above measure*”; and when he was overcome by infirmities, he became humble, and closer to God<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

The psalmist ends his talk about chastisement by expressing his great appreciation for the divine law or the commandment, which are learned through entering into distress and suffering; and which he calls: “*The law of Your mouth*” (72); For the source of the sweetness of the commandment is that it is a personal talk between God and the believer, as though it is from mouth to mouth. ... The psalmist says:

*“The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of shekels of gold and silver” (72)*

St. John Chrysostom wonders, saying: [Was St. Peter the apostle poor when he had no gold or silver to give the lame man (See Acts 3)?]

- ❖ That means that the law of Your mouth, namely, Christ, is better for me. I despise the glittering gold and silver, but I enjoy and find pleasure in the law of Your mouth.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ The prophet means to say that the law of God is better for him than all the pleasures of this world, referring to them as the glittering pieces of gold and silver.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ According to the symbolic interpretation, silver represents the mind, and gold refers to the spirit. Despite the thousands of shekels of gold and silver, used by those who debate by the wisdom of this world in

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<sup>1</sup> *Concerning the Statues, hom., 1: 14.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Acts hom. 16.*

<sup>3</sup> *In Heb. 33: 8.*

the schools of philosophy, Yet he, who lives the divine wisdom and the divine truth, says: "***The law of Your mouth is better for me***". Yes indeed, it is only the law coming from the mouth of God that can give the true gain to which he holds fast.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

The thousands of shekels of gold and silver could be lost, robbed, or represent danger on the life of their possessor; Whereas the law of the mouth of God presents a steadfast riches that would last forever, and no one can take away from us.

### **Between the distresses caused by the wicked and the chastisement given by God:**

We already said that the wicked cast their cords on the children of God to close shut before them every opening to salvation. Yet God, in His care for His children, turns these troubles into blessing for their growth; by turning them into divine chastisements for their edification:

1- The life of the believer could be summarized in the words: "*You have dealt well with Your servant*" (65). This is the judgment of the pure heart that expresses its thank to God on all situations, being sure that "*all things work together for good to those who love God*" (Romans 8: 28).

2- God uses the chastisements to take away from us any slothfulness, and to exhort us to keep His commandments (67). Although he completely trust in the truth of God's statutes, yet the psalmist seeks from God to proclaim His goodness as a Chastener, and to provide him with knowledge amid the afflictions.

3- Through the divine knowledge, we should never murmur because of the afflictions, but we should rather give thanks to God for His care; trusting in His wisdom, saying to Him: "*You are sweet, O Lord*" (68).

4- Do not be afraid of the afflictions caused by the proud; as it is written: "*No weapon formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue which rises against you in judgment, you shall condemn*" (Isaiah 54: 17).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 9 Teth**

**(65 – 72)**

**YOUR HAND IS GENTLE EVEN WHILE CHASTENING ME**

- ❖ While chastening me, You present to me an edifying knowledge, to recognize Your exalted goodness;  
You use my chastisements for the edification of my soul, and to bring me forth to perfection;
- ❖ If chastisement is of benefit as a remedy for the prophet;  
How much more would it be for my weakness?!
- ❖ By Your chastisements You reveal my sins, to be afflicted before You;  
To confess them and present a repentance;  
By Your chastisements You support me, to keep Your statutes.
- ❖ You are sweet, O Lord, and good, even when You chasten me;  
Your chastisements incite in me the life of thanksgiving, and not of murmur.  
I praise You, not only by my tongue, but with my whole heart.
- ❖ As I give You thanks, O my Lord, in the time of distress, You count me a creditor;  
You pay my thanks back with uncountable blessings  
Giving You thanks in the time of comfort, I am paying back my debt.

## 10 YOD

# YOUR JUDGMENTS ARE GOOD

(73 – 80)

When we talk about the chastisements of God on His believers, and how the evil wicked deal with them, certain questions are raised concerning the Justice of God:

Where is the justice of God? ... Where is his care for His saints?  
... Why does God allow for His children to pass through affliction?

The psalmist, on the other hand, presents himself, and his life, as a living answer to those questions:

<b>1- I am Your creation, the subject of Your love</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>2- I am a practical example that answers the questions</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>3- You granted me the uprightness of Your judgments</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>4- Let Your merciful kindness be for my comfort</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>5- Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>6- You destroyed the slanders of the proud</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>7- Let those who fear You, turn to me</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>8- Consummate Your work with me</b>	<b>80</b>

### **1- I AM YOUR CREATION, SUBJECT OF YOUR LOVE:**

*“Your hands have made me and fashioned me, Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments” (73)*

All along the generations, those questions arose around the justice of God and His care; specially when afflictions dwell upon man who has nothing to do with them. The psalmist, however, instead of presenting questions, by the spirit of doubt and despair, he proclaims his need to perceive, and to understand the secrets behind God’s judgments; on account of that he is His creation who never doubts the justice and care of his Creator, and His limitless love. He seeks from the Creator and the heavenly Father, to reveal His wisdom to him; he proclaims his desire to learn; he trusts that God who created him, cares for him, and ordains his life; according to the words of the prophet Moses: *“Is He (the Lord) not your Father who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?”* (Deuteronomy 32: 6).

The righteous ‘Job’ says to God: *“Remember, I pray, that You have made me like clay. Will You turn me into dust again?”* (Job 10: 9). If the potter cherishes the earthen vessel he has conformed from clay,

Would God, who made Adam from dust, in His image, and according to His likeness, and granted him the gift of reason and perception ... Would He not present to him an increasing knowledge, to perceive the secrets of His wisdom, to thank and praise him?! ... God says to the prophet Jeremiah: “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you*” (Jeremiah 1: 5), to proclaim the extent of His care for him... God knows us before we are born, and seeks from us to know Him, and recognize his features and wisdom; to encounter Him on the level of the true and mutual love, set upon the true and exalted knowledge.

“*Your hands*”; some believe refers to the Son and the Holy Spirit; on account to that God says (in plural) in the book of Genesis: “*Let (Us) make man in (Our) image, according to (Our) likeness*” (Genesis 1: 26).

❖ It is said that the Hands of God are the only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit; as They come from One Source, and would never separate from Him; Their union would never dissolve. ... The way the hands are closely attached to the body, yet they are distinct from One another; So it is with the only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, They proceed from the Father, connected to Him, and to One another, in the unity of the Godhead; Yet They are distinct, as far as the Persons are concerned ... That is why the righteous ‘Job’ wrote in His book, through a divine inspiration: “*Your hands have made me, and fashioned me; and yet You would destroy me*” (Job 10: 8). A phrase that was quoted by the blessed David.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

According to **St. Augustine**, the expression “*The hands of God*” refers to the Lord Christ alone, or to both the Son and the Holy Spirit.

❖ Let us understand “*the hands of God*” as His power and His wisdom; both titles were given to the One Christ (1 Corinthians 1: 24); which could also be understood by the expression “*The arm of the Lord*” in the verse: “*To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*” (Isaiah 53: 1).

Or let them understand “*the hands of God*” as the Son and the Holy Spirit; on account of that the Holy Spirit works together with the Son.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Finally, it is also stated that a saint (the blessed David) received the sanctification from the Son and the Holy Spirit, saying: “*Your hands have made me, and fashioned me*<sup>1</sup>” (73).

(St. Ambrose)

The repetition of “*made me, and fashioned me*”, according to some, may refer to the creation of the body and the soul. God, the Creator of man, cares for all his needs, physical and spiritual, as well as for the edification and salvation of his soul. Together with the soul, He glorifies the body that will be risen in the great day of the Lord ... He cares for it, both in the present time, and the one to come; the way he cares even for the number of the hair on our heads.

- ❖ The frames of our bodies and souls are conformed by the hand of the divine Artist Himself<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

This repetition, according to others, refers to the creation of man, and his renewal in the water of baptism, in the image of his Creator.

The believer would never doubt the care of God for him; but, with the daring of sonhood, he cries out, saying: “*Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments*” (73).

- ❖ You, O Lord, who made me a rational creature, Graciously consummate what I lack of understanding.

You created me to be Your own, which would never be realized, except through doing according to Your commandment. From the beginning, You gave me one commandment; But, with the multitudes of my falls, I became in need of many commandments. So, graciously, give me the understanding, that I may learn, and consummate them.

The wicked, though, would say: [That would not of benefit to us, would interfere with our interests, and would cause us to be in reproach for not keeping the law].

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- ❖ “*Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments*” (73)... Teaching His disciples, Our savior, in the gospel according to St. Matthew the Evangelist, says: “*Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man*” (Matthew 7: 24). ... Would it be possible to do according to those commandments without understanding them?

(The scholar Origen)

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<sup>1</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit, Book 3. 3: 33.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon 228:1.*

**According to Apolinarius:** [About this perception, the apostle Paul also says: “*Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things*” (2 Timothy 2: 7). This supplication, addressed to the Creator, is a logic one, which means: [Take care of Your creation, ... Consummate that reasonable being, Grant him the perception, and understanding; ... He, whom You made to live in Your love; let him live in

Your ove through understanding Your will; As, from the beginning, man needed to learn].

According to **St. Augustine**, he can present to his congregation the words they need to hear; But, concerning the understanding, it is a divine gift. ... Words are given for the ears, But it is God who gives the understanding to the hearts.

❖ Hearing could be realized through me; But, Who will give the understanding?!

I talk to the ears to listen; But who will talk to your heart to understand?!

It would not stop at the sound of the words that strike your ears; But there is He, who utters the truth to enter Your heart; ... There is He, who talks to your heart, although You do not see Him!

If you have understanding, O brethren, The talk is addressed to the heart; for the understanding is its gift.

If you have the understanding, Who would utter it in your hearts, but He, to whom the psalm is addressed, saying: “*Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments*”<sup>1</sup> (73).

(St. Augustine)

## **2- I AM A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS:**

This psalmist by the psalmist comes out of his trust in God, his Creator, who made him a rational being, granted him knowledge and understanding and did not keep from him the revelation of His divine will. That is why, looking at David, and finding in him a living example of debating with God amid the suffering, those who fear God, rejoice and feel at peace, when they partake of his trust in God.

**“Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, because I have hoped in Your word” (74)**

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<sup>1</sup> On The Gospel of St. John, tract. 40: 6.

A sign of the true fellowship is that, when a member has comfort amid his suffering, those who fear the Lord will rejoice together with him and feel comfort; Whatever one of them enjoys, is counted as a gift for all of them. And as the prophet David says: *“The humble shall hear of it and be glad; Oh, magnify the Lord, and let us exalt His name together”* (Psalm 34: 2).; and, *“The righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me”* (Psalm 142: 7).

- ❖ Those who fear God see my good work with a sensory sight, and perceive the virtues of my soul with a mental insight; and will rejoice for my trust in Your words.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ They take me as an example when they see me. How? *“for my trust in Your word”*; and will anticipate to get the same benefits for themselves.

**(Eusabius of Caesarea)**

- ❖ Not all those who see the righteous will rejoice; ... The more annoying it would be for the wicked to look at him; on account of that his life and ways are different from theirs (Wisdom 2: 14-15), the more rejoicing it would be for the righteous, those who fear God.

The word *“see”* could be understood, either in a sensory way, namely, seeing the apparent man, or in a spiritual concept, namely, his soul (the inner man), or his thoughts, mind, and wisdom. By such a way, we see the righteous man; we rejoice and be glad to know him.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ We can understand this, that those who fear God, being righteous, perfect, and lack nothing; they wish that all will progress and have benefit; rejoice in everything that give pleasure to God; and, like the heavenly creatures, they rejoice over the sinners who repent (Luke 15: 7).

And it could also mean that those who fear God, are less progressive, will see me and rejoice, for I trust in Your word; Will see me in complete union with Your word, my thoughts conform to Your teaching; ... But because they fear lest they fall under the punishment for the wicked and sinners, according to Your judgments, they keep themselves from doing evil. Fearing You in some way, they see me and rejoice, through keeping away from sin; not as a grudging obligation (2 Corinthians 9: 7), but with zeal, to resume strength, for they also trust in Your words.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

according to **St. Augustine**, those who fear God, here, are the church -- the body of Christ, whose members rejoice when they see him, who trusts in the Word of God ... Namely, they will rejoice when they see other members of the body of Christ, trust in the Word of the Lord. The believers will rejoice when they see their brethren who partake of their faith, trust in the Word of the Lord.

### **3- YOU GRANTD ME THE UPRIGHTNESS OF YOUR JUDGMENTS:**

*I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me“(75)*

My trust in Your word stirs the wicked up, and makes the righteous glad (74). As for me, I perceive that Your judgments are right, and that what You allow for me to have of chastisements, distress, or the oppression of the wicked, are in faithfulness; For I am a sinner, and in need of affliction as a support for myself. Through difficulties I enjoy Your help without losing my hope in You; and through them I become trained on the spiritual strife, to enjoy a series of conquests. By Your grace, the more I feel Your care amid the sufferings, the more I abide in You.

❖ All what happen are through the wisdom of God. The believer believes that “**God’s judgments are right**”. Yet, unless he gets the “*knowledge*”, he would not be able to know them. The nonbeliever, on the other hand, not only does not have such faith, but he, as well, slanders the divine care, concerning these judgments.

There are, therefore, those who believe in God’s judgments, and those who do not. He, who reaches a better level, will not stop at having faith, but he will, as well, “*know*”, namely, he will have knowledge of God’s judgments, and of all what happen to man; a knowledge that the *prophet* David has received.

“**I know**” is different from “**I believe**” (66). He who believes may not have the knowledge with the same degree. The Lord Jesus said to those who believed in Him: “*If you abide in My word, you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8: 31, 32). He said “*You shall know*” to those who have already believed; as faith does not necessarily provide knowledge; Hence the apostle Paul discerns between faith and knowledge, and between faith and wisdom; in the list of the gifts of the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12: 8,9).

*“I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me” (75); Namely, You have afflicted me according to the truth, and according to Your right judgments.*

In the Holy Book, specially in the book of psalms, I often notice that the words, *“You have afflicted me”*, means, “You have cast me in temptations”.

**(The scholar Origen)**

Amazing is God, our Father, in His love for us; He is not like Eli, the priest, who did not restrain his sons when they made themselves vile (1 Samuel 3: 13); But God chastens, and together with His chastisement, He gives us *“knowledge”*, if we seek it from Him. Chastisement may cause some temporary affliction, but the *“knowledge”*, and the discovery of God’s wisdom, will turn the affliction into thanksgiving, joy, and praise, together with exalted heavenly comforts.

#### **4- LET YOUR MERCIFUL KINDNESS BE FOR MY COMFORT:**

The psalmist truly entered into affliction (75); Yet, by mercy, behold, he enjoys the divine comfort (76). He starts by the truth, than followed by mercy; the two being connected together, according to the saying of the psalmist: *“All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies”* (Psalm 25: 10). He did not seek from God to lift the rod of chastisement up from him; but he sought from Him, together with what he gained of the divine knowledge amid the distress, not to deny him His mercy, which He gave as a general promise to all mankind, particularly to every believer; saying:

*“Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Your word to Your servant” (76)*

❖ He, who is weak in view and faith, not perceiving that God, in faithfulness, allows for tribulations and afflictions, will get annoyed; Whereas he, who trusts with complete faith, knowing that they happen with right judgment, seeks comfort in His mercy; namely, in His Word or His only-begotten Son, who came to comfort the sorrowful, according to His promise on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah, that through the Son, will come the compassion that revives those who study the law of God in a practical way.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ The prophet, in his strife, learned to endure all what dwell on him; In his prayers, he does not seek from God to take away the sufferings,

but seeks, in the time of his grief, that God gives him a word of comfort that makes him endure the sufferings with complete joy and peace. He says: Have mercy on me, O Lord, let me experience the comfort, and find the courage.

Like the apostle Paul, who sought comfort during temptations, and has got it, who said: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comforts, who comforts us in all our tribulations”* (2 Corinthians 1: 3, 4); The psalmist, after so much comfort, could comfort those who are in grief or are passing through affliction, saying: *“In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul”* (Psalm 94: 19).

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ The mercy of the Father is in the incarnation of the Son, He who comforts our souls fallen under the tyranny of the devil ... Have compassion on Your servants, according to Your promise to give comfort.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ *“Let Your merciful kindness be for my comfort”*. Many who get comfort are deceived, and assume to have got it through their own wisdom and reason; But as for me, lest I would go astray like them, *“I am Your servant, Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to **Your word to Your servant**”* (76).

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ He indeed, starts with the “truth”, by which we are afflicted even to death, by Him whose judgments are righteousness, while we are renewed for life, by the promise of Him whose blessings are a gift; hence the psalmist says: *“according to Your word to Your servant”*; whether it is the renewal by which we have got the adoption among the children of God; or it is by faith, hope and love, that come through the mercies of God. Nevertheless, in this life, full of emotions, and troubles, there are the comforts of the miserable, not the joy of the blessed.

**(St. Augustine)**

## **5- LET YOUR TENDER MERCIES COME TO ME, THAT I MAY LIVE:**

*“Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; for Your law is my delight”* (77)

If the psalmist refers every comfort to the free generous grace of God, not to his own mental capacities or his strong will, he feels indebted by his whole life to God's tender mercies; by which he lives, and to God's law or commandment, in which he meditates and delights.

The human nature, as a whole, is, indeed, in need of "God's tender mercies", for unless it comes, we cannot live the true life, "the life hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3: 3).

Let us also learn the saying: "*Your law is my delight*". Let us dedicate ourselves to the study of the holy Books; in which we shall find delight.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ As we find in many locations in the Holy Scripture, a mention of "God's tender mercies", we are committed to meditate in the fact that the only-begotten Son and the Holy Spirit -- the Givers of life, are "God's tender mercies".

God – according to the teachings of the apostle, full of wisdom – is "the Father of mercies" (2 Corinthians 1: 3).

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

As God's mercies and tender mercies lift the believer up – amid his affliction – as though from the dead, to live, and to meditate with delight in God's law; to study it elaborately; not to care about the slanders of the proud; and to let the wicked in their evil, pour shame and reproach on him; The believer will be only preoccupied with the wonderful and life-giver promises of God; and will enjoy the fruits of God's word; while the wicked will bring upon themselves the fruits of their disobedience of the commandment.

## **6- YOU DESTROYED THE SLANDERS OF THE PROUD:**

*"let the proud be put to shame, for they have subverted me with guile. As for me I will meditate on Your precepts" (78)*

Perceiving that God's judgments are right, the psalmist saw himself, in his own eyes, as worthy of every chastisement; but through God's mercies, he enjoys the divine comforts amid the sufferings; and through His tender mercies he enjoys life, and the fellowship with the Father, in His Son, by His Holy Spirit.... Now! What is the position of the proud who slander the psalmist and subvert him with guile? ... While being preoccupied with planning evil plots, and setting nets and snares on his way, God puts their plans to shame, and the psalmist keeps

on being preoccupied with his strife to execute the divine commandment without distraction.

❖ Getting Your help, O Lord, the wicked and the enemies of the truth, are put to shame; And while being in reproach, I will not get puffed up, but will keep meditating in Your commandments.

**(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ The psalmist does not utter this prayer against the proud who subverted him with guile, and slandered him, but for their benefit. For, as long as the sinner is not aware of his sin, he would not be ashamed of it; But, once he becomes aware of it, he would be... I know that they have treated me wrongly with falsehood; but I shall do nothing but keep on meditating in Your commandments.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ When you hear how often the sinners are cursed in the Holy Book, you should perceive that it is meant only for the proud among them, who keep on defending their sins. And when you hear how the poor are blessed, do not assume it to apply to all Christians, but only to those meek and humble by their hearts among them<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

## **7- LET THOSE WHO FEAR YOU, TURN TO ME:**

*“Let those who fear God turn to me, those who know Your testimonies” (79)*

While seeking shame for the proud; namely, that they would feel their sins to present repentance; he calls those who fear God to turn to him in faith, to enjoy God’s comfort and tender mercies. According to some, the prophet David uttered those words to proclaim his desire to enjoy again the company of the saints, who have forsaken him after causing the death of Uriah the Hittite; counting that as a shameful sin, not befitting of those who fear God<sup>2</sup>. He seeks from God to make them turn to him, to live among those who fear God; and to let them know that he has turned to God with his whole heart, and how his life has become a miracle.

❖ The prophet David wishes that those who fear God would turn to him, become close to him, so that they would partake of the grace he has got.

**(The scholar Origen)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermon 48: 3.*

<sup>2</sup> *Bethany Parallel Commentary on O.T., P1163.*

## 8- CONSUMMATE YOUR WORK WITH ME:

*“Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes, that I may not be ashamed” (80)*

Seeking repentance for the proud; and for those who fear God to enjoy the same grace he has got; he, finally, not forgetting himself, he seeks from God to let him grow in the blameless, namely, the righteous life. He started by seeking repentance for the sinners; then followed up by seeking for the believers to have, together with him a fellowship in the living life of faith; and finally, he seeks for his own sake, to repent his sins, and grow, hoping to ultimately reach the summit of perfection; far from any anxiety or reproach.

❖ How could man’s heart become blameless, or, according to some interpreters *‘perfect’*? ... By keeping Your statutes! ... And what would be the fruit of that? ... not to be put to shame; on account of that all sins are worthy of shame.

(The scholar Origen)

### Some questions pertaining to God’s care:

In the following points the psalmist responds to questions pertaining to God’s righteousness and care:

1- Being the creation of God, and the subject of His love, it is not befitting of man to embrace any doubt in God’s goodness, and care for him.

Instead of raising questions, he should seek knowledge and understanding (73).

2- God did marvels in creating man, with his whole physical, psychological, and spiritual being ... Would He neglect him after creating him?!

3-Your love, O Lord, necessitates being firm with me, disciplining me, and even afflicting me for some time (75)

4-Together with discipline, God grants “knowledge” for those who seek it; that would turn the affliction into praise.

5-The believer seeks God’s mercies, being a personal promise to him from his God (76); that raises him up as though from death to life (77).

6- The heart of the believer exults by the gifts and promises of God; whereas the proud wicked, are put to shame for not keeping God’s commandment (78).

7- While the proud are preoccupied with plotting evil plans; the believer enjoys the fellowship with those who fear the Lord (79); and his heart gets purified, to become blameless (80).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 (10 Yod)**  
**YOU ARE MY CREATOR; GIVE ME THE UNDERSTANDING**  
**OF YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**

- ❖ You are my Creator; Has the creature the right to Question Your righteousness?!  
You created me a rational being;  
Grant me the gift of understanding, that I do not ask so many vain questions!  
Being human, I present interpretations and words for the ears to hear;  
But You, burn the hearts with understanding to perceive Your righteousness.
- ❖ Many of those who pose questions pertaining to Your righteousness;  
Seeing me joyful amid my sorrows;  
Because of my trust in Your promises and words;  
Would follow my lead, would have confidence, and would rejoice;  
So You comfort me; and I comfort those around me.
- ❖ My trust in Your promises would stir up the wicked, but would bring joy to those who fear You;  
I became sure that all troubles are for my benefit;  
That Your grace is sure, even in the bitter-most moments of my life;  
Your judgments are right; and Your care is perpetually exalted.  
The wicked, however, slander Your care.
- ❖ You allow for me to be afflicted by troubles for some time;  
Yet, together with the affliction, You grant me knowledge and understanding;  
So, Your wisdom turns my affliction into thanksgiving and praise,  
together with heavenly comforts;  
I do not seek from You to take away the rod of chastisement;  
But I seek from You to grant me the understanding amid the affliction, and mercy together with discipline.
- ❖ Put the proud to shame;  
Those who subverted me with guile;

I do not seek revenge for myself;  
But I seek from You to expose them before their own eyes, to make  
them return to You;  
I desire their salvation, and not their perdition.

❖ By love, I desire the repentance of the proud;  
And by love I seek fellowship with those who fear You;  
Make them turn to me, to gather together and to become one in You;  
Grant me the purity of heart, to become blameless.

## **11 KAPH**

### **HOPE AMID THE DARKNESS**

**(81 – 88)**

Having talked about the chastisements, perceiving that God's judgments are right, the psalmist, on his side, is convinced that he is worthy of chastisement for his sins; and the affliction motivates him to resort to the Word of God and His promises; And on the side of the proud wicked, God's justice chases them to repent; and If they persist on their despise of God's law, they would perish. ... Now, with the strong afflictions surrounding him on all sides, the psalmist feels as though the darkness wholly covers him; Yet he is filled with hope, that the Savior, the Sun of Righteousness will shine on him.

- 1- **“I have become like a wineskin in smoke”** 81 - 83
- 2- **The foolish fantasies uttered by the wicked, and the truth of the commandments** 84 - 87
- 3- **“According to Your loving kindness, Revive me”** 88

#### **1- “I HAVE BECOME LIKE A WINESKIN IN SMOKE”:**

According to other versions, it came as: “..... *in ice*”; but according to the Hebrew version, it came as “... *in smoke*”. The wineskin, a vessel made out of dead animal skin, was used by ancient peoples to bring drinking water to households, as well as to store liquids like wine and milk. Those vessels were kept in a dry atmosphere, close to a source of heat, like an oven or a furnace.

The psalmist likens himself here, to a wineskin, hanged in a tent, where a fire is made to fill the tent with smoke, so that it would be difficult to see the wineskin, hanged in a corner, usually dark in color like the tent itself. Temptations nearly destroyed him; surrounded him like smoke in a tent, almost unseen, nor recognized by anyone, bearing nothing but the smell of death (that of dead animals skin) ... Amid those bitter feelings, the psalmist's soul longs for the Savior, anticipated to come according to the divine promise; He who, alone, will give him any value, and will care for his life; saying:

*“My soul languishes for Your salvation, but I hope in Your word” (81)*

❖ Who can utter such words, but “*the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the holy nation*” (1 Peter 2: 9)?; those who languish for the

Christ (the savior), since the beginning of mankind, and until the end of the world. Each according to his time, whether those who have already lived, or those who are living today, or will live in the future.

In the early generations of the church, there have been saints who were born before the Lord in flesh, who languished for the realization of His incarnation. But, later on, as He has already come, crucified, died, and ascended to heaven, there are saints who languish for His second coming to judge the living and the dead.

“*I hope in Your words*” (81); namely in Your promises, we came to have the hope, anticipating the things not seen by the nonbelievers.

(St. Augustine)

“*My eyes fail from seeking Your word, saying: ‘When will You comfort me?’*” (82)

According to St. John Chrysostom, [David’s psalms bring forth a fountain of tears<sup>1</sup>].

Some believe that the psalmist, having waited so long, in anticipation of the coming of the Savior, proclaims here his longing for Him, seeking divine comforts, to dwell on him like dew or ice. He came to be like a wineskin, bringing his body to death, receiving the work of the Savior like dew.

According to St. Athanasius, the “Savior” is the Son of God who saved us, to Whom the soul languishes; in whom the believers trust; and the eyes of the prophets have failed in anticipation of His coming and comfort. About Him, St. John, the beloved, wrote in His first catholic epistle: “*If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins*” (1 John 2: 1). ... He comforts him, who anticipates His promises, and waits on His words that came in the divine Scriptures.

❖ “*My eyes fail from seeking Your word, saying: ‘When will You comfort me?’*” (82) ... This blessed failure of the inner eyes, worthy of commendation, is not set upon mental weakness, but upon an intense longing for the realization of the divine promise; hence he says: “*from seeking Your Words*”; and by that meaning, those eyes

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. On 1 Timothy, 14.

could go on saying: “*When will You comfort me?*”; whether when we pray, or zealously sigh from so much anticipation.

Saying: “***When will You comfort me?***” reveals the extent of suffering from so much anticipation; “*My soul is greatly troubled, but You, O Lord, how long?*” (Psalm 6: 3). Comfort would be realized when we feel the that time will pass, and the Lord will soon come to help us. But God knows what and when to act; for “*You have arranged all things by measure, and number and weight*” (Wisdom 11: 20).

(St. Augustine)

***“For I have become like a wineskin in smoke; Yet, I do not forget Your statutes” (83)***

❖ As the incarnation of the Son of God is likened to dew on a fleece of wool (Judges 6: 37, His words and teachings would be like ice; And all those who do according to His words, and receive His teaching, would bring to death their body members which are, according to the apostle Paul: “*fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is adultery, because of these thing the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience*” (Colossians 3: 5, 6). Whoever brings his body members to death, and turns his body into what is like a wineskin, presenting love for God, who died for his sake, would be worthy to say: “*My soul languishes for Your salvation, but I hope in Your word*” (81)... And would not forget his statutes.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

It is obvious that the psalmist has gone through an intense state of affliction, and was on the verge of despair, if it was not for his hope in the promises of God for salvation. ... Here we notice:

a- Despite what the psalmist was suffering of intense grief, and depression of heart, that he likened himself to a wine skin, Yet he stayed hoping in the promises of God, saying: “***I hope in Your word***” (81); trusting in God’s mercies, that raises from death to life, and holding fast to God’s testimonies, whatever the cost may be (88).

b- The psalmist proclaimed his longing for the salvation of the Lord (81), and not of anyone else. The secret of his longing, not just to get saved from his affliction; but to encounter him as a Savior, and to get to know His love, statutes, and secrets.

c- However dark the world would become in his eyes, the psalmist would remain anticipating the salvation of God; who will surely come, for God would never break His promises, or bring to shame those who have trust in His word. Salvation will surely come; and the believer

is committed to seek it, should seek it elaborately, as a sign of his trust in the promises of God.

d- It is not for us to tell God when to realize his promises; but our eyes should keep waiting on Him; according to the words of the psalmist: ***“My eyes fail from seeking Your word, saying: ‘When will You comfort me?’”*** (82). Even if our eyes fail from seeking the realization of God’s promises, yet our hearts should stay full of hope, and never fail. Abraham looked by the eyes of his heart, by faith, he rejoiced to see the Lord’s day, and perceived His amazing salvation from afar.

e- Man, with his whole being, anticipates the comfort of the Lord with joyful hope; By his lips he utters to express what is in the soul, saying:

***“My soul languishes for your salvation”*** (81); and his eyes ***“fail from seeking Your words”*** (82); and man, as a whole, ***“becomes like a wineskin in smoke”*** (83).

The eyes fail from being continuously lifted up toward heaven in anticipation of the amazing salvation of God. What the tongue cannot express, the eyes proclaim by their contrition and tears; which open the gates of heaven to let the supplication enter to reach the divine throne.

❖ He means for us to understand the wineskin as being the body brought to death; and the (ice) as the heavenly blessing.

The lusts of the flesh are so bound, as though by ice, to become slow in motion, so that the righteousness of God would not be drawn away from memory; according to the words of the apostle, saying: ***“Make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts”*** (Romans 13: 14); When the lusts cool down, the memory of love shines<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ He, who brings his members to death, and feels that he vainly walk in a mortal world, will not cease to say: ***“I became like a wineskin in (ice)”***. (every trace of lust in me has dried out); and My knees became weak because of fasting; ***“I forget to eat my bread; because the sound of my groaning, my bones cling to my skin”*** (Psalm 102: 4, 5).

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 22: 17.

## **2- THE FOOLISH FANTASIES UTTERED BY THE WICKED, AND THE TRUTH OF THE COMMANDMENT:**

Together with his longing for the Savior, and his long anticipation for His coming; and for the enjoyment of his comfort, the psalmist feels bitterness, when he compares the deadly words, slanders, and deception of the wicked, to the life-giving words of God.

***“How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?” (84)***

❖ Those who persecute the believers are the demons, whether through wicked people or without them. The psalmist seeks from God to breakdown their power, and to submit them under his feet.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ Such were the words of the martyrs in the book of Revelation (6: 10, 11); 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”*.

***“How many are the days of Your servant?”*** Here he ask about the number of days of the church – the body of Christ. That does not mean that the church would cease to exist before the end of this world. The church will certainly last on earth up to the great day of judgment, when her persecutors will be avenged. In case someone wonders why, then, did the psalmist pose this question ... he should remember that, when the disciples asked the Lord the same question, he answered them by saying: *“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the father has put in His own authority”* (Acts 1: 7).

**(St. Augustine)**

By talking about how short the days of his sojourn are; how his temporal life will soon come to an end; and how the sorrows caused by the enemy are destroying it, the psalmist seeks God’s mercies, help, and intervention, to let him see His wonders before he departs from this world. He cries out seeking God’s justice against the devil and his evil works.

***“The proud have dug pitfalls for me, which is not according to Your law” (85)***

According to **St. Augustine**, the Greek word translated as *“pitfalls”*, is translated by some as (foolish fantasies) or (vain pleasures);

namely, that those who work against the law stir up debates that carry to them some kind of vain mental pleasure.

He adds: “*which is not according to Your law*” (85); For it is the truth and not the words that give me pleasure.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ To persecute me, they tell me pleasant stories; but I would rather have Your law. Because “*Your commandments are all true*”; whereas, because their debates bear increasing vanity, they persecute the truth in me.

I need Your help to strive for the sake of truth even to death; according to Your commandment, which is also the truth.

**(St. Augustine)**

The enemy attempt to deceive me by vain words, and to seduce me by pleasure; But I perceives that my true pleasure is in the law of God

❖ Look, O Lord my God, Where is my pleasure? ... The wicked talk to me about pleasures; but there is no pleasure like the law of God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Pitfalls, are the sayings of this world, and the teachings of the Jews, which they have taken from human traditions, contrary to the Holy Book, the interpretations of the heretics, and the books of nonbelievers. These are all of no benefit; For there is no salvation except in the law of God.

The Jews have driven out the Lord Christ and his saintly disciples; and the nonbelievers have driven out the Christians; not because of robbery, fornications, oppression, murder, or anything else that warrant death, but because they uttered the truth, which is an act of oppression and a denial of the truth.

The wicked almost made an end of me on earth; and almost made me languish for the earthly vanities; but I never ceased to keep Your precepts.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

*“All Your commandments are faithful; They persecute me wrongfully; Help me!”* (86)

*“They almost made an end of me on earth; But I did not forsake Your precepts”* (87)

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<sup>1</sup> *Confessions, 11: 2:4.*

❖ There was a great slaughter of the martyrs, while proclaiming Your truth, and testifying to it; On their tongue, the psalmist cries out to God, saying: “**Help (us); But we did not forsake Your precepts**”.

(St. Augustine)

Perceiving that the way of the Lord is full of troubles, stirred up by the enemy, in an attempt to cast him to the ground, or even to make an end of him on earth; Yet the psalmist has never forsaken God’s precepts, that turns the persecutions of the wicked to crowns of glory.

These words, uttered by the prophet are recited by every believer in the prayer of midnight; for they are words that touch the daily actuality of those who fear God, whom the enemy keeps on opposing by every possible way; whether they are young, or old, men, or women.

### **3- REVIVE ME ACCORDING TO YOUR LOVING KINDNESS:**

The mouth of the wicked utters foolish fantasies, in an attempt to make an end of my soul, and to destroy it eternally; But the mouth of God, on the other hand, presents to me life-giver testimonies. Hence, the psalmist says:

*“Revive me according to Your loving kindness; so that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth” (88)*

❖ God has no mouth; but being incarnated, our Lord Jesus Christ had an uttering mouth. The testimonies of God’s mouth, therefore, are the commands of the Holy Bible, uttered by Him; And the prophets, the apostles, and the preachers, are all the mouth of God; for they strive to utter His precepts.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

The psalmist ends his talk, full of bitterness, brought forth by the troubles caused by the wicked, by joy and hope, having experienced God’s life-giving loving kindness; and having tasted His living and steadfast word.

### **The secret of hope:**

The psalmist’s life turned into a wineskin in smoke; and his soul was almost destroyed by afflictions. But, as his hope in the Lord shined light on his life, his lamentation turned into a joyful praise:

1- He would never receive salvation except from God alone ... His soul languished for such salvation, which, would not only saves him from affliction, but would reveal to him the Savior’s love and secrets (81).

2- Salvation is close at hand; for God has promised it, and will give it to us if we ask for it; and if we abide to His word, without anticipating certain times for it's realization.

3- The believer proclaims his hope in salvation by his whole being: the lips reveal the longing of the soul; the tears utter what the lips could not; and the tongue of both his body and soul turns into a prayer that goes up to heaven, proclaiming their hope in God, their Savior.

4- While the devil exerts all his power, in an attempt to destroy the believer, and to make an end of him on earth; the believer would never pervert from God's precepts; with surety that all the fights of the enemy against him will turn into glories for himself.

5- While the devil never ceases to ridicule the believer, in an attempt to destroy every hope in him, the Word of God never ceases to give him life.

### **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 11 Kaph (81-88) YOUR PROMISES FILL MY SOUL WITH JOYFUL HOPE**

- ❖ As temptations surround me on all sides;  
I become like a wineskin in smoke  
Smoke, filling the tent, make me disappear from view;  
I become nobody;  
No one looks at me;  
Nor cares for me;  
But Your divine promises are true; and fill me with great hope;  
And open before me the door of salvation.
- ❖ As the affliction greatly intensifies, my eyes look up at You alone;  
Waiting long for Your salvation, my eyes fail;  
Yet I am certain that salvation is close at hand;  
When will You comfort me?  
My hope in You is certain;  
When will You lift up from me the temptations, even temporarily?  
When will You come for judgment; and the world would come to an end with all its sufferings?  
Yes indeed, the time is short;  
And everything has its time, O Pantocrator!
- ❖ As my tongue becomes speechless;

My eyes fail, and utter by tears;  
Their voice are louder than that of the mouth and tongue;  
My eyes cry out together with the psalmist and the martyrs;  
How many are the days of Your servant?  
When will You execute judgment on the devil and his angels, who  
persecute me?!  
Make hast, I pray, for the enemy intends to destroy the short days of  
my sojourn.

- ❖ The enemy attempts to draw me to him by glittering vain words;  
But I never feel pleasure, except in Your law;  
He intends to kindle my heart by the love of earthly things;  
But I shall never forsake Your precepts;  
Although the words of the enemy are attractive; yet they are  
destructive to my soul;  
Whereas Your words, although firm, yet they are life-givers.
- ❖ Attempting to destroy every hope in me; the enemy ridicules me;  
But You speak to me through the prophets;  
And the Word of God, Himself, came to talk to me with the language  
of love on the cross;  
He opened wide the door of joyful hope before me.

## **12 LAMED**

# **YOUR WORD IS PERPETUAL IN HEAVEN (89 – 96)**

Having talked about the foolish fantasies uttered by the wicked – who seek to make an end of him on earth, the psalmist presents to us the life-giving Word of God, being the Word perpetually settled in heaven, broad without limits, that gives the soul an inner security, and a heavenly life, together with limitless enlargement of heart. Suiting all eras, the word of God also touches the life of every man.

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| <b>1- God's word is settled in heaven</b>       | <b>89</b>      |
| <b>2- The word of God suits all generations</b> | <b>90</b>      |
| <b>3- The word of God suits all men</b>         | <b>91</b>      |
| <b>4- The word of God suits me personally</b>   | <b>92 - 95</b> |
| <b>5- The word of God is exceedingly broad</b>  | <b>96</b>      |

### **1- THE WORD OF GOD IS SETTLED IN HEAVEN:**

There are many who think that the whole world is in the hands of the wicked, especially the violent among them, and those who abuse authority. the cause of moaning by those who fear God along the generations. But the psalmist perceives that all the plots, vanity, violence, and practices of the wicked will come to an end; but the Word of God is settled forever in heaven.

***“Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven” (89)***

He, who gets attached to the wicked will go together with them down to vanity; for their spirits will come out, and they will return to dust. Whereas he, who gets attached to the Word of God, will forever enjoy an inner settlement, and a heavenly eternal life.

Once Adam disobeyed the commandment, he separated himself from the settled Word of God; lost his gladness, and his paradisiacal life; his land produced thorns and thistles; and heard the divine verdict: *“You are from dust, and to dust you will return”*. Then came the second Adam, the Lord Christ, the eternal Word of God, for us to unite with Him, to bear His obedience, to partake of His divine nature, to sit together with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2: 6), and to enjoy the fellowship of His eternal glories.

According to **the scholar Origen**, the Word of God endures forever in heaven, for the heavenly creatures follow an extremely particulate system, set by the Word of God, never to pervert from it. Whereas, as far as the earth is concerned, while the global system abide to the Word of God, the wicked pervert from what the Word has set, to practice adultery, uncleanness, and other lusts; that the Word of God would have no place in him; for “*what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?!*” (2 Corinthians 6: 14).

He, whose behavior comes to be in heaven, even if his body stays on earth, the Word of God will dwell in him.

According to **St. Athanasius the apostolic**, the psalmist here, talks about the global system, the celestial stars in particular, and their abidance to the Word of God, on account of that the whole creation are His “servants” (91).

In the previous verses (81-88) we saw how the psalmist suffered from the words of the wicked who did not seek less than to make an end of his life on earth; They did not only afflict him, and deprive him of his throne, but plotted to have him killed. Now, having experienced, amid all that bitterness, the possibility of God’s promises and Word, , his heart exulted in the Lord. The sweet psalmist of Israel knew how to find in the midst of the deadly currents of this world, the Rock of truth, in whom he would take resort, so as not to be shaken! ... Let, therefore, the destructive currents do their work, the way they find convenient; for they would never be able to move the Rock of the Word of God, on whom the psalmist has taken resort. His eyes will no longer fail, nor his lips will cry out, nor he will become like a wineskin in smoke, that bursts open ... But he will rest upon the Rock, to play with the spirit of truth, on the harp of his soul, a symphony of love, faith, and hope; and to perceive that his strength will no more fail; for instead of being preoccupied with the deadly currents around him, he will exult by the divine kingdom within himself; and will partake of the praises of the heavenly creatures.

And behold, the sweet psalmist testifies that it is not his experience alone, but is the experience of all generations in the dealings with God; It is the experience of all the congregation of believers in every era; as well as a personal experience of every believer in his own life.

❖ His heart burning with longing toward the heavenly Jerusalem, the psalmist looked up toward the higher kingdom, and said: “***Forever, O***

***Lord, Your word is settled in heaven***” (89); Namely, perpetually settled among the angels who eternally serve You as Your hosts.

(St. Augustine)

❖ David moved to say: “***Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled down in heaven***” (89); For the existence of what endures, will never come to an end, even to eternity<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ The Word of God, according to the holy Scripture, is One, “***settled in heaven forever***” (89); unchangeable, neither before, nor ever; but will remain the same forever. It is befitting for the One God, to have One image, One Word, and One wisdom<sup>2</sup>.

In the Holy Book, He was not described as: “God’s firstborn”, nor “God’s creation”, but as “*the only-begotten Son*”, “*the Son*”, “*the Word*” , and “*the Wisdom*”, to refer to His relationship to God the Father<sup>3</sup>.

(Pope Athanasius the Apostolic)

## **2- THE WORD OF GOD SUITS ALL GENERATIONS:**

***“Your faithfulness endures to all generations. You established the earth, and it abides”*** (90)

As the Word of God works in us – the earth -- makes us settled in Him; He becomes the foundation of our spiritual building; and turns our dry land that produces thorns and thistles into a new land, an icon of heaven.

The Word of God suits all generations; will never get old or ancient; for His promises are steadfast. The Word suits every generation, being “God’s truth”, or “the never changing Truth”. ... In the old testament, the “Truth” was presented through the shadows and symbols; Then, in the fullness of time, He came, proclaimed by the divine incarnation, for us to be established in Him, as though on the Rock, that no time could corrupt.

❖ ***“Your faithfulness (Truth) endures to all generations”***...

The first generation (the Jews) rejecting the Faithfulness (the Truth), saying: “*Away with such a fellow from the earth*” (Acts 22: 22); Faithfulness moved from that generation to another generation. And on that Generation, the earth was established; on the foundation of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Of the Christian Faith, Book 1, 10: 63.*

<sup>2</sup> *Four Discourses against the Arians, 2: 18: 36.*

<sup>3</sup> *Four Discourses against the Arians, 2: 21: 62.*

Cornerstone, to lead all the faithful on earth. That is why the earth became “well established”, having a solid foundation or unshakable basis.

(The scholar Origen)

### 3- THE WORD OF GOD SUITS ALL MEN:

The Word of God, not only suits all generations, but suits all men in every generation, whatever their citizenship, culture, race, etc. are.

***“They stand today according to Your ordinances, For all are Your servants” (91)***

❖ Nothing escapes from the authority of God; for it is written: *“For all are Your servants”*.

Only One is His Only-begotten Son; And only One is His Holy Spirit; Both are exempts; while all the others are servants of God, by the Only-begotten Son, in the Holy Spirit.

God, therefore ordains all; and by His long suffering, He endures even the criminals, the robbers, and adulterers among them; fixing a certain time to recompense everyone. And, in case those whom He warned, persist on not repenting from their hearts, they will get a great judgment<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ He said: *“You established the earth”*; namely, the earthly creatures who believed in the Lord Christ, the incarnate God. He established them on this Truth, namely, upon Himself -- “The Truth”, established on Him, as though on a solid Rock. By His shining and appearance incarnate, on earth, He set a shining day for the believers, not like the sensed day, made by the sun, for the sensed day, which eventually comes to an end, and is followed by night; Whereas the day set by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, will abide and endure forever.

❖ In the present time, the enlightenment is by symbols and images; whereas in the time to come, it will be public and direct. While the believers will enjoy an eternal day, not followed by night; For the nonbelievers, it will be an eternal night without light. ... All mankind abide to the authority of God.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> *Cat. Lect., 8: 5.*

- ❖ The day which the Lord (the Truth) has made (Psalm 118: 24) is lighted, for it is God, Himself, who lighted it. This day will settle, endure, and, on account of that it is founded upon Christ, the Cornerstone, it has no end, and will never change.
- ❖ As what is intended is the new time; the day, in which “*The Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God will be the dawn of the righteous*” (Isaiah 60: 19); the day is, therefore settled, and your sun will no more set, the sun of noon (see Amos 8; 9).

On the earth, where not all are righteous, there is no perpetual day, nor perpetual night.

But, once the righteous become separated from the wicked; then, the night will be for the wicked, when “*they will be cast out into outer darkness*” (Matthew 8: 12); and the day will be for the righteous, when the day endures, and will not be followed by night. It is the day about which I believe he says: “***They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants***” (91).

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ “**The day also endures**” (91)

All those things are (the day): “*The day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it*” (Psalm 118: 24); “*Let us walk properly as in the day*” (Romans 13: 14).

“***For all are Your servants***” (91). He says “all’ on the “some”; For all those who belong to the night (See Hosea 4: 5 LXX), do not worship Him.

(St. Augustine)

By saying “***All are Your servants***” (91), the psalmist confirms that it is befitting of all creatures, being servants of the Lord, to abide to the Word of God. ... Now, since all the heavenly and earthly creations abide to the system set for them by God to realize their goals; Would man be the only creature to disobey God, his Creator?! ... How could we, the believers not receive His law?! ... Let us then, abide to His Word, receive His ordinances, and serve Him with our whole hearts, in order to endure forever.

#### **4- THE WORD OF GOD SUITS ME PERSONALLY:**

If the Word of God suits all generations, and suits all men, it will certainly suit me personally. That is the feeling of the psalmist, who passed through a tough stage, in which he was almost utterly destroyed by despair; Then the Word of God came to restore hope to him; and he says:

***“Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction. I will never forget Your precepts, for by them, You have given me life” (92, 93)***

In the midst of affliction, when I recite Your words, and remember Your promises, the ordinances of Your righteousness will be revealed to me, and I will love Your precepts, which are my personal support amid my sufferings and affliction. Instead of despair, I enjoyed the joy of hope, an enjoyable companion, and comforter for the soul.

Even if all forget me, I shall never forget Your precepts, and Your precepts will never forget me; “By the divine statutes and commandments, in the midst of my troubles, every feeling of isolation will be taken away from me, and I will enjoy life” (See Leviticus 18: 5).

❖ As already said, the difficult time of temptation, is called “affliction”. Blessed is he, who is in affliction, yet he does not perish.

As an example, if I come into the temptation of martyrdom ; and the statutes of God are perpetually the subject of my meditation and training; I shall not perish, whatever the ultimate end of that temptation may be. The same thing could be said about any other kind of temptation.

And when I am attacked by evil thoughts, and adversary hosts, I would perish, unless Your law is my help ...

❖ ***“Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction”*** (92)... This is the law of faith; not a vain faith, but one working with love (See Galatians 5). Through this grace, faith is acquired, that makes men courageous in the temporal sufferings, so as not to perish in their afflictions.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ According to the apostle Paul, the law was then, our instructor and guide to Christ ... He, to whom the law is the guide until he reaches the fullness of the time (Galatians 4: 4), when he puts away childish things (1 Corinthians 13: 11); Such a man is not corrupt, nor a denier.

Saying: *“I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life”* (93), the psalmist means to say: **[I shall always keep in mind Your precepts which I received from You; which You taught me here on this earth; and by which I moved from earth to heaven, and dwelt among the angels].**

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ By the care of the divine Physician, the psalmist restores his health, after suffering a serious illness; And while in good health, he would

not forget how he was cured. ... That is how the psalmist lived his life by the precepts he received from You; he would never forget that by them “You have given him life”.

**(St. Dedyumus, the blind)**

- ❖ Do you see how he did not perish in his affliction?; For unless he is given life by God, any one could kill him, and would not be able to give him life.

**(St. Augustine)**

Going on in his talk to God about his personal experience with His divine works, the psalmist says:

***“I am Yours, save me; for I have sought Your precepts. The wicked wait for me to destroy me, but I will consider Your testimonies” (94, 95)***

Entering into a personal relationship with God, the psalmist says to Him: ***“I am Yours”***. My salvation is not set upon the works of my righteousness, nor my strife, but on Your divine Work; Acquiring me for Yourself, I shall be Your portion, and You shall be mine... Through this partnership, set upon the true love, I covet for Your precepts; and then, I will care no more for the plots of the wicked to destroy me; but will be only preoccupied with the enjoyment of knowing and considering Your testimonies.

- ❖ It is as though he says: [When I intended to become my own, I lost myself. But now: ***“I am Yours, save me, for I have sought Your precepts”***],

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ He, whose works and words are according to God’s law, and who seeks God’s precepts, would have the right to say: ***“I am Yours, save me”***... By my nature, I am Your subject; By Your grace, I am Your son; working according to Your commandments, I am Your servant; ... Enduring the troubles from the hidden and the manifest enemies, I am Your soldier ... Save me from the perdition they plan to bring forth upon me; for I have sought Your precepts, and considered Your testimonies.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ The wicked intend to deliver me to death; But being preoccupied with Your testimonies, I acquired the life to come, right here in this world.

**(Father Theodoret)**

❖ Elaborately meditating in this verse, we shall see that perdition is being far from God; For the adversary hosts have only one goal – my perdition. But, while waiting to destroy me, I considered Your testimonies, and kept them close to my heart.

(The scholar Origen)

## **5- THE WORD OF GOD IS EXCEEDINGLY BROAD:**

Being bound to the commandment on a personal level, brings me forth to limitless perfection. The heavenly settled Word, turns the heart into heaven without limits.

*“I have seen the consummation of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad” (96)*

The prophet presented to us his own experience.

He saw how the mighty Goliath, who humiliated the entire army, falls down with one single stone from a sling.

He saw how the wise counselor Ahitophel, present a corrupt council to his son Absalom.

He saw how the beautiful and strong Absalom hanging shamefully in a terebinth tree

He saw how the perfections and glories of this world will end up!  
*“All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flowers fall away; But the word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Peter 1: 24, 25)*

According to **St. basil**, the commandment to love God, our neighbor and our enemy, is an extremely broad commandment, for it covers all, includes. and crowns all perfections.

❖ Love is the breadth of the commandment.

(St. Augustine)

❖ For every virtue I saw a consummation:

The consummation of chastity is controlling lusts

That of manhood is courage and daring against horrors

Every thing has its consummation; but the consummation of good men is the kingdom of God.

I saw that Your commandment is exceedingly broad; although the way leading to salvation is narrow; Your commandment makes it wide for those who keep it, makes them courageous and strong; and its end is joyful, broad, and lighted.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

**The word of God is perpetually settled in heaven:**

1- The world is not a toy in the hand of the wicked, but is controlled by its Creator; namely, by the Word of God.

2- The divine Word turns our land, that produces thorns and thistles; namely, our lustful body, into a joyful heaven, where the body is sanctified to the account of the kingdom of God.

3- The Word of God is presented to all generations, and even to every man, to be experienced by the believer in a personal relationship with God.

4- The world and all creatures faithfully abide to the Word of the Lord ... Is it not befitting of us, then, as believers, to receive His law?!

5- The life-giving Word of God is exceedingly broad, and limitless.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 12 Lamed**  
**YOUR WORD SCATTERS THE FOOLISH FANTASIES**  
**UTTERED BY THE ENEMY**

- ❖ The devil assumes that he has dominion over me;  
Sometimes he threatens me, and other times he attempts to seduce me  
by uttering foolish fantasies;  
But I abide to Your word that scatters them.
- ❖ Your Word is settled in heaven, enjoyed by the heavenlies;  
Attaching myself to it, I would get settled by it forever;  
And would enjoy its joy, to become, myself, heavenly.
- ❖ The devil's promises and his hosts, are vain and temporal;  
He, who gets attached to them, would, himself, become vain;  
Because of him, I was told:  
*"You are dust; and to dust you will return"*.  
But now, I hear You say to me:  
*"You are heaven, and to heaven you will return"*
- ❖ Your Word will stay, working through the generations;  
The Jews rejected it when they crucified the incarnate Word of God;  
And when the Gentiles received it, by believing in the cross;  
The door of the World opened before all men.
- ❖ The light of the Word, the Sun of Righteousness, shone on all;  
To turn their night into an enduring day, not followed by night;  
It is the day, made by the Lord;  
To rejoice and be glad in it;  
Everything in me exults, worshipping You.

**13 MEM**

**YOUR WORDS ARE SWEET IN MY  
MOUTH  
(97 – 104)**

As the Word of God is settled in heaven; suits all generations, all eras, all men, and is enjoyed by the believer in a personal relationship; bringing him forth to the breadth and width of heaven; he finds in it a special and better sweetness than honey.

- 1- The sweet commandment, and the meditation in God's name** 97
- 2- The sweet commandment, and the eternal wisdom** 98 - 100
- 3- The sweet commandment, and the strife** 101 - 102
- 4- How sweet is Your commandment!** 103
- 5- The sweetness of the commandment, and the hate of every false way** 104

**1- THE SWEET COMMANDMENT, AND THE MEDITATION IN GOD'S NAME:**

The secret of the sweetness of the commandment is our bond with God, and finding pleasure in His beloved name, in which we will never cease to meditate all the days of our life.

*“Oh, how I love Your name! It is my meditation all the day”*  
(97)

Getting attached to the Word of the Lord, the Sun of Righteousness, our life turns into a perpetual day with no night; We cast away from ourselves the works of darkness, And we enjoy the meditation in His Holy Name, as the weapon of light, that darkness cannot confront.

The psalmist not only revered the commandment, but he also loved it; that is why he received it in his life, to grant him the fellowship in the features of the Holy One. ... We, as well, not only honor the name of God, but we also love it, and meditate in it all the days of our life, being the sign of His presence in us, and our presence before Him, to perpetually enjoy His company.

The prophet David was not preoccupied with his throne, his problems, or his family matters; but, in everything, and under every circumstances, he enjoyed the presence of God, and was preoccupied with His sweet Holy Name, and His joyful commandment. And with the passing of time, he got more attached to God, longing for new depths in his fellowship with Him.

## **2- THE SWEET COMMANDMENT AND THE ETERNAL WISDOM:**

By our attachment to the incarnate Word of God, our life turns into a perpetual day; and His name becomes sweet in our mouths. The leaders of the Jews, on the other hand, bearing the spirit of animosity against the Lord Christ, and His own, their eyes darkened to the knowledge of the truth. Instead of being the teachers of the whole world about the Lord Christ, they rejected Him; Whereas the Gentiles received Him, enjoyed His eternal wisdom, and got the enlightenment of their insight. Hence, the Jews became enemies of the Gentile believers, instead of being their teachers and elders.

***“You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the elders, because I keep Your precepts” (98-100)***

David probably did not bear the Holy Book in his hands in his early days; yet he bore it in his mind and heart. The divine commandment has been his support, and the secret of his wisdom while herding his father’s sheep in his youth; has been his instructor when the prophet Samuel anointed him a king in secret; and has been his companion all the days of his sojourn. Bonded to the school of the commandment all along the stages of his life, he grew in wisdom and grace. Loving the divine truth, that purified his heart and mind, he came to be more understanding than all the elders. That was not an insult against the elders, but in it was their joy and glory, to see their student surpassing them in knowledge.

❖ ***“Your commandments, made me wiser than my enemies”***

*“They actually had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Romans 10: 2).* But the psalmist understood God’s commandment more than his enemies, according to the words of the apostle, who says: *“Not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Philippians 3: 9).* Not that the law, read by enemies,

is not from God, but they did not understand it, the way he did more than them, bonded to the 'Rock' (Christ), in whom they got offended; "*For Christ is the end of the law*" (Romans 10: 4); "to be justified for free by His grace" (Romans 3: 4); Hence, even if they held fast to God's law, yet they sought to set their own righteousness. They did not walk as the children of the promise, who "*hunger and thirst for righteousness*" (Matthew 5: 6); asking for, and knocking on the door (Matthew 7: 11), entreating the Father to enjoy sonhood through the Only-begotten Son ... but they sought the temporal reward of the same commandment (through which the psalmist enjoyed the divine blessings).

(St. Augustine)

❖ "*I have more understanding than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation*"

Who is he, who has more understanding than all his teachers?

Who would dare to put himself in a better position than all prophets?

Who taught, not just by words, but by great authority, those contemporary to him, and the successive generations?

It could not apply to the person of Solomon ...

I obviously know who He is: "*When He was twelve years old, the boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem, and so it was that after three days, his parents found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers*". To His parents, the Son said: "*I must be about My Father's business*".(Luke 42-49).

It is very difficult to understand this about the Person of the Word, unless we perceive that the Son begotten from the Father ..., having "*taken the form of a servant*", those older than Him assumed that he should learn like a boy of His age. But, being taught by the Father, He had more understanding than all His teachers, of the testimonies of God concerning Him, when He uttered the words: "*You have sent to John, and he has bore witness to the truth; Yet, I do not receive testimony from man*" (John 5: 33-34).

(St. Augustine)

❖ "*I understand more than the elders, because I keep Your precepts*"

... To know what is meant by the term "elders", more than whom the Lord understands, we shall find it in His answer to the scribes and the Pharisees who asked Him: "*Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread*", to which He, who is wiser than the elders answered:

*“Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?”* (Matthew 15: 2, 3).

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ We, the believers, understand the commandments of God more than the Jews, for our Lord Jesus Christ granted us by His Holy Spirit, to understand the spirit of the Book, which they understood only superficially; but which we abide to its spiritual content and meanings, that endure for us forever.

The prophet called them *“enemies”*, for they curse us, and bear toward us animosity and hate; whereas we love them, pray for the sake of their salvation, and bless them, as the Lord commanded us.

Those whom the prophet called *“enemies”*, he also calls *“teachers”*, on account of that they were entrusted on the sayings of God before us; namely, His law; and that they had Moses, and the prophets... From the divine books, we drew the knowledge more than they did, and received the precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ, and perpetually search in them.

Esau was older than his brother Jacob; Still, the blessing of their father Isaac, that was to be for the older son, when his father asked him for food, he headed to the wilderness to hunt like wild beasts.... So were the Israelites (as elders), older and wiser than us -- the Gentiles; and the blessing was prepared for them, on account of that the statutes and the prophets were given to them; but they intended to please God by pouring animal blood like beasts. And when they went out of their father’s house to the wilderness; we adorned ourselves with the counsel of our mother – the holy church, beautified by the divine books, and put on the hide of the Lamb, that was slain for our sake; namely, by the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and approached our Father; who gave us the blessing and the firstborn status; which the *“elders”* have forsaken, and become in woe, regret, and servitude to the devil; until they return to God by repentance and faith,

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

The commandment, therefore, grants knowledge and wisdom; as according to the Lord Christ: *“Anyone wants to do the will of God, will know if the teaching is from God”* (John 7: 17). By the divine commandment we know how to practice with the simplicity of the doves, yet with wisdom more than that of the serpents (See Mathew 10: 16).

The psalmist says: *“I have more understanding than all my teachers”* (99). He so says, not with haughtiness or pride; but as a

confession of God's work that granted him more wisdom and knowledge than his teachers. A true teacher who bears the spirit of fatherhood, would love to see his students have more wisdom and knowledge than him; As every generation would rejoice when the generation following them show more progress than what they have; Otherwise, there will be no growth for mankind, nor edification for the church of God. This is the living tradition, leaning on the past to practice it through the experience and language of the present, to testify to the living faith in a continuouslygrowing life, kindled with the spirit. This tradition is set upon the Word of God, lived by the apostles, and all the following generation, for the church of the present to live, and to present, living, and with no perversion, to the future generations.

### **3- THE SWEET COMMANDMENT AND THE STRIFE:**

If the prophet David, having surpassed his teachers in wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, he adorned all that, not by pride and haughtiness, but by restraining his feet from every evil way, to set the knowledge on a foundation of a holy life; confirming his practical intention to receive God's law as his own law.

If our bonding with the Lord our God, and with His holy name, give us a special sweetness in practicing His commandment, which, in turn, would grant us heavenly wisdom, and more understanding than that of the Jewish teachers who rejected the faith; On our side, corresponding to such grace and sweetness, together with having the understanding and the wisdom, we are committed to strive to keep the commandment, and the precepts of the Lord.

***“I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself has taught me” (101- 102)***

If we – the Gentiles -- have received the Word of the incarnate God, On our side we are committed to forget every evil and deceptive way, to receive the one new “Way”.

The secret of the psalmist's commitment to the judgments of God, is his feeling that the law of the Lord was put specially for him; as though it was conformed to suit him personally, and to prepare him for the new heavenly life; hence he says: ***“You Yourself has taught me”***.

Being committed to the law of the Lord, or to His commandment, he restrained his feet from every evil way, to consummate the will of God in his life, and to keep His law. The more he restrained his feet from every evil way, the more he discovered the

depths of God's law. It is as though the law exhorts him to strife, and the strife supports him to discover the law.

Restraining our feet from every evil way, is not to get commendation from men, nor to gain a temporal reward; but as a desire to keep the law of the Lord, as a sign of complete obedience to God, so immensely beloved by us.

❖ Being our head, Savior of the body itself, It is not possible for Him to bear any bodily lust, or any evil way, from which he would be in need to be restrained; Nevertheless, the members of the body, with complete freedom of will, could walk differently.

To restrain our feet from every evil way: the way in which He does not walk, that He would never go through. By this, we can keep the word of God, if we do not go after the evil lusts (See Sirach 17: 30). And by this, we do not seek the evil lusts, but resist them by the spirit that lusts against the flesh (See Galatians 5: 17); so that they would not draw us, seduce us, and cast us out on the evil ways.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *"I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself has taught me"* (102)... Here, he shows what made him fear, and restrain his feet from every evil way.

You, O Lord, are deeper than my own deep; You have set a law in my heart by Your Spirit, as well as by Your fingers; that I may not fear from it as a servant, who carries no love, but love it with gentle fear as a son, and fear from it with gentle love.

(St. Augustine)

#### **4- HOW SWEET IS YOUR COMMANDMENT:**

The new life requires from the believer to be serious, and to restrain his feet from every evil way, to walk along the narrow way, that of the Word of the crucified Lord, to find, together with the affliction, an exalted sweetness. He says:

*"How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth"* (103)

The word of God has a special sweetness; sweeter than all the philosophies, knowledge, and wisdom of the world.

There is a great difference between him, who studies the Word of God, in a human dry mental way, and him, who eats it to get nourishment, to find it such a sweet and satisfying food, sweeter than honey in his mouth; and to give sweetness to his soul; to turn the dryness of his cruel heart into the sweetness of the wide and compassionate love!

The Word of God, in its sweetness, turns the believer to the sweet life, that the others would find pleasure in having fellowship with him.

❖ If man eats unripe grapes, his teeth will suffer from an intense sensitivity in his teeth, that he would not be able to eat bread. Likewise, if man profusely feeds upon the defilement of this world, and is immersed in vain and ugly talks; he would despise and reject the divine sweet Word; and if it so happens that he read it, he would not be able to say together with the prophet: *“How sweet are Your words, O Lord”*<sup>1</sup>.

❖ The sweetness of the Word of God would perpetually abide in us, if we intend to plant it in others, by reciting it all the time, with perfect flowing love<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

❖ The words of the Scripture sometimes have increasing sweetness in the mouth (103); as when man keeps on repeating a simple phrase in prayer, never get satisfied, to move on to another phrase<sup>3</sup>.

**(Isaac, bishop of Nineveh)**

❖ Now, teaching the vague secrets of the proclaimed wisdom, would become like chewing honey-wax cells in the mouth of the teacher, to be sweet in the mouth of the heart, rather than in that of the body of his listeners.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ It is the magic of the truth, as expressed by the psalmist, saying: *“How sweet are Your words to my taste; sweeter than honey to my mouth”*.

**(St. Basil)**

❖ The words of God have become to me like honey, that I cried out for the sake of knowledge, and raised my voice, seeking wisdom<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Gregory, the Nezianzen)**

❖ Go to the bee, and learn from its activity. Notice how it moves among the different kinds of flowers to collect nectar for you. ... The same way, you should move among the Holy Books, to seek the salvation

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 8: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 117: 5.

<sup>3</sup> Discourse 22.

<sup>4</sup> In Defence of His Flight to Pontus, 77.

of your soul; and being satisfied, you can say, together with the psalmist: “*How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth*” (103) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, not every soul will find sweetness in the Word of God, but only the upright and sound soul, as the sick cannot taste the sweetness of food<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Anyway, as there are some who do not know of even the existence of Holy Books; that is why, believe me, nothing of benefit could come from us<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

Writing about the widow ‘Furia’, whom he called “Deborah”, on account of that she, like a bee, collects the sweet juice of Nectarin from the flowers of the Holy Book; **St. Jerome** said that she was surrounded by the sweet aroma of the Holy Spirit<sup>4</sup>.

## **5- THE SWEETNESS OF THE COMMANDMENT AND THE HATE OF EVERY FALSE WAY:**

Experiencing the sweetness of the Word of God, full of love and compassion, the believer does not stand violence, and does not endure the false ways of oppression.

*“Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way”* (104)

**St. Augustine** discerns between the two expressions: “I understood Your precepts”, and “*Through Your precepts I get understanding*”. The first reveals his perception of the meaning of the precepts; whereas the second reveals his enjoyment of the gift of understanding, namely, the wisdom that comes from keeping the precepts.

❖ The body of Christ, in truth, utters these words; For he who keeps the commandments will get more understanding of the wisdom, hence he adds: “*therefore I hate every false way*”. The love of righteousness should go hand in hand with the hate of every false way. That love which is stronger because of the sweetness of the higher wisdom that

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<sup>1</sup> *Cat. Lect. 9: 13.*

<sup>2</sup> *Hom on St. John, 1: 5.*

<sup>3</sup> *Hom. On Hebrews, 8: 9.*

<sup>4</sup> *Letter 54: 17.*

it inspires – the wisdom given to him, who obeys God, and gives him understanding through His commandments.

(St. Augustine)

**The sweetness of the Word of God:**

1- We, not only revere the Word of God, but we also love it, to turn the days of our sojourn to a joyful day (97).

2- By the divine Word we enjoy the exalted wisdom, and live it the way the previous generations lived it, without perversion, to deliver it as a living deposit to the generations to come (100).

3- The Word, restraining our feet from every evil way; will give us a deeper understanding of the Word. The divine Word will support us in our strife, which will, in turn, reveal the depth of the Word (101).

4- In our spiritual strife, we discover that God has set for every believer His divine law, as through specially for him; which will make his personal relationship with the Word of God, deeper (102).

5- The Word of God is sweet, nourishes, satisfies, provides men with sweetness, for all to covet to encounter it, and partake of its sweetness in the Lord (103)

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 13 Mem**  
**YOUR WORD IS SWEET AND SATISFYING TO MY SOUL**

- ❖ Your name is sweet and beloved, In it I meditate all the days of my life;  
The world, with all its pleasures and sufferings, will not preoccupy me away from reciting it.
- ❖ Your Word is sweet and satisfactory to my soul;  
It grants me knowledge and wisdom from You;  
Of it, I have more understanding than the Jews, who were committed to preach it.
- ❖ Your law is sweet, as though You have set it personally for me;  
You have inscribed it in my heart by Your Holy Spirit'  
I am committed to it, to consummate Your will;  
To keep Your precepts, and to restrain my feet from every evil way.
- ❖ Your law grants me love for You, full of gentle fear; and fear, mixed with gentle love;  
Your sweet law motivates me toward stronger strife;  
To enjoy obedience to You, O beloved One;
- ❖ I abide to Your law, O incarnate Word  
I walk in it, as You did, O Holy Head;
- ❖ Your Word, O my God, is sweeter than all the philosophies, knowledge, and wisdom of the world;  
I feed on it, to be dissolved with love, and to satisfy my depths;  
I present it to my brethren with love, to have it sweeter in my mouth.

## 14 NUN

# YOUR WORD IS A LAMP TO MY FEET (105 – 112)

The sweetness of the Word of God in the psalmist's mouth, means, not a mere mental pleasure, but it is a sweetness of experience and an enjoyment of the true Light; after having been cast, by sin, into the darkness of the tomb, and condemned to eternal death. God sends His Word as light that shines on the world, darkened by evil; to enter into the heart of the believer to give light to his depths, and to reveal to him the world of the Spirit; And, instead of the experience of evil, and the world of iniquity, the believer would enjoy the righteousness of God dwelling in him in an unapproachable light; to sing together with David, saying: "*By Your light, O Lord, we see the light*".

According to St. Cyril the Great, faith is the "lamp"; and the Word of the incarnate God is the "Light"; He says: [The Word of God is the subject of our faith; and is the light. For the lamp is the faith, being "*the true light which gives light to every man who comes into the world*" (John 1: 9) <sup>1</sup>.

- 1- The commandment is the true light105
- 2- The commandment is an entrance into a covenant106
- 3- The commandment, grantor of life107
- 4- The commandment, grantor of strength108
- 5- The commandment and the *delivery*109
- 6- The commandment reveals the snares110
- 7- The commandment, grantor of gladness111
- 8- The commandment and the enjoyment of the eternal crown112

### 1- THE COMMANDMENT IS THE TRUE LIGHT:

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path"* (105)

The Word of God is like the golden minaret with its lamps unceasingly burning in the temple of the Lord; and is like the pillar of light which led the people of Israel in the wilderness, and wherever they were, whether in the temple or on their way; For the Word of God is the true Guide which gives light to the way.

He calls it "*A lamp (to my feet)*"? because it gives light, not only to the eyes, to have understanding and wisdom, but also to the feet to

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<sup>1</sup> In *lus. 11: 33-36.*

walk in the royal path. It would not be enough for the believer to recognize it through the divine enlightenment, but to walk in it until he reaches his goal. The goal of the commandment is, not only to reveal the will of God to us, but to scatter before us the darkness of the evil path, and to reveal the path of truth to our feet to follow.

In weakness, the psalmist in his talk, does not call the commandment as being a sun, but just “*a lamp*”. For in that stage, his eyes could not look at the sun; a lamp was enough to give light, to scatter the darkness, and to guide them to the Lord Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, the incarnate Word of God. As according to St. Peter the apostle: “*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). Then, it would be said: “*They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.... And there shall be no light there; they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light, and they shall reign forever and ever*” (Revelation 22: 4, 5).

In the Old Testament, the golden Minaret had its own rite, concerning its seven lamps, and the kind of its oil and threads. The continuity of burning its lamps has been an essential thing in the life of that people, as a symbol of the need of mankind to the divine enlightenment, to take away their dark nature, and to make them bear a fellowship with Christ. The true Light who gives light to the world.

If the Lord Christ is “*The Way*”, who brings forth our inner man into the bosom of the Father; He is, as well, “*The Light*” that reveals to us that Royal Way, so as not to pervert from it.

- ❖ The light has been truly hidden and veiled in the law of Moses; But, when Jesus came, he removed the veil, and the blessings, whose shadow was presented in the letter, were truly, and instantly proclaimed<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ If anyone perceives the Word of God, and enjoys “*the Logos*” in every behavior, even when he moves his feet in every step he makes, he would never stumble; for he (acquires) the “*Lamp*” and (uses) it as well. On the contrary, if he receives the lamp, and seems, as though he believes in it, but does not bear it in every behavior, and has not considered “*the Logos*” where he puts his feet; Such a man commits a

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<sup>1</sup> On Principiis 4: 1: 6 (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, 4: 302).

double sin: he perceived the Logos, yet he did not use the Word of God wherever he goes.

We can say that, when the “Word of God”, the “Logos”, came down from heaven, He gave light to every believer, inside him, without any decrease in the Logos Himself. Through the “Logos” – the Lamp and the Light – many lamps were produced from that unique Light; For everyone who perceives the grace of “the Word of God”, the lighted Lamp, will say: “*Do you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me?*” (2 Corinthians 13: 3). ... Under all circumstances, if we receive the Word of God, we are prepared, in our talk, behavior, and mind, to use the Lamp put before us; “*For no one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand that those who enter may see the light*” (Luke 8: 16). ... For no one among us, who has lit his lamp, and could perceive “the Logos”, will put it out of use, by covering it with a vessel, or by putting it under the bed (Luke 11: 33; Matthew 5: 15), but will set it on a lampstand, the right place for the lamps.

According to one interpretation, the place for the lampstand is your soul, which should be the place for the Word of God. And according to another interpretation, it is the words uttered by your mouth, when you open it to say the Word of God “The Logos”; ... Namely, the lamp should be set on a lampstand, which is your mouth.

“... *that those who come in, may see the light*” (Luke 11: 33; Matthew 5: 15), whether according to the first interpretation (namely, seen in Your soul), or according to the second interpretation (proclaimed in the words uttered by your mouth). Hence the Holy Book says: “*Let your waists be girded, and your lamps burning*” (Luke 12: 35). The Lamp is the Word of God “the Logos”, whom we received, and through whom we believe in God (the Father); to remain burning, and never to be quenched. For the light of the righteous is eternal, and the lamp of the righteous will never be quenched.

In the tabernacle of the meeting, (Exodus 27: 21), the lamps were always burning, to help those who served to practice their rites, and be enlightened by it. In the same way, a lamp burns in the church – the new tabernacle of the meeting.

“*The lamp of the body is the eye*” (Matthew 6: 22; Luke 11: 34). The whole body represents the church; and the lamp, representing its eye, is the spiritual insight in man. ... [Origen binds between knowledge and work]. ... He, who perceives the “Logos”, his eye would not say to his hand: ‘What are you doing?’, nor his hand can say to his eye: “*I have*

*no need of you*” (Luke 12: 21); For the hand, although it cannot see, yet it practices the (Christian life), without seeing the spiritual facts.

There is a difference among those who perceive the “Logos” (the Word of God): Some perceive it as a “lamp”, while some others perceive it as “Light” ... The foolish virgins had “*going-out*” lamps (Matthew 25), “*For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed*” (John 3: 20). .. The Lord Jesus rebukes those who get no benefit from the light which they have, even for a moment (See John 5: 35); saying: “*He (St. John the Baptist) was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light*” (John 5: 35).

I need two things: a lamp for my feet, and, then, a shining light for all my ways.

**(The scholar Origen)**

The psalmist believes that, his life in this world, requires the enlightenment from the teachings of God, which guide him along the royal path, whatever are the dangers he encounters.

❖ The rays of the Word are eternally prepared to shine, as long as the windows of the soul are open through the simple faith.

**(St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers)**

❖ The “lamp” is the law for those who walk in the darkness, before the Sun of Righteousness arose on them with the healing in His wings (See Malachi 4: 2). The true light is not a lamp, but the Sun that shines on those for whom “*the night is far spent, and the day is at hand*” (Romans 13: 12). In that day we can walk properly (Romans 13: 13).

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

The Word of God is a lamp for the believer, “*For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light*” (Proverb 6: 23); if he lives it by the Spirit, he would be enlightened; but if he stick to the letter, he would “go-out” like the lamps of the foolish virgins.

In this world we need a shining lamp in the midst of the darkness of this life, to be able to walk in the royal way, to see the Lord face to face, and to enjoy the eternal Light.

Men of the old covenant lived, before the coming of the Sun of Righteousness, in the light of the lamp of the law; Whereas, men of the new covenant, having become the children of the day, enjoy the light of the Sun of Righteousness.

- ❖ He, who rejects the light of the Word of God should fear the punishment of the eternal darkness<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Caesareus, bishop of Arle)**

- ❖ We should hope and endure, until the wrath of God passes over the night which is the father of the wicked. We were before the children of the night; and we were once darkness (Ephesians 2: 3; 5: 8); and behold, its scars are apparent on our bodies, which are “*dead because of sins*” (Romans 8: 10), “*until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away*” (Songs 2: 17) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ It was said about the Lord Christ, that He was given as Light to the nations: as is written in the prophet Isaiah says: “*I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness; and I will give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles*”, to be My salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 42: 6); And the prophet David says: “*Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path*” (105) <sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Aphrahat)**

- ❖ No creation, whether rational or have certain power of understanding, can have light by itself, but are enlightened by fellowship with the eternal Truth.

**(St. Augustine)**

According to **St. Jerome**, the light, here ,does not only refer to the scattering of the darkness, but to inciting the spirit of joy into believers. The wise virgins, while anticipating to encounter the Groom, the Sun of Righteousness, were probably carrying burning lamps, not to scatter the darkness, but as an expression of joy.

- ❖ The Eastern churches, even when they have no relics of martyrs; when the Holy Gospel is read, candles are lighted, even in daylight, not to scatter the darkness, but as a testimony of joy. The lamps of the wise virgins in the gospel are always burning; And the apostles exhort us to have our waists girded and our lamps burning (Luke 12: 35).. And about John the Baptist, we read that “he was the light who shines”; even though the symbol of the material light about which we read in the psalm: “*It is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path*” (105) <sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 76:3.

<sup>2</sup> Confessions 13: 14 (15).

<sup>3</sup> Select Demonstration, 1: 10.

<sup>4</sup> Against Vigilantius, 7.

(St. Jerome)

The Holy Gospel shined with the light that was hidden behind the letters in the Old Testament.

- ❖ The Holy Gospel liberates us from the old system of the letter, and proclaims the exaltation of the new system; the system of the Spirit, realized by the light of knowledge, properly belonging to the New Testament, but found, as well, hidden in the Old Testament<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

## 2- THE COMMANDMENT IS AN ENTRANCE INTO A COVENANT:

In the darkness man usually walks with fear and anxiety, anticipating to fall into a pit, or to stumble by a stone; Whereas he, who walks in light, the way for him being clear, he walks in it with courage and surety, he does not fear to pervert, to stumble, or to be humiliated. That is why the psalmist, finding in the divine commandment light to his path; He says:

***“I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments” (106)***

According to **St. Augustine**, the oath here means a persistence on walking in the light, and on keeping the judgments of God.

- ❖ The righteous judgments of God are kept by faith; when we do not assume that any good deed would ever go without a reward; nor any sin would ever be unpunished; according to the righteous judgments of God.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ We should wonder here: What does it mean to say: ***“I have sworn”***? ... ***“God made a covenant with His chosen”*** (Psalm 89: 3); a covenant set between God and His believers by an oath, a sign that the believer has received the covenant between him and God. By receiving the covenant, we have a covenant with God, and have sworn to keep His righteous judgment.

Once I abide to the righteous judgment of God in my soul, I can say with the wise Solomon: ***“The thoughts of the righteous are right”*** (Proverb 12: 5). These are the ***“righteous judgments of God”***.

By swearing, I hold fast to these judgments in my soul.

(The scholar Origen)

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<sup>1</sup> Com. On John 1: 6: 36.

- ❖ The words “*I have sworn*”, does not mean to utter the name of God, but it is a form of speech to indicate something that would never change, and a covenant that would never be broken.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

### 3- THE COMMANDMENT, GRANTOR OF LIFE:

The commandment, shedding light on the path of the psalmist, his sin was exposed before his eyes. Greatly humiliated, he seeks the mercies of God, and His salvation work. Perceiving that death has reigned over his soul, and destroyed it, he felt the need for the Word of God to restore it to life, saying:

***“I am extremely afflicted. Revive me, O Lord, according to Your Word” (107)***

- ❖ We are afflicted, whether because of the attacks of the enemies, or because of those of the lusts of the body against us, coming through our own will..

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

- ❖ He says: Even if I, because of any reason become puffed-up, haughty, and proud, as though I am a king, and wise; Yet “*I am extremely afflicted*”, for I know that “*God scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble*” (Proverb 3: 34).

***“Revive me, O Lord, according to Your word”***. The irrational creatures live without reason; Whereas, although the rational creatures live according to reason; Yet, the majority of them – I talk here about mankind in particular – do not live according to the word of God, but “*carnally minded*” (Romans 8: 6); Few are those who live according to the Words of God.

(The scholar Origen)

### 4- THE COMMANDMENT, GRANTOR OF STRENGTH:

Having experienced the light after the darkness, and the resurrected life after death, the psalmist says:

***“Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me Your judgments” (108)***

Having been inundated with God’s grace, and the commandment has given light to his life, the psalmist, intending to offer spiritual sacrifices accepted by God, presented pledges of thanksgiving and praise to God, under all circumstances; the free offerings of his will.

What does he mean by “*the freewill offerings of my mouth*”, according to the Coptic version; Or “*the optional offerings of my mouth*”, according to the Septuagint version; Or “the words of my mouth”, according to the Syrian version?

Having enjoyed the resurrected life, the psalmist pledged to live according to the law of Christ, namely, the law of the new life; to practice the spiritual life with all its positive aspects, like love, fellowship with God, His angels, and His saints; and its negative aspects, like abstaining from the evil ways; ... In addition to some other pledges, like resolutions to live a virgin, or a monk, etc. All these pledges that harmonize with the divine commandment, the believer will not be able to keep, unless the commandment works in him, being the blessing of the Lord in him; so that God would grant him the strength to bring them into effect; teach him His judgments; and guides Him, by Himself, lest he perverts in his pledges outside the circle of the Spirit

By the living faith and trust in the possibility of God, and through the flaring love in us, we pledge to present our life a sacrifice of love to God on a daily basis; for the commandment to work in us, to get the blessing of the Lord, and be under His guidance.

❖ “*Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord, and teach me Your judgments*”... Namely, let them bring You pleasure; Do not reject, but accept them.

The freewill offerings of the mouth are understood as being the sacrifices of praise, presented in a confession of love, and not out of fear of commitment.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The works that we like to practice by our own free will, are called “*freewill offerings of our mouth*”. As an example we mention the words of the apostle Paul: “*Concerning virgins, I have no commandments from the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 7: 25); Namely, the virginity, about which, although no commandment or command was given; yet I practice it by my own free will, choosing the good or the better portion (1 Corinthians 7: 38)... In the rest of things of our life, we may discover that, some works we do, like slaves, through commands; and other works, we do through our own free will.

“*And teach me Your judgments*” (108). Although I know for sure that “*Your judgments are unsearchable*” (Romans 11: 33), Yet, I pray, teach them to me, so that, learning them, I can execute them better, and with gladness.

(The scholar Origen)

## 5- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE DELIVERY:

Believing that the commandment is a covenant between God and man, namely a kind of “dialogue” of love between the two sides; in which the believer experiences the strength of the Word as a “lamp” that gives light to the path of his sojourn, an eternal light that accompanies him in the heavenly glories, and a power of resurrection that grants him a new blessed life; The psalmist seeks from the Lord to teach him His judgments, and to guide him by Himself. ... In the daring of sonhood, and the obedience of love, he proclaims delivering his life in the hands of God, and preoccupying his whole being with His law, saying:

***“My life is continually in my hand, Yet I do not forget Your law” (109)***

Perceiving that dangers were surrounding him on all sides; that in many situations he was on the verge of death, sometimes through the plans by king Saul against him, and other times by his son Absalom, through help of his own counselor Ahitophel, and finding that his only refuge is in the hands of God, the psalmist seeks from Him to keep him there. ... In the hands of God, we do not think about the dangers that may dwell upon us, nor about the animosity of others; for we find our pleasure in the law of the Lord, and in our bond with the Truth.

According to **St. Augustine**, it came in some versions as: ***“My life is continually in (Your) hand”***. ... Anyway, it is in God’s hands, where the believer returns with repentance -- like the prodigal son returning to his Father -- to deliver to God his life and his soul, to revive; Or it is in the hands of the believer, to present to God as an offering of love, to revive.

❖ ***“My life is continually in(my) hand ...*** The soul of any man will be in his own hands when he is in the midst of dangers ... when the righteous says: [As for me, I die every day; I am continually in danger, on account of my bond to Your Word, and for the sake of Truth ... Yet, the danger of death would never make me forget Your law].

We can also understand this verse in a different way, that my soul is continually on my palm; namely, it perpetually practices the good work; For the “hand” or the “palm” always refer to the work.

**(The scholar Origen)**

My soul is in the hands of God working in me; when He turns His commandments into an experience of life and work in my daily life. On my side,

I respond to this by not forgetting His law; as what I practice according to the law of Christ is actually a gift from God, and through His grace to me.

❖ *“For both we and our words are in God’s hands”* (Wisdom 7: 16) ... We can understand *“My soul is continually in Your hands”*, that they are the words of the righteous man, and not those of the wicked;...of him, who returns to the Father, and would never depart from Him (See Luke 15: 12, 24) ... In another location, the psalmist says: *“To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul”* (Psalm 25: 1).

(St. Augustine)

## **6- THE COMMANDMENT REVEALS THE SNARES:**

My soul is in Your hands to protect, support; and work in it, to let it respond to the work of Your grace. The wicked, on the other hand, never cease to oppose me with every possible way.

*“The wicked have laid a snare for me, Yet I have not strayed from Your precepts”* (110)

❖ That only happen when his soul is in the hands of God, or when it is in his own hand, to present to God to protect.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Like the fowlers of irrational beasts, who lay snares to catch them, so does the devil and his hosts, who fill the whole world with snares, and the life with nets.

They have laid snares for me everywhere; yet I perpetually kept Your precepts, and never strayed from them. And in another psalm he says: *“Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers”* (Psalm 124: 7)

(The scholar Origen).

## **7- THE COMMANDMENT, GRANTOR OF GLADNESS:**

Opening up our eyes on the divine commandment, to behold the hands of God stretched to embrace us; and perceiving that all the snares of the enemy will not be able to catch us, We will hold fast to it as our eternal heritage, and our heart will rejoice in it.

*“Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart”* (111)

Discovering the power of the Word of God, will grant the believer zeal to proclaim that it is his personal heritage and portion, not

for a limited time, but forever; which he receives with joy and gladness of heart, that will never be shaken.

According to **the scholar Origen**, taking “*the testimonies of the Lord*” mean readily receiving the commandment, truly testifying to the Truth, namely, to Christ before men with no shame, and striving even to death. These testimonies grant *the* believer rejoice, as it was said about the apostles: “*They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name*” (Acts 5: 41).

❖ He acquired it as a heritage forever; on account of that it bears no temporal glory from men, who seek vain things; but bears the eternal glory for those who suffer for a short time, then will reign to no end. Hence, came the following words: “*For they are the rejoicing of my heart*” (111).

(St. Augustine)

## **8- THE COMMANDMENT AND THE ENJOYMENT OF THE ETERNAL CROWN:**

Finally, the commandment is attractive to the heart, which opens up on the eternity, to anticipate the reward.

“*I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes, Forever to the very end*” (112)

❖ “*I have inclined my heart to perform “Your law”, “Your statutes”, “Your commands”*”; For I know that there is a reward waiting for me – the kingdom of God – “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Corinthians 2: 9).

(The scholar Origen)

We may probably wonder: Are we supposed to keep on performing statutes forever? ... Of course not! ... Yet, if love is the essence of the divine statutes, love endures forever, and so will be the works of the statutes.

❖ He, who says: “*I have inclined my heart*”, has previously said: “*Incline my heart to Your testimonies*” (36); so as to make us understand that it is a divine gift, as well as the work of the free will.

Do we have to perform the righteousness of God forever?... Those works that we do for the sake of the needs of our neighbors, are not forever, because there will be an end for needing them. They would not be righteousness, if we do not practice them out of love; but if we

do; this love, being forever, there will be an eternal reward designated for it.

(St. Augustine).

### **The Word of God is light and life:**

1- If the darkness has dwelt over the world, we should not fear what are in it of offenses, snares, or nets, as long as we hold the light of the lamp of the wisdom of God (105), which scatters the darkness of ignorance and foolishness.

2- As we experience the light of the Word of God, we enter into a steadfast covenant with God, in which we proclaim our loyalty and obedience to Him (106).

3- The Word of God reveals the death which has reigned over us through sin, to grant us the eternal life (107).

4- By the Word of God, we, in turn, would present the freewill offerings of our mouth, blessed by the Lord (108); and we would pledge, as well, to deliver our life to Him (109).

5- The Word of God reveals to us, and protects us against, the snares set by the enemy (110).

6- The Word of God is our heritage, which reflects on us the spirit of rejoice (111); and by which we get an eternal reward (112).

### **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 14 Nun YOUR WORD IS A LIGHT TO MY PATH**

❖ Your Word is the lampstand that light Your sanctuaries inside me;  
And the pillar of light which guides my whole being on the way to  
the heavenly Canaan;  
It scatters all the darkness in my depths, to proclaim Your heavenly  
light;  
I bear it wherever I go, to keep me from stumbling,

❖ In the Old Covenant, the prophecies were lamps;  
I bore them, until I saw You, O the Sun of Righteousness;  
You shone on me by Your divine and eternal light, by which You  
made me a light to the world

- ❖ You shone on me with the light of the Spirit;  
You moved me from the deadly letter to the life-giving Spirit;  
I perceived You behind the letters of the Book;  
And I encountered You, O the unique Light.
  
- ❖ Your Word is the light of joy and gladness;  
Let me carry it, and enter together with the wise virgins, in the  
company of the Sun of Righteousness;  
Heavens do not need my lamp;  
But I will enjoy the light of joy in an unceasing eternal wedding
  
- ❖ As Your Word give me light, I am afflicted to discover my sins;  
I perceive the power of Your promises; and live by Your Word;  
I present to You my soul which is in my hand, as an offering of love;  
I deliver it to You, to revive.
  
- ❖ Your Word gives me light, which makes me discover the snares set  
for me;  
Counting me as a beast, they intended to catch and kill me;
  
- ❖ Your Word reveals to me my eternal heritage and reward;  
And by the spirit of joy and gladness, I shall strive;  
I shall run toward You, to put my soul into Your hand to revive and  
to protect.

## 15 SAMEK

# SUPPORT ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD

(113 – 120)

The psalmist delivers his life into the hands of God, to remain always abiding to the divine commandment, as a lamp to his feet, as light to his sojourn, and an eternal light he inherits in the life to come. Now, being in the hands of God, he seeks His help and support against the opponents of the commandment; asking Him to grant him salvation and wisdom, together with the fear of the Lord, to keep the commandment without perversion.

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1- Help against the opponents of the commandment | 113 - 115 |
| 2- Help for his inner life                       | 116 - 117 |
| 3- Help to endure oppression                     | 118 - 119 |
| 4- His need for having the fear of the Lord      | 120       |

### 1- HELP AGAINST THE OPPONENTS OF THE COMMANDMENT:

*“I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law” (113)*

Although the prophet David does not say that he is liberated from the vain thoughts; yet he hates them; he does his best to drive them away, and to overcome them. As much as he opposed them, his love for the law of God increased. For the holy life and the meditation in the commandments go hand in hand, and support one another. As we hate the sin, we love the commandment; and as we love the commandment, our hate of the sin increases.

- ❖ The blessed prophet did not hate men like Absalom, Saul, or the like, but, by his hate for the opponents of the law, he meant their thoughts, works, and movements, that lead them to oppose the law of God. It may also mean those who seduce the others to oppose the law. ... We are commanded to hate even our parents and relatives; but that does not mean to hate them as persons, for it would contradict God’s command to love our enemies; but it rather means to hate and reject their sayings and works which are against the law of God, who commands us to hate, even ourselves; Namely, if our lusts are contradictory to God’s will, we should disobey them. ...

Hate, means as well, to prefer our love of God to our love of ourselves or our relatives; (the same way it is said that the light of the lamp is counted as darkness, if compared to the light of the sun). He, who loves the law of God, would hate, or despise anything that provokes him to contradict it. God will be his help and support against his enemies, if he trusts in His words.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

❖ He does not say: [I hate the wicked, and love the righteous], nor: [I hate oppression and love God's statutes]; but He says: "***I hate the double-minded***"; then he added the reason, saying: "***I love Your law***"; confirming that he does not hate the human nature in the wicked, but he hates their evil, which is their animosity against the law which he loves.

(St. Augustine)

As much as the psalmist loves the law of God, and as much as he is attached to His Word, he does not endure what contradicts the holy thoughts and ways of God; and hates what contradicts His statutes.

***"You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your Word. Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of God" (114 - 115)***

For the prophet David, God is a secret place where he hides from the enemies, and a shield to protect him against the arrows. He says: "*In the time of trouble, He shall hide me in His pavilion. In the secret place of His tabernacle, He shall hide me*" (Psalm 27: 5); "*You, O Lord, are a shield for me*" (Psalm 3: 3); and, "*My defense is of God, who saves the upright of heart*" (Psalm 7: 10).

The psalmist loves the Word of God, steadfast forever, and rejects, and does not trust the changeable words of men which contradict the law of God; That is why he adds: "***I hope in Your word***". The psalmist does not hate the wicked men, but hates their evil counsel.

Finally, he finds in the wicked an obstacle on the way of searching the commandments of the Lord his God; Separating himself from the fellowship of the wicked, he enjoys that of God, on a personal level.

As the Lord becomes my God, I count His statutes as my statutes, and His law as the law of my life.

❖ Calling the wicked thoughts which come from the heart, and defiles man, "the wicked", the prophet tells them off, and sends them away from him, for their presence are obstacles on the way of God's

commandments. And as sending them away is beyond the ability of man, without a help from God, he prays to God, saying: “*Uphold me*”.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

- ❖ You are “*my help*” to do the good works; and “*my shield*” to escape from evil; Then he adds: “*I hope in Your words*”. In all this, he talks as the ‘son of the promise’.

(St. Augustine)

*“Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God”*

- ❖ He does not say: “*I will consummate the commandments of God*”, but “*I will keep (search) them*”; in his attempt to learn the law diligently and perfectly.

We should tell the wicked to depart from us, and even force them to retreat from our company; on account of that they have a role in hindering our attempt to keep the commandments, whether when they persecute us, or even when they honor us. Expecting us to get preoccupied together with them in their persistent evil practices, and causing us to waste our time, which we are committed to spend in the ministry of the divinities, we cry out with these words of the body of Christ, saying: “*Depart from me, you evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God*”

(St. Augustine)

## **2- HELP FOR HIS INNER LIFE:**

Having entered into the spiritual battle, and found in God his hiding place against danger, and his shield against the arrows of sin; And having found in His words the spiritual law to conquer the devil; Now, he seeks from God help and support.

The believer needs help and support from God; as He alone, as the Grantor of resurrection, is capable of raising him up from the death of sin, and of granting him the new life; by which his joyful hope would never fail. He will not realize His salvation, nor perceive the secrets of His commandment, without the divine grace. And, at the same time, searching His commandment, and entering into its depths, he enjoys the grace of God, and says:

*“Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live; and do not let me be ashamed of my hope” (116)*

❖ He, who previously said: *“You are my shield”*; is now praying for more and more support... for which sake, he endures much troubles.

Concerning the future, he says: *“that I may live”*. As though, in this mortal body, we are not living. While anticipating the hope of our bodies, we become saved by hope; and *“hoping for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance”* (Romans 8: 23-25). *“Hope does not disappoint, if the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us”* (Romans 5: 5).

(St. Augustine)

***“Hold me up, and I shall be safe; and I shall observe Your statutes continuously”* (117)**

The psalmist binds the enjoyment of the new life, to the salvation, together with the continuous observation of the commandment. He seeks the divine support, by which he presents a pledge to observe continuously the commandments of the Lord.

❖ He says: ***“I shall observe Your statutes continuously”***... Because this grace is only enjoyed by those who observe the law here, and in the life to come.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

### **3- HELP TO ENDURE OPPRESSION:**

Having sought the help of God against the inner evil and outer seductions (113 – 115); and having sought that the resurrection of the Lord would work in his life, open to him the doors of hope, and reveal to him the secrets and power of the commandment; now the psalmist seeks a particular help to confront the disobedient oppressors.

***“You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is falsehood. You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross. Therefore, I love Your testimonies”* (118 - 119)**

According to the psalmist, the thoughts of the wicked are deceit and falsehood; Being the sinners of the earth; they are different from the true believers, who are not from this world. For, if the commandment of the Lord lifts the heart up to heaven, evil, on the other hand binds the wicked to the earth and dust.

❖ Why did they stray from God’s righteousness? ***“for their deceit is falsehood”***. They headed that way, forsaking God; All their works – good or evil – come out of their thoughts; for man could be innocent or criminal according to his own thoughts.

(St. Augustine)

*“You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross”.*

**St. Augustine** rejects the claim of some interpreters, that those without law will perish; whereas those who are under the law, although are condemned on their own sins, yet they will not perish, but will be saved as though with fire. Here, **St. Augustine**, utterly rejecting the view of the ‘purgatory’, he believes that those without law disobey the law of nature in them; and those under the law, who break the law, are counted, disobedient, as well. By that, on account of that all sinners who persist on their sins, without repentance, are equally condemned, the psalmist resorts to the divine grace, and flies up toward the life-giving Spirit, to have his own sins wiped out.

#### **4- HIS NEED FOR HAVING THE FEAR OF THE LORD:**

The true support for man against all evil, is to have the fear of the Lord.

*“My flesh trembles for fear of you; And I am afraid of Your judgments” (120)*

The joyful hope is bound to the fear of the Lord. As, according to what is written in the book of Habakkuk, *“When I heard, my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble ... For I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation”* (Habakkuk 3: 16, 18).

❖ The body lusts represent an integral part of the body; And by the statutes of righteousness and the nails, the fear of God will tear our body, and crucify it, as a sacrifice, well received by the Lord.

**(St. Augustine)**

**St. Augustine** wonders: [If the psalmist is actually fearing God, Why then, is he still praying to God to have his body nailed in His fear?

Is he seeking to have additional fear for himself, enough to crucify his body; namely, to crucify his body lusts?! ... As though he says: ‘Let Your fear be complete in me; for I am afraid of Your judgments’?!]... **St. Augustine** then answers his own wonder by saying: [Through the law which punishes body lusts, the psalmist feared God, on account of His threats of punishment; but he seeks the love that would drive such fear away, and nail in him instead, a new kind of fear that emerges from rejoicing in the spiritual blessings. ... Through the love of righteousness, he counts the sin itself as punishment.... In other words, instead of the fear of punishment, threatened by the divine law; We, in

the era of grace, have got a new kind of fear; namely, fear of the sin itself, which we count as a bitter punishment; as long as we taste the grace of the heavenly spiritual blessings].

- ❖ As the one nailed on a cross does not move for fear of pain, so would be he, who thinks about God's judgments on sinners; he would not make any evil move, for fear of probable punishment.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ What a divine secret of the cross! ... On which weakness is hanged; iniquities are nailed; and on which, as well, memories of conquest are raised! ... That led such a saint to say: "*Nail Your fear in my flesh*". He does not mean nails of iron, but those of fear and faith; for the bonds of virtue are stronger than those of punishment<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ As it is impossible to take off a Pine tree from its roots that go deep in the earth; So is the soul in which the fear of God is nailed; It could not be moved<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ Looking always at the cross, means that man would spend his life like dead or crucified to the world (Galatians 6: 14); whom evil cannot move.... The psalmist truly says: "*Nail Your Fear in my flesh*"; For nailing implies controlling the soul that controls the body<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)**

- ❖ God desires from us to attach to Him, unite with Him, and never separate from Him<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

### **The word of God is my support and help:**

1- The psalmist proclaims his desire to separate himself from the wicked (113); for he does not endure their evil counsel, and their false views, contradictory to the law; so as to enter into a fellowship with the Lord his God; counting God's law as his personal law (114).

2- Being a man of war, he finds in God, the secret of his conquest.

When he sees danger approaching, he flees to God to hide in Him.

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<sup>1</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit, 1: 108.*

<sup>2</sup> *In John, hom 54: 1.*

<sup>3</sup> *Life of Moses, p. 274.*

<sup>4</sup> *Hom. On 1 Tim., 9.*

When danger dwells, he sees in God the shield, by which he protects himself against the fiery arrows of the wicked.

He abides to the words of God, being spiritual commands which support him through obeying them

3-Seeking the divine help and support; he, in his turn, is committed to observe God's statutes continually (117).

4-He seeks God's support, to reject any fellowship with the sinners of the earth (119), who stray from the law of God; ... with the intention of getting bound to His commandments, in a fellowship with the heavenlies.

5- Finally, in order that the commandment becomes his support, he needs to have the fear of God, which is the head of wisdom (120).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 15 Samek**  
**SUPPORT ME, O GOD, ACCORDING TO YOUR DIVINE**  
**WORD**

- ❖ There are many who reject Your Law;  
Grant me to love Your law, and to hate their hate for it;  
Grant me to hate every thought, saying, or work, which may lead me to disobey Your law;  
Grant me to hate even the works and sayings of my own parents, which make me disobey Your law;  
Grant me to hate even my own works and sayings, which may provoke me to disobey Your law'  
Grant me, not to hate the human nature, but to hate the evil which oppose the truth.
- ❖ You are my Rock, in whom I resort and hide from enemies;  
You are my shield, by whom I protect myself against the fiery arrows of the wicked
- ❖ Depart from me, O evildoers, for you intend for me to separate myself from the word of God;  
Let me separate myself from your fellowship, by having a fellowship with my God;  
Let me count His statutes my statutes; and His law as my personal law;  
Depart from me; for you persecute me because I keep the divine commandment;  
Or you flatter me, to let me stray away from it.
- ❖ Support me to observe Your statutes, here, and in the life to come;  
Support me to fly away by Your grace, and be saved from my sins;  
Nail Your fear in my flesh; for it is my support against every sin;  
Instead of fearing judgment, nail in me the fear of a son full of love for his Father.

16 AYN

## **DO NOT LEAVE ME TO MY OPPRESSORS (121 – 128)**

The psalmist never ceased to seek the divine help; For, the more he attached himself to the divine precept, and enjoyed the divine grace; the more the devil and all his hosts got stirred up against him; and the more he appeals to God for help.

- 1- An appeal against the oppressors<sup>121</sup>
- 2- An appeal against the oppression of the proud<sup>122</sup>
- 3- An appeal for the salvation of God<sup>123</sup> -- 124
- 4- An appeal for the divine commandment<sup>125</sup> – 128

### **1- AN APPEAL AGAINST THE OPPRESSORS:**

*“I have done justice and righteousness; Do not leave me to my oppressors” (121)*

❖ No wonder that the psalmist has done justice and righteousness; having prayed and sought the chaste fear of God, by which to nail his body, namely, his bodily lusts, which keep him from doing the upright judgment.

(St. Augustine)

❖ He, who does justice and righteousness, God will not leave to the oppressors; and will save him, even if he did fall in their hands.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

Many of those in authority are used to realize for themselves material gains, honors, and pleasures, against all measures of justice. King David, however, having done justice and righteousness to please God, and in abidance to His upright commandment, now seeks from God with daring, not to leave him to his oppressors. The upright behavior give us the courage and daring to pray and seek from the divine Judge, to save us from the oppression of others; not out of self-righteousness that we claim to have, but through the work of His grace in us.

### **2- AN APPEAL AGAINST THE OPPRESSION OF THE PROUD:**

***“Be surety for Your servant for good; Do not let the proud oppress me” (122)***

❖ They draw me to fall into the pit of evil; Take me out to do what is upright.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ According to a translation by ‘Aquila’: *“Be surety for Your servant”*; Namely, cover me, guard me, and help me to do good; lest the proud would find in me a cause to slander me unjustly. In this meaning, the Lord commands us to pray not to fall into temptation; as there is no stronger temptation than un-justice.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

As the proud have put in their heart to slander me unjustly, I have no one but You to defend me, and be my surety. If You become my Advocate, the wicked would not be able to crush me with their denigrations; and You would save me like a bird from the snare of the fowler. I would never trust anyone on my life, troubles, and case, except You.

When king Hezekiah entered into an affliction, he said: *“I cry for help until morning; ... Like a lion he breaks all my bones; ... Like a swallow or a crane I clamor, I moan like a dove; ... My eyes fail from looking upwards. O Lord, I am oppressed; be my surety”* (Isaiah 38: 13, 14).

### **3- AN APPEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF GOD:**

If the psalmist seeks from God not to leave him to the oppressors, and to protect him against the proud; his eyes are never dry, longing with tears for His salvation; namely for the coming of the Savior, who, by His cross, would realize God’s justice and mercy; as he pays the debt, presents love; and proclaims Himself to the Father, a Surety and Security for His believers, who hold fast to Him, and hide in Him.

***“My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation, and Your righteous word. Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy, and teach me Your statutes” (123 - 124)***

❖ To present a symbol of the cross, the prophet Moses, by the command of the merciful God, erected a living image on a pillar in the wilderness, according to the likeness of the sinning body, who was committed to be crucified in Christ, as a symbol of it (John 3: 14). To that cross, the psalmist looked up, and said: ***“My eyes fail from***

*seeking Your salvation , and Your righteous word”* (123); *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”* (Romans 8: 3; 2 Corinthians 5: 21).

For the sake of uttering God’s righteousness, he says that his eyes failed from looking with zeal, while remembering the human weakness, seeking the divine grace in Christ.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Saying: *“My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation”*; refers to his increasing longing and desire for the salvation, promised by God for the world, by His righteousness and mercy; and praying to Him to teach him His statutes, and give him understanding that he may know His testimonies.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

He cried in anticipation, looking at the hand of His Savior, who hears the sound of tears and the hidden sighs of the heart, louder than the words of the lips. His eyes failed and became weary; but God never fails.

#### **4- HIS APPEAL FOR THE DIVINE COMMANDMENT:**

*“I am Your servant, give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies. It is time for You to act, O Lord, for they have broken Your law. Therefore, I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold”* (125 -127)

In the word of God, the psalmist found the answer to all his questions, and the satisfaction of all the needs of his soul; Therefore he loved it more than all the treasures of the world.

❖ *“I am Your servant, give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies”* ... This prayer should be always in our mouth; for, it is not enough for us to have the understanding of God’s testimonies, unless we get a continuous flow the eternal spring of light. God’s testimonies will be known better and better, the more understanding man gets.

❖ *“It is time for You to act, for they have broken Your law”* ... What would that act be, but the grace that is to be proclaimed in Christ in due time? About it, the apostle says: *“When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son”* (Galatians 4: 4).

Once the law was broken, it was time for the Mercy to send the only-begotten Son of God.

❖ *“Therefore, I love Your commandments more than gold”*

It was the goal of grace, that the commandments which were impossible to keep through fear, could be kept with love ... hence, it is more precious than gold. In another psalm, it is said: “*More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold*” (Psalm 25: 10).

Intending to obey the commandments of God for the sake of earthly and physical reward; they could not obey them, for they did not love them ... The commandments for them were an undesired burden; But once the commandments became loved for their own sake, more so than gold and precious stones, any earthly reward compared to them were considered of no value; Nothing of all the good things of man, could be compared to this goodness, by which man himself becomes good.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ If the gospel calls on us to count the cost before building a tower; the high tower of our spiritual life is not set on just one stone, but on several stones of virtues, more precious than gold and silver; and according to **St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa**:

[As one stone does not sustain the entire building of a huge tower; keeping a single commandment, would not bring the perfection of the soul up to the desired height. The foundation should be first put, then on this foundation, according to the apostle, the rest of the building is set with gold, silver, precious stones, etc. (1 Corinthians 3: 12). Such is the work of the commandment, according to the prophet who cries out, saying: “*Therefore, I love Your commandment more than gold and precious stones*”<sup>1</sup>].

- ❖ Let us then knock on the gate of Christ, about which it is said: “*This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter*” (Psalm 118: 20).; So that, when we enter, the hidden treasures would be opened to us by Jesus Christ; “*In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2: 3)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**“*Therefore, I direct my steps by all precepts; which I consider right; I hate every false way*” (128)**

If the oppressors and the proud have come against me, on account of my attachment to Your precepts, I would truly find refuge in them, enter into the depths of their secrets; and long to testify to them whatever the cost may be.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Virginitiy, ch. 17.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Matt. 7: 7.*

❖ I truly love Your precepts, which I consider right, and I hold fast to them, to become, myself, right. It is only natural to add: “*I hate every false way*”. As, how can he, who loves uprightness, not hate every false way? .... As it could be said, that he, who loves gold and precious stones, would hate any thing that may cause him to lose them .... Having loved God’s precepts, he hates to sail along a path in which his very precious ship may confront the danger of being wrecked.

To avoid such a destiny, he who sails on the wood of the cross, by the divine precepts, carrying his cargo, is committed to keep away from that dangerous rock (the false way).

(**St. Augustine**)

Here, the psalmist demonstrates the following points:

a- The understanding of the commandment is not set upon my self-abilities, but upon the work of God, the Grantor of understanding and wisdom

(125). Our divine Instructor, not only gives us the knowledge, but He also gives us the understanding, which no one else can give. As, according to **St. Clement of Alexandria**: [Someone may say that the Greeks have discovered philosophy through the human understanding; but I find the Holy Scripture say: “The understanding is from God<sup>1</sup>”].

b- Knowledge of the commandment grants me the strength to testify (125); through the practical and joyful execution of the divine commandment;

Namely, the believer testifies to the light by walking in it.

c- Being now the time for God to act, it is not befitting of me to postpone (126). As, according to the book of Isaiah: “*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 ... ; that You may say to the prisoners, ‘Go forth’, and to those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves’*” (Isaiah 49: 8, 9). And the apostle says: “*In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You’; Behold, now is the accepted time, Behold, now is the day of salvation*” (1 Corinthians 6: 2).

For David, all the time has been a time for the work of the Lord; he knew no slothfulness; Both in the time of affliction, as well as in that of peace, in his public work, or in his familial life, or even while eating, drinking, or sleeping, he acted to the account of the kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Stromata 6: 8.

And while unceasingly working to the account of the Lord, the wicked were preoccupied with opposing the law of the Lord; the way the magicians did opposing the work of God on the hands of the prophet Moses (Exodus 7: 11).

d- The commandment is more precious than gold and silver (127).

❖ When it was the acceptable time, and the Gentiles came to be for the Lord, they hated the gold and precious stones, out of which the idols they used to worship were made; and loved the commandments of God, and preferred them to all the treasures and honors of the world.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

### **Do not leave me to my oppressors!**

1- He, who walks by the grace of the Lord in uprightness, and does justice and righteousness in his behavior and judgments, will dare to seek from God to save him from his oppressors. (121).

2- It would not stop at saving the believer from his oppressors, but he would seek from God to be for him a Surety and advocate, to defend him (122). He would not trust anybody else to take care of his cases.

3- The suffering believer speaks with his tears that open up the gates of heaven, more than the well-chosen words (123).

4- The believer spends all his time to the account of the kingdom of God; whereas the wicked preoccupy theirs to destroy him (126).

5- The commandment gives strength to work in the way of Truth; and a natural hatred for the false way (128)

6- In this 'stichon', the psalmist finds pleasure in calling himself "servant of the Lord" three times;

- "*Be surety for Your servant*" (122).

- "*Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy*" (124).

- "*I am Your servant; Give me understanding*" (125).

As a servant, faithful to his Lord, he seeks from Him to defend him, to grant him His mercy, and to give him understanding.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 16 Ayin**  
**BE A SURETY FOR ME**

- ❖ Who can support and keep me against the proud oppressors?!  
Be a surety for me, and defend my case.  
Save me from the wicked, like a sparrow from the snare of the  
fowler;  
Whom can I trust with my life and case, except You?!  
I cry out to You by the tears of my eyes, seeking Your salvation.
- ❖ Count me as Your faithful servant; and defend me;  
Do to me according to Your mercy;  
Give me understanding;  
By which I will love Your commandments, more than gold and  
precious stone;  
The commandments that I was not able to execute, even out of fear of  
punishment;  
Would be sweet, precious, and beloved.  
I would consummate by love; and seek no temporal reward.
- ❖ I love Your commandments that are more valuable than gold and  
precious stones;  
Which I carry in the ship of the cross;  
And sail away from the path of oppression, to keep my precious ship  
from being wrecked.

17 PE

## YOUR TESTIMONIES ARE WONDERFUL (129 – 136)

Having previously talked about the blessings of the commandment as a unique support for himself, and a refuge against the oppressors and the proud (121-128); Now, having enjoyed the salvation of the Lord, and his eyes were opened on the depths of the commandments, he saw amazing things in them.

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1- Your testimonies are wonderful                              | 129      |
| 2- Your testimonies give light and understanding to the simple | 130      |
| 3- Your testimonies are the gift of the Spirit                 | 131      |
| 4- Your testimonies kindle the love for God                    | 132      |
| 5- Your testimonies direct my steps                            | 133      |
| 6- Your testimonies redeem me from the oppression of man       | 134      |
| 7- Your testimonies make Your face shine upon Your servant     | 135, 136 |

### 1- YOUR TESTIMONIES ARE WONDERFUL:

*“Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul keeps them” (129)*

- ❖ The testimonies of the Lord are wonderful, From them we learn every amazing thing, to love of all kinds of virtue, and to reject every kind of iniquity.

By them we learn how to deal with virtues and iniquities.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Who can count all the kinds of testimonies of God? ... Heaven and earth; His works, hidden and manifest, all declare somehow His goodness and greatness ... The psalmist was not terrified by seeing God’s wonderful creation, but he rather felt committed to keep and search them. After saying: *“Your testimonies are wonderful”*, he added: *“Therefore my soul keeps them”*. The more difficult things are, the more intense his desire would be to search them.

**(St. Augustine)**

How amazing are the testimonies of God! They are unique in their limitless perfection! ... ; devoid of vanity! ... amazing in purity! ... amazing in possibilities! ... capable of drawing man to the presence of God! ... they are truly amazing; they present divine promises, faithful to the end!...

Amazing is the Word of God, for it reveals the Person of God, and proclaims His divine plan; how He sees man; and how He cares for his eternal salvation!.

The written Word of God is amazing on all aspects; And the incarnate Word of God, "*His name will be called wonderful*" (Isaiah 9: 6); for He came to talk to us in the language of practical divine love; delivering His life a sacrifice of love, that takes away the sins of the whole world.

So impressed was the psalmist with God's testimonies, that he kept them, not only in his memory, but also in his soul, in his inner depths, to give fruit, spiritually, in his thoughts, senses, and feelings, and even in his body. The prophet David kept them in his soul, to sanctify his heart and depths, and to guide his words, as well as his manifest behavior.

## **2- YOUR TESTIMONIES GIVE LIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING TO THE SIMPLE:**

*"The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple" (130)*

❖ Who are the "*simple*", but the humble and the weak?! ... Do not be proud; and do not boast your strength -- which is actually nothing -- to get to understand why the good law was given by the Good Lord! ... Although unable to give life, it was rather given with a goal to make you feel small, instead of great; and to reveal to You that you are helpless to fulfill the law by your own strength, and would accordingly flee toward the divine grace, saying: "*Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak*" (Psalm 6: 2).

Let everyone be "*simple*", and all the world be guilty before You, O Lord, "*By the deeds of the law, no flesh is justified in (Your) sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (Romans 3: 20). These are Your amazing testimonies, for which the soul of this "*simple*" search and finds. For, becoming simple and humble, he could consummate Your commandments as he should; namely, "*by faith working through love*" (Galatians 5: 6); "*because the love of God has been poured out in his heart by the Holy Spirit*" (Romans 5: 5).

(St. Augustine)

❖ Your sayings, O Lord, give light and educate the illiterate, who, because of their lack of knowledge, they are called “*simple*”. They enlighten, as well, those who return and choose to be simple; the way Your saintly apostles, and many others did; and the way wisdom was given to the babes and children of the Jews, who were inspired to recognize that You are the Savior who came to the world, to receive You with the branches of the trees, and to cry out, saying: “*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord*”.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

Once the words of the Lord enter into the soul, they give it light; as through them, the Word of God – the Sun of Righteousness – enters, shines on it, and scatters its darkness, pouring His splendor on it. The words of God give light to the royal way, through which we pass from earth to heaven.

It is amazing that this enlightenment that grants the soul understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, does not bring forth pride, but humility and simplicity; by which the believers become like babes, for whose sake, our Lord Jesus got exulted by the Spirit, and said: “*I thank You Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes*” (Matthew 11: 25).

❖ Our eyes have been already opened by the Lord Jesus, who came to lift up the veil that covered them<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

### **3- YOUR TESTIMONIES ARE THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT:**

*“I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Your commandments” (131)*

The psalmist likens himself to a traveler in an extremely hot weather, who opens his mouth to get a cup of cold water to quench his thirst. His soul longs to the work of the Holy Spirit who kindles the longing of his heart toward the divine Word. In another psalm, the psalmist says: “*My soul thirsts for You in a dry and thirsty land*” (Psalm 63: 1).

The Spirit who opened the mouths of babes and sucklings to praise the Savior, enters, as well, into our minds and our inner man, to

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<sup>1</sup> *De Principiis* 7: 6. PG 12: 203.

give understanding of the secrets of the Savior and the salvation, and to kindle the soul with the fire of longing to the commandments of the Lord, or the spiritual law of Christ.

After so long running, the psalmist opens his mouth and pants; for, for him, the commandment is a breath of air he takes in to restore him to life.

The psalmist often repeats the phrase: “*I longed for Your commandments*”. He longed to get it from the hands of his God, as his personal law; to understand it, to perceive its secrets; to keep it in his soul as a precious treasure, to carry it along the way as a lamp to his feet, to obey it as a son who loves his father’s commands, to teach it to others to enjoy together with him, to eat it, for it is sweeter than honey, and to enjoy it as his eternal heritage.

❖ What does he desire, but to obey the divine commandments? ... Yet, as it is not possible for the weak to practice the difficult things, nor for the little to practice the great things, he, therefore, opened his mouth confessing his utter helplessness to consummate that task on his own; He opened his mouth asking, seeking, and knocking (Matthew 7: 7); He thirsts to drink the Good Spirit who enables him to do what he cannot do on his own; For: “*the law is holy, just, and good*” (Romans 7: 12). Not that those who are “*led by the Spirit of God*” (Romans 8: 14), have done nothing, but, in order to keep them going, the Good Spirit moves them to work. The more man becomes a good son, the Father gives him the Good Spirit in a greater level.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ I opened my mouth and panted, and delivered my soul and my whole being to the Spirit – my work, words, and even my silence – to let Him hold my hand and lead me; to move my hand, mind, and tongue, to do and to say what is right, according to His will; and to control them in truth.

I am the tool of God, a rational tool, on which the Holy Spirit, the great and skillful Artist plays, to produce harmony.

Yesterday, His work provoked me to ‘silence’; and accordingly, I refrained from talking.

Will He, today, play on my mind, for my voice to be heard uttering? ... I open and close my door according to the divine Will, the Word, and the Spirit, the One Godhead<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory the Neizianzen)**

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<sup>1</sup> To His Father, Oration 12: 1.

Here, **the scholar Origen** binds between these words and the Song of Songs, saying: “*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*” (Song 1: 2); For the bride of Christ opens up her inner mouth to receive the Holy Spirit who enlightens her mind, and grants her the worthiness to get the kisses of love of her Groom<sup>1</sup>.

And **St. Jerome** quoted the same thought when he talked about this grace; Namely, when the soul kisses the Lord Christ, she receives the Holy Spirit working in her. He kisses the Lord Christ, who confesses Him with his mouth, and believes in Him with his heart (See Romans 10: 10); he, who, when he reads the gospel, recognizes the works of the Lord Jesus, admires them by the spirit of piety, piously receives His steps, and kisses the Lord Christ by the kiss of fellowship with Him<sup>2</sup>.

#### **4- YOUR TESTIMONIES KINDLE THE LOVE FOR GOD:**

Opening up his inner mouth, and receiving the work of the Holy Spirit in himself, the believer’s heart will be filled with love for God, and will practice His commandment; And through practicing and obeying the commandment, the believer proclaims his love for God, and draws His divine look at him. That is why the psalmist seeks from God to give him the grace of His divine look, by which He looks at His own beloved subjects, and grants them His mercy, kept for those who love His name.

***“Look upon me, and be merciful to me, as is Your custom toward those who love Your name” (132)***

With humility, the psalmist does not seek from God to stretch His hand to him with help, which is too much to ask; but it is enough for him to get the looks of His compassion, and His smile, to kindle his life. He does not seek what is his right, but what is according to the free divine mercies for those who love His name.

❖ God’s mercies are given to two categories: To those who sin no more, He grants His mercy, and forgets their sins; And to those who manage to practice virtue, who, for the sake of their love for God’s name, they do what draws His look upon them.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

❖ He still prays; he opens up his mouth and pants.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Comm. On Song of Songs 1: 2*.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter 41: 15*.

He still knocks on the door of the Father by prayer, he seeks, and drinks; and the more sweet he finds it, the more intense his thirst becomes. Listen to the words he says in his thirst: ***“Look upon me, and be merciful to me, as is Your custom toward those who love Your name”*** ... Having loved them first, You made them love You in return; according to the words of the apostle: ***“We love Him because He first loved us”*** (1 John 4: 19).

**(St. Augustine)**

## **5- YOUR TESTIMONIES DIRECT MY STEPS:**

Keeping the divine commandment, for the sake of his love for God, grants the psalmist the personal looks and mercies of the Lord; by which his steps become stronger to walk freely along the royal path, as though flying; No iniquity will have dominion over him, nor could hinder his sure and sound steps.

***“Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me”*** (133)

❖ In case we refrain from doing evil, and head to do good, God will direct our steps, pave our path, and mend our behavior; so that iniquity would have no dominion over us.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, sings, saying: ***“He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness”*** (1 Samuel 2: 9). God, by His grace, will guard the steps of His pious, who will not move except according to His holy will; no iniquity will have dominion over them, as long as God, Himself, leads their steps on the way of perfection.

❖ The more God’s love reigns over man, the less iniquity would have dominion over him.

What does man seek, other than to be granted by God to love him? Through loving God, he would love himself and his neighbor in a healthy way. For on these two commandments, hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22: 37-40).

For what does he pray, except that God would give him help to consummate these commandments which He has set on him to keep?

**(St. Augustine)**

## **6- YOUR TESTIMONIES REDEEM ME FROM THE OPPRESSION OF MAN:**

***“Redeem me from the oppression of man, that I may keep Your precepts” (134).***

- ❖ The expression ***“Redeem me from the oppression of man”***, came in Greek as “Redeem me from the deceit of men”, namely, from their slanders, as for example from ***‘the teachings of the heretics’***, who slander the true faith by uttering what contradict the Truth.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Have the saints not kept the commandments with more glory in the midst of such calamities, and of the worst kinds of affliction, and have they not submitted to the provocations of their persecutors to do evil? ... Yet, these words could also mean: [Will You, by pouring Your Spirit on me, keep me from succumbing before those human pressure, and from withdrawing from Your commandments to practice evil? ... If You do that to me; If You, somehow, save me by granting me the gift of perseverance, I shall not fear their vain charges with which they accuse me; and I shall keep Your commandments amid all those calamities].

**(St. Augustine)**

David tasted bitterness because of the slanders of the wicked; he was often, and for long, been deprived of enjoying the sanctuaries of the Lord, of the fellowship of the collective worship, and of the presence among the people; to remain a fugitive, without any wrong doing on his part. And behold, he seeks the help and salvation of God, lest the affliction would surpass his ability to endure. ... Yes, even in the darkest moments, while he was a fugitive, he felt that he was like an olive tree planted in the house of the Lord, which no one could uproot, nor could uproot the sanctuary from his depths,... Yet, he did not cease to cry out seeking the divine help; as though he says: ‘Let me not enter into temptation’.

Once the oppression is lifted up from the children of God, they would not use their freedom for perversion, but for the glory of God. When Peter and John were released from prison, ***“they went to their own companions”*** (Act 4: 23), praising and glorifying God.

## **7- YOUR TESTIMONIES MAKE YOUR FACE SHINE UPON YOUR SERVANT:**

The work of the commandment is to present the Truth which saves us from the slanders of the heretics, and prepares us to behold the face of the Savior “the face of the Father”, “the Sun of righteousness”; Hence the psalmist says:

***“Make Your face shine upon Your servant, and teach me Your statutes” (135)***

❖ Meaning, declare Your presence by Your help to me, and ***“teach me Your righteousness”***. He expressed that more clearly by saying: ***“Teach m (to do) Your will”*** (Psalm 143: 10). For those who hear, although they may memorize what they hear, yet they are not counted as being learned, unless they practice what they hear. The word of Truth is: ***“Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me”*** (John 6: 45). Therefore, he who does not obey through work, namely, does not come to Him, would not be counted as learned.

**(St. Augustine)**

David, the king, cherished to be called “the servant of the Lord”, counting it a great honor to him, and seeking His pleasure, even if all stand against him.

If the wicked unjustly accuse me, and slander me, to bring me forth to the darkness of the grave, You, on the other hand, shine on me with Your face, and fill me with splendor. While they provoke me to break Your commandment, You reveal to me its secrets, and teach me Your statutes.

When God shines on us with His light, we should not assume that we have reached perfection, and teach the others with haughtiness and pride; We should rather feel the need to learn more, in order to enter into new depths, and to enjoy greater enlightenment. We should teach the others, from the high chairs of teachers, but by a spirit of compassionate fatherhood. Our tears should never dry-up for the sake of their repentance, and their return to God; For the shining of the Sun of Righteousness on us, would grant us a flow of tears for the sake of sinners.

***“Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep your law” (136)***

❖ Do not let anything keep you away from remorse; as, with such grief on sin, you would be like the saints. ... David ***“has eaten ashes like bread, and mingled his drink with weeping”*** (Psalm 102: 9). And, ***“Rivers of water run down from his eyes”***<sup>1</sup> (136). He consequently, the more he wept, the more he rejoiced.

**(St. Ambrose)**

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning Repentance, book, 2, 10: 93.

- ❖ With some kind of exaggeration, he says that tears run down from his eyes, surpassing the running of rivers of water.

(St. Augustine)

David did not weep on his many daily sufferings and troubles; as much as he did, for the sake of the sinners who insult, and lose their eternal salvation. By that he bore the spirit of our Lord, who says: “*I have no pleasure in the death of the one who dies*” (Ezekiel 18: 32); and who also wept for the sake of the city of Jerusalem, whose inhabitants did not repent. Peter cleansed his triple denial by a flood of tears; and the prophet Jeremiah, lamenting his non-repentant people, said: “*My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people*<sup>1</sup>” (Lamentations 3: 48)

### **Your testimonies are wonderful:**

1- They are unique in their perfection, purity, activity, and faithfulness. The psalmist kept them, not only in his mind, but also in his soul, to give fruits in all aspects of his life (129).

2- They shine light in the soul to be filled with splendor, yet with the spirit of simplicity and meekness, to make it like a simple, yet wise child (130).

3- He opens up his mouth to pant breathing them, proclaiming his longing to keep them inside himself, eat, practice, understand their depths, and teach them.

4- Keeping them in our depths, and in our behavior, we become qualified for being looked upon by God with love and mercy.

5- By grace, the testimonies of God support our steps, and keep evil and the wicked from having dominion on us, until we reach perfection, and enjoy holiness.

6- The believer longs for God to keep him against the oppression of the wicked (134), and to shine with his face on him, to grant him splendor (135); and to let him enter into a new knowledge of the commandment, together with compassionate love for the repentance, and return of the sinners.

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<sup>1</sup> Epistle 122: 1.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 17 Pe**  
**YOUR TESTIMONIES ARE WONDERFUL**  
**AND MY SOUL LOVES THEM**

- ❖ Your testimonies are wonderful: unique in their perfection and purity;  
True, and capable to present to me the faithful promises of my God;  
Your testimonies are wonderful, I keep them, not only in my memory;  
But also in my depths, to work in my thoughts, feelings, and my whole being;  
They sanctify my heart, and guide my words and behavior.
- ❖ Your law shines on me, to reveal my weakness to me;  
I confess to You my weakness and ignorance, like a little child;  
Grant me knowledge to receive the work of the Spirit in me  
I open up my mouth to receive the work of Your Spirit in me;
- ❖ Loving Your testimonies, qualify me to have Your looks, full of love and mercy;  
My feet become stronger to move freely according to Your commandments;  
I would fly, as though toward heaven, and iniquity would have no dominion on me;  
I would not care for the vain slanders of the wicked, nor retreat from Your commandments to evil works;  
By that, I would be qualified to behold Your face, and to have Your light shine on me;  
My soul moans, and I bitterly weep for those who do not enjoy Your light together with me.

## 18 TSADDE

# UPRIGHT ARE YOUR JUDGMENTS FOREVER (137 – 144)

Getting in touch with the commandment, the psalmist found it amazing in its strength and activity. Now he finds in it the righteousness, despite the assumption of some, that oppression prevails on this world with no restraint. The psalmist perceived that he is too small to defend the righteousness of God's judgments and testimonies; or even to understand or interpret them. He was sure that God is love; In His love He is merciful and righteous; His mercy is full of righteousness, and His righteousness is full of mercy. That was manifested very clearly in the cross, the fountain of the divine love and righteousness.

1- ***“Righteous are You, O Lord”***137 - 138

2- **The psalmist's zeal on the righteousness of God**139 – 144

### 1- ***“”RIGHTEOUS ARE YOU, O LORD”***:

***“Righteous are You, O Lord, and upright are Your judgments. Your testimonies which You have commanded are righteous and very faithful”*** (137)

It so seems to man that oppression prevails upon the world; but with elaborate and wise meditation, he will realize that You, Yourself, O Lord, are ***“Righteousness”*** and ***“Truth”***, and that Your Judgment is upright.

❖ Let us meditate in the words of this psalm, saying: ***“Righteous are You, O Lord, and upright are Your judgments”***. No one can so utter, except he, who magnifies the Lord in all his afflictions, and refer all his sufferings to his own sins; offering God thanks for the sake of His mercy<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ ***“Righteous are You, O Lord, and upright are Your judgments”***  
...The righteousness and the upright judgment of God should be feared by every sinner. As every one condemned, is condemned by God; and as no one can truly complain against the righteousness of God, when He casts the sinner in hell; there is need for the tears of

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<sup>1</sup> Epistle 39: 2.

remorse, on account of that the non-repentant hearts are justly condemned.

He calls God's testimonies "righteousness"; by confirming that He is Righteous through presenting righteous commandment; which is also true, For by such testimonies, God is known.

**(St. Augustine)**

Amazing is God in His righteousness mingled with love. If, by righteousness, He condemned us to death, as a natural fruit of our separation from Him – the Source of our life; Yet, He, with love, received this very verdict in the body of His Manhood; realizing the divine righteousness, to reconcile us with the Father, to restore us to life.

Being Righteous, and doing nothing without righteousness, God desires from us to follow His lead, and walk with righteousness like our heavenly Father; in our dealing with ourselves, or with others, or even with God Himself.

## **2- THE PSALMIST'S ZEAL ON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD:**

Seeing that the church is the house of God, the house of the divine righteousness, the psalmist got very consumed by zeal on her; being the object of consistent attacks by the enemy, on every aspect.

*"My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your words" (139)*

This saying applies to the Lord Christ, who, in His zeal on the church of God, namely, in His love for the salvation of the believers, was consumed like wax when He was hanged on the cross, to realize the divine righteousness; and, at the same time, to reveal the limitless divine love. Yet, His own people, who turned to animosity, have forgotten His sayings, which He previously proclaimed on the mouths of His prophets.

The true believer is as well, filled with zeal on the house of the Lord, which is within himself, and set in every human soul. Feeling the value of the soul, he gives up all his temporal life, he gives up every right and honor, for the sake of building the glorious house of the Lord in the depths of the soul. He is also filled with zeal on his time and purity; and this zeal remains kindled even after death. ... As, according to **St. Jerome**: [Do you think that the apostle Paul, who was so filled with zeal on the salvation of every soul; who moved from one city to another, and from one country to another, as though he was moving from one room to another in the same house; ... Do you think that his

zeal and love came to an end by his departure from the body?! ... Far from it, but his zeal certainly increased, praying for the salvation of the whole world].

❖ *“My zeal has consumed me, because my enemies have forgotten Your words”* (139).... In some versions it came as *“Your zeal...”*;; Namely, someone zealous on God, not on himself.

The psalmist’s zeal could be understood here, to be consumed for a good cause; *“because my enemies have forgotten Your words”*.

**(St. Augustine)**

By saying: *“They have forgotten Your words”*, the psalmist reveals the extent of their evil. For man may break the commandment, yet his inner conscience would stir-up against him and rebuke him, even though he would attempt to calm it down. But, to forget, and completely disregard the commandment, is something far more serious.

*“Your word is pure (well tried), Therefore Your servant loves it”* (140)

❖ Saying “pure”, means (with no falseness, flirtation, or hypocrisy); *“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). He, who becomes a servant to God, should love Him.

**(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)**

Longing for purity, the psalmist’s heart binds to the fiery word of God, namely the pure in its meaning, spirit, and activity. Being pure, it is capable of granting purity, and of kindling the heart with its fire.

❖ How miserable is the soul, in which the fire of faith is quenched, and the warmth of love turned cool.

When our heavenly High Priest comes to her, seeking live coal, on which to offer incense to the Father, He would find, instead, dry weeds, and cold ashes.

That is how those who retreat and separate themselves from the Word of God, lest they would hear the divine words, and their hearts would burn with faith, grow in the warmth of love, and ignite with mercy.

Do you want me to show you how the fire ignites by the words of the Holy Spirit, and how they give light to the hearts of believers? Just listen to David, saying in the psalm: *“Your word is very pure”* (140). And read what is written in the gospel, that the disciple Cleopas,

after the Lord talked to him, on the road to Emmaus, said: “*Did not our heart burn within us?*” (Luke 24: 32).

You, as well, When will you acquire this fire? How would the live coal be found in you, unless you continuously burn with the words of the Lord, and grow by the words of the Holy Spirit? ... Listen to David, saying: “*My heart was hot within me; While I was musing, the fire burned*” (Psalm 39: 3)... How could you grow warmer, unless the fire burns in you; unless you meditate in the divine words? ... What could be worse, is when your fire is only that of the fun houses, and the sport arenas; a kind of fire which does not come from the altar of the Lord, but that which is called “*profane fire*”, which when it was offered by some before the Lord, they were destroyed (See Leviticus 16: 1) <sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ It would be difficult for a human being not to love something or another Our mind, by necessity, is committed to open the way to love. ... Yet love of the flesh is overcome by love of the Spirit; Lust is quenched by another lust; What is taken from one will increase the other<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

The secret of David’s zeal since his youth on the righteousness of God, is because he has experienced it practically when he was the youngest of his brothers, despised even by his own father, who did not call him when the prophet Samuel intended to anoint one of his sons a king; but God did not forget him; as according to him:

***“I am small and despised, Yet I did not forget Your precepts. Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth” (141 -142)***

The psalmist feels that, as a young man, he was too small to take the position of a critic of the Word of God and of His commandment; but he would take the position of the fiery man who longs to enjoy the presence of God. Knowing for sure that God’s righteousness and words are the Truth, he submits to enjoy that divine truth, and the exalted heavenly knowledge.

- ❖ ***“I am small and despised, Yet I did not forget Your precepts”*** ... It so seems that the smaller grieves on those who are older than him, those who have forgotten the righteousness of God, which he did not

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<sup>1</sup> In Lev. Hom. 9: 9.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 22: 17.

forget. ... As is meant by what he says, that those older than him have forgotten?!

Let us recognize the two nations that struggled together, even within the womb of Rebecca, to whom it was said, "*Not of works but of Him who calls, The older shall serve the younger*" (Genesis 25: 22, 23; Romans 9: 12, 13). ... But the younger here, who says that he is despised, became the greater, "*The last will be first, and the first the last*" (Matthew 20: 16).

- ❖ No wonder that those who have forgotten the words of God, who chose to establish their own righteousness, "*are ignorant of God's righteousness*" (Romans 10: 3). While he, the "smaller" here, has not forgotten, for he seeks, not his own righteousness, but the righteousness of God; about whom he says: "*Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth*" (142).

(St. Augustine)

According to **the scholar Origen**, that "small man" refers to the congregation of the Gentiles, new to faith, despised by the Jews, who preceded them to faith in God (in the Old Covenant); but they were not forgotten by God, who opened before them the gate of faith.

- ❖ How could the law not be the truth, out of which came the knowledge of sin; and which testifies to the righteousness of God?! As is said by the apostle: "*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith*" (Romans 1: 17), as testified by the law and the prophets".

(St. Augustine)

The words of God is not only true, but they are "the Truth" itself, which we are committed to keep, and according to which to act.

***"Trouble and anguish have overtaken me; Yet Your commandments are my delight"* (143)**

- ❖ As no athlete can take part in any athletic competition, unless he trains beforehand; Let us, then, anoint (the arms) of our souls with the oil of reading the Holy Book; and let us train day and night in its (gymnasium).

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ For the sake of the law, the smaller endured the persecution of the older; for him to say: "***Trouble and anguish have overtaken me; Yet, Your commandments are my delight***".
- ❖ Let them be stirred-up and let them persecute; as, according to the commandments, we should love, even them.

(St. Augustne)

***“The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting. Give me understanding, and I shall live.” (144)***

He, who keeps the commandment would counter many troubles; as, according to the apostle: *“Outside were conflicts. Inside were fears”* (2 Corinthians 7: 5). But keeping the commandment of God, and being preoccupied with it, will definitely lift the heart above any trouble or anguish.

❖ That “small man” prays for the understanding, that he would be wiser than the elders (100)

He prays, because, being in such troubles and anguish, persecuted and despised, he feels as though in a pit, and that his life became in the hands of his oppressive enemies. Saying: ***“I shall live”***, he prefers to live in the everlasting righteousness than in the temporal things. That righteousness amid the troubles and anguish is the testimonies to God *“Martyria Dei”*, by which God crowns the martyrs.

(St. Augustine)

**“The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting”**

1- If oppression prevails on the world, Yet the righteousness of God is everlasting.

2- The psalmist proclaims his strong zeal in defending the righteousness and precepts of God.

3- The testimonies of God are righteousness, capable of granting us the purity, and bringing us forth into the truth itself.

4- The wicked belittle and despise the psalmist; but he exults in the commandment that lifts him up above any anguish.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 18 Tsadde  
RIGHTEOUS ARE YOU, O LORD  
EVEN IF OPPRESSION PREVAILS ON THE WORLD**

- ❖ Who am I, O Lord, to defend Your righteousness?!  
Who dares to complain against Your righteousness?  
Whatever dwell upon me is because of my sins;
- ❖ You have justly condemned me to eternal death;  
Yet, with Your love, You carried that verdict in the body of Your  
Manhood;  
Righteous You are, and loving, O Savior of mankind.
- ❖ In Your zeal on Your church, Your heart dissolved like wax on the  
cross;  
And in my zeal on Your church, I desire death for the sake of the  
salvation of every soul;  
My zeal on Your church will endure, even after I depart'  
So will all the saints, who seek the edification and the salvation of all.
- ❖ My heart burns by the fire of the holy zeal;  
Let Your words endure, as a burning fire in my depths;  
Let it kindle my love, with a fire that the whole world cannot quench;  
Let the fire of Your holy words consume in me, the physical lusts and  
pleasures;
- ❖ Jesse despised his own small son David, when the prophet Samuel  
came to anoint him a king.  
My father and mother despise me; But You will never forget me;  
Small and despised I am, to criticize Your righteousness;  
Your righteousness is truth, even if I do not understand it.

## 19 QOPH

# YOU ARE NEAR, O LORD (145 – 152)

Believing in the righteousness of God, and trusting in his judgments, whatever are the situations around him, the prayer of the psalmist's heart comes forth to settle in the heart of God, where it finds a response. He cries out with his heart to the righteous God, the One very near to him, who will instantly hear him in His own divine heart.

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| 1- Cry-outs from the heart                                  | 145 -- 146 |
| 2- Urgent cry-outs  | 147 -- 149 |
| 3- The nearness of the wicked, and the nearness of the Lord | 150 – 152  |

### 1- CRY-OUTS FROM THE HEART:

*“I cry out with my whole heart; Hear me, O Lord! I will keep Your statutes” (145)*

While the prophet Moses was silent with his mouth, the Lord said to him: *“Why do you cry to me?”* (Exodus 14: 15). Having a holy heart, the Lord heard his hidden cries, and responded to them even before they come out of his lips. ... On the contrary, man may cry out for long hours, to hear the Lord say: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘ Lord; Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 7: 21).

For God to hear our cry-outs, we are committed to raise them with our whole hearts, which should not be preoccupied with anything else but God; should be holy, responding to the Holy God; And the cry-out should conform to God's mind and will.

David has been truly a man of prayer, who knew how to raise his prayer, for heaven to respond:

- He raised it from his whole heart (145). This is the essence of prayer, when the soul is dedicated, with all its energies and feelings to God's account.
- He sought the statutes of God; Namely, it was a prayer according to the divine will (145)
- He sought for himself, salvation, and not temporal things (146).
- He sought help to keep God's statutes, to execute, and be persistent on executing them (146)

- He sought a response to his prayer from God alone; For, believing that there is no hope for him in human arm, he perceived that only “*One thing is needed*” (Luke 10: 42).

❖ The cry-out is nothing but a strong and loud voice, that indicates the importance of what man intends to say to God. The righteous indeed cries out to God when he seeks great and heavenly things. So, it was said about the righteous ‘Abel’ when he died: “*The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground*” (Genesis 4: 10); to make it clear that the righteous cries out to God with a strong voice.

The Lord said to the prophet Moses, who was chased by the Egyptians: “*Why do you cry to me?*” (Exodus 14: 15). ... As for us, when we become saints, we shall have such a cry-out inside us; for the Spirit dwelling in us cries out saying: “*Abba, Father*” (Romans 8: 15; Galatians 4: 6).

Hear also the words: “*Jesus stood and cried out, saying: ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink’*” (John 7: 35). ... Therefore, he who cries out to God is he, who supplicates for the sake of great things, and does not seek things of little value.

How did David cry out? “*with my whole heart; Hear me, O Lord*”. ... He says: I do not slothfully utter; Not just with my mouth and lips, but with my heart, I raise my prayer to You, O Lord, beseeching You to respond to my prayer, and seeking Your statutes, to get elaborate understanding, and to become wise by them.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ To what extent will his prayer be effective? ... He answers: “I seek righteousness”; ... and for such a goal, he cried out to God with his whole heart. ... He wished he could have this from the Lord, who hears him, seeking His righteousness.

(St. Augustine)

*“I cry out to You; Save me, and I will keep Your testimonies”*

(146)

It was a very short prayer: “*Save me*”; Yet it carried many aspects; of which are:

- Salvation from the evil plots of the enemies
- Salvation from tough temptations.
- Salvation from sins and seductions
- Salvation of the soul by continuous renewal.
- Salvation from reproach; and enjoyment of the lost paradisiacal glory.

The goal of this prayer, namely, the goal of having such salvation, is: “***I will keep Your testimonies***”. He will also remain a faithful witness to God, his Savior, by his life, burning with love for God and men.

According to **St. Augustine**, it came in certain Greek and Latin versions, as “***I called You***”, instead of: “***I cried out to You***”. But, what does “***I called You***”, mean, but, by calling You, “I beseech You”?

❖ When he said: “*Save me*”, he added: “***I will keep Your testimonies***” .  
When the soul is sound (not sick; namely, enjoying salvation), she consummates what she is committed to do, to strive even to the death of the body, if the temptation reaches to that extent, for the sake of defending the truth concerning the divine testimonies. Whereas, if the soul is sick and weak, the truth would be despised.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ I called You loudly: “*Save me*”; and I pledged, if saved, to keep Your commands, which You gave me before witnesses, for the sake of my salvation.

**(The scholar Origen)**

## **2- URGENT CRY-OUTS:**

Because the situation is very serious, concerning my eternity, I raised the voice of my heart in consecutive cry-outs, seeking salvation, together with a pledge to keep Your testimonies, even in the midst of anguish. And as the time is short and the days are wicked (1 Corinthians 7; 29), I hastened to present urgent cry-outs at night, and dawn, until the Sun of Righteousness shines on me, and turns my life into perpetual daylight. I shall not cease to cry out, and to meditate in Your promises to me:

***“I rise before dawn and cry for help. I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night watches, that I may meditate in Your word” (147, 148)***

❖ We can interpret this text, either literally or spiritually.

To interpret it literally, we may say: I did not wait for the morning to pray to You, but I rose while it is still dark to gain the shining of the truth in me. And, through my hope in Your word, I anticipated anew, with more love, for “*love hopes all things*” (1 Corinthians 13: 7).

**Whereas the spiritual meaning** is: it is not something strange for an elder, who is no more disturbed by the lusts of his body, to get

preoccupied with praying; but it would be strange for such a young man (like David), to despise the physical urges of youth, and not to wait for the morning, but intends, while it is still dark, to overcome his lusts, with the wisdom of old men. ... About such a man, I can only say that he has realized the true sense of those words, saying: ***“I rise before dawn and cry for help. I hope in Your word”***.

❖ I opened my eyes before dawn to pray to You; to meditate in Your word, before getting preoccupied with anything else.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ He was first in the dark ***“before dawn”***; which could be likened to the present world we are used to call (night), compared to the world to

come, which we call (day); as is clear from the text: *“The night is far spent, and the day is at hand”* \*Romans 13: 12).

❖ By what he calls ***“My eyes”*** (148), he means his ability for “vision”; as he did not wait for the shining of the Sun of Righteousness

(Malachi 3: 20), to have the daylight, but got preoccupied with meditating in the Word of God, to grant him wings, by which he would set forth to the heights, to enter into a fellowship with the true Light Himself, without the use of a veil; and not to be anymore in the dark.

**(St. Dedyms the blind)**

❖ Beware, lest, when the ***“Sun of Righteousness”***, looking at you, would see you still in bed, snoring in deep sleep! ... Remember that you

are indebted to God by the firstfruits of your heart and voice. ... Remember that the Lord Jesus has often spent night in prayers. ... Give Him, then, what he gave you.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ If we refer here to every believer,... the love of God would most probably wake up (in him) at that time of the night, and exhorts him to pray fervently (before the rooster crows).

Whereas, If we understand it here, as the night of this world, We truly cry out to God at midnight, before the end of time, when He would mend our ways, according to His promise.

But if we chose to understand that ‘night’, as the time which was not yet complete; before ***“the fullness of time”*** (Galatians 4: 4), when

Christ appeared in flesh; namely, in the days of the old covenant; At that time, the church was not silent, but was crying out through

prophecies, trusting in the words of God, capable of fulfilling what He promised our father Abraham, that all nations will be blessed by his seed (Genesis 12: 3; 22: 18).

**(St. Augustine)**

The psalmist probably meant to say that, while being in the time of darkness, namely, under the shadows of the old covenant, before the shining of the Sun of Righteousness, he (the psalmist), by the inner cry-outs of his heart, and by his meditation in the promises and the words

of God, he could have his inner insight open up, and behold the secrets of salvation, as though through the night watches!. The psalmist counted himself as living in the darkness of night, seeing Christ coming to shine with His light on those sitting in the dark. He saw Him through the prophecies, symbols, and shadows. Hence, once the dawn came, and signs of the divine light started to appear, he hastened to meditate in the words of God, to recognize the Person of the Messiah to come

Some interpret the expression “*the night watches*”, by referring to that the Jews used to divide the night into three watches, each of four hours; while the Romans used to divide it into four watches, each of three hours; each of those watches, was declared by the night-watcher. The psalmist, on the other hand, used to wake up, even before the declarations of the night-watchers, to cry out to God, for he did not need anyone to wake him up, or to remind him of the time for praying; The night-watchers took turns in performing their duties; whereas the psalmist used to minister to God all night long, without waiting for anyone to relieve him, or to take his place; having dedicated all the hours of his life to a fellowship with God.

The psalmist used to wake up before sunrise, to start his prayers by crying out, and presenting fervent supplications to the Lord his God.

He used to mix his prayers with a study of the holy Scripture, as both of them are inseparable, and represent an intimate conversation between man and God.

❖ Let us count the “morning”, here, as the time when the light shone upon those who were sitting in “*shadow of death*” (Isaiah 9: 2); as the eyes of the church have been always anticipating that time, through the saints who dwelt on earth, and kept on meditating in the words of God that proclaimed all those things through the law and the prophets.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Hear my voice according to Your loving kindness, O Lord, revive me according to Your justice” (149)***

Through the time of darkness, meditating in the words of God, the psalmist sought His redeeming love, holding fast to His divine promise of salvation, saying: ***“Revive me according to Your justice”***. David’s life of meditation in the word of God was transformed into prayers and cry-outs. Our gospel, therefore, is not just for bare meditation, but is a treasure, with which we are committed to enjoy through our intimate talk to our Savior, the Grantor of life.

❖ I do not seek from You to revive me according to my behavior, namely, to my self-righteousness, but according to Your justice. In other words, Revive me by whichever way You intend for me to live.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ God, by His loving kindness, first relieved the sinners of punishment, and, according to His justice, will grant them the life to come; as it was not in vain, saying to Him: *“I will sing of mercy and justice; To You, O Lord, I will sing praises”* (Psalm 101: 1). Saying these two terms in such an order, “mercy” first, then “justice”; namely, presenting mercy in this time, to be followed by “justice” on the day of the coming of the Lord; Although in the time of “mercy” itself, mercy would not be without justice; according to the words of the apostle: *“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged”* (1 Corinthians 11: 31). ... The final “justice”, as well, would not be without “mercy” , according to the psalm: *“He will crown you with mercies and loving kindness”*. ... Yet, *“justice will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy”* (James 2: 13).

**(St. Augustine)**

### **3- THE NEARNESS OF THE WICKED, AND THE NEARNESS OF THE LORD:**

The more the believer lifts his heart by crying out to God, and dedicating his life to meditation in His words, the more the wicked will come near, to drive him out to his destruction; ... Yet, there, he will find the Lord, Himself, driven out of the camp, namely, out of Jerusalem, very near to him, even inside him. David went through all that, when he said to Jonathan, the son of Saul: *“There is but a step between me and death”* (1 Samuel 20: 3). Yet, then, as well, he found happiness; for the nearer the wicked came to him, the nearer the Lord came to defend and protect him.

***“They draw near who follow after wickedness; they are far from Your law” (150)***

Hearing by his inner ears the footsteps of those who chased him to do him harm, David put himself in the hands of God, and entreated Him to interfere, for they hated him on account of that, they went far from the law of God; as though their hate for him is hate for God Himself.

- ❖ From this text, we can realize the end of those who persecute the righteous. The nearer they come to persecute him, the more they go far from the law, and from life itself, for the law is our life (See Deuteronomy 32: 47).

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ The nearer they come to the righteous to persecute him, the more they go far from righteousness. What harm would they do by coming nearer to persecute the righteous, if that makes God hasten to come to save and protect them?!

**(St. Augustine)**

***“You are near, O Lord, And all Your commandments are truth” (151)***

If the enemies come near to oppress us, God is nearer to us; He is even inside us to support us; He hears our hidden cry-outs, and chases our enemies.

- ❖ The Lord says: *“Am I a God near at hand, and not a God afar off?!”* (Jeremiah 23: 23). God is everywhere, which confirms His divine care for His creation; according to the words of the apostle to the Greeks: *“We seek the Lord to find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17: 28); And it is also said: *“The Spirit of the Lord has filled the world with wisdom”* (Wisdom of Solomon 1: 7).

Unless we, ourselves, come near to God, we would not rejoice in His nearness to us. The wicked are far from Him, and, *“Indeed, those who are far from You shall perish”* (Psalm 73: 27). The righteous, on the other hand, are near to God, For God is not only the Creator of mankind, but He bring them forth into a fellowship with Him.... *“Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come near”* (Exodus 24: 2). He will come near the Lord, who has a fellowship with Him, according to his own level of readiness and perfection, *“He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him”* (1 Corinthians 6: 17).

***“You are near, O Lord, And all Your commandments are truth” (151).*** This could not be uttered by the ‘body-oriented’ Jew, whose practice of the law of God is within the range of literality; Yes,

He is circumcised, Yet not a true circumcision; Yes, he celebrates the feast of the unleavened bread, Yet not the true feast. ... Whereas he, who perceive the facts and the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13: 11; Mark 4: 11; Luke 8: 10), and knows the truth of every word in the Holy Book, will be able to utter: "*All Your commandments are truth*".

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ The text: "*All Your commandments are truth*", could also be interpreted to mean all the ways leading to God, He who says: "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*" (John 14: 6). He, who reaches to all these ways, would be in the "Truth", and the "Truth" and His Father would be in him.

**(St. Dedymus, the blind)**

❖ The saints confess to God, even in the midst of their troubles, referring the truth to God, on account of that they suffer, not according to the truth. So did queen Esther; the prophet Daniel; the three saintly young men in the furnace, and others, who, in their holiness, they confessed to God.

Yet, some may wonder: What is meant by saying here: "*All Your commandments are truth*"?... And in another psalm we read: "*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth*" (Psalm 25: 10). As far as the saints are concerned, all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, at the same time; as He cares for them even in His judgment; by which, there would be no lack of mercy. Through His mercy on them He consummates what He promised, and there would not be any lack of truth. So we are all, whether liberated or judged, will find in God's paths, both mercy and truth; As, when He does not manifest mercy, He manifests the truth of His revenge; Namely, He judges no one unworthy of judgment.

**(St. Augustine)**

***"Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever" (152)***

The prophet David knew that, of old, God has founded His testimonies; that they will hold fast all along the eras; and that the hosts of darkness would never be able to destroy. They are set on a rocky foundation, on which the believers build their life in the Lord. God's promises are steady, would never be changed with time; which fills the hearts of the believers with joyful hope.

- ❖ As I was in the beginning of my life in Your fear, and gained the knowledge of Your testimonies, I was enlightened by them, and came to have knowledge.

*“Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever”*. If God has founded those testimonies, they anticipate what would be built on them. On that foundation, God builds His precepts, statutes, commandments, judgments, wisdom, and knowledge. That would make the building consummate and perfect in every aspect ... to become worthy *“for God to dwell in it ...”* (2 Corinthians 6: 16; Leviticus 26: 12).

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ It is the Lord who founded the testimonies, which no one could shake nor destroy; It is Your “Word”, Your “Wisdom”, Your “Son”, who founded them... Hence He, Himself, says: *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away”* (Matthew 24: 35; Mark 13: 31; Luke 21: 33).

**(St. Dedymus, the blind)**

- ❖ What are those testimonies but by which God declares that He will give an eternal kingdom to His children?

Having declared that He will give these testimonies in His only-begotten Son, the psalmist says that they are founded forever; What God promised through these testimonies is eternal; hence the words *“You have founded them”*, are so understood; *“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 3: 11).

**(St. Augustine)**

According to **St. Augustine**, these testimonies which were founded by God, was known by the church from the beginning; whose firstborn was ‘Abel’, who was slain as a testimony to the blood of the Intermediary to come, which was shed through a wicked brother.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – Qoph (145-152)**  
**COME NEAR TO ME, O LORD;**  
**FOR THE WICKED DRAW NEAR TO DESTROY ME**

- ❖ Let me, together with David, present my prayer with my whole heart;  
I keep Your statutes, to consummate Your heavenly will;  
Let me seek the salvation, and not the temporal things;  
Let me seek from You to come near to me, because the wicked draw near to destroy me.
- ❖ Come near to me and save me from their evil plots;  
Save me from the tough temptations;  
Save me from the sins and lusts  
Save me from my corrupt nature, by renewing it;  
Save me from the reproach, to enjoy the glory of the lost paradise.
- ❖ Before sun-rise I get up, and cry out to You to come near me;  
In the midst of the darkness of lusts, I cry out to You to turn my life into daylight;  
I will give You the firstfruit of my life;  
Before starting work in the morning, I cry out to You to come near me.
- ❖ Many are the nights, I spent praying to You, who hears the prayers;  
Grant me to spend the nights of my life in prayers, to encounter You;
- ❖ Grant me to mix the cry-outs of prayer with serious meditation in Your word;  
As in both of them, I enter with You into an amazing debate, and be bound to Your promises  
Come near me, and proclaim Your dwelling in me.
- ❖ The enemy draw near to destroy me;  
But You hasten to come near me to save me;  
You are nearer to me than the enemy; For You are in me.



- ❖ We cannot understand the law of God as we should; except through considering the ultimate verdict, saying: “*Whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*” (Luke 14: 11; 18: 14).

(St. Augustine)

**“*Plead my cause and redeem me; Revive me according to Your word*” (154)**

Here, the psalmist seems as though pleading his case before the supreme divine Court. On his side, he presents two points in his favor: his humility, and keeping the law of God; by which he feels at peace, standing before the divine throne. He seeks from the Lord to consider his cause; on account of that, He, alone, through His divine insight, could perceive what lie deep in the soul, of sorrow and anguish, could grants her an exalted peace, and give her back her gladness. His divine insight, as well, is accompanied by a divine work; in contradiction to the looks of men, which, even if they happen to bear some kind of compassion, yet they are helpless to save..

- ❖ “*I do not forget Your law*” (153) conforms to the words here: “*Revive me according to Your word*” (154). As these words are the law of God which the psalmist will never forget. ... Humbling himself, he was lifted up.

Saying: “*Revive me*”, concerns this lifting-up; for the lifting up of the saints is the eternal life.

(St. Augustine)

## **2- “SALVATION IS FAR FROM THE WICKED, FOR THEY DO NOT SEEK YOUR STATUTES”**

If the believer, by his humility and obedience, enjoys fellowship with his Savior; The wicked, on the other hand, by his pride, and his disobedience, or his rejection of God’s statutes and commandments, deprives himself of the enjoyment of that fellowship, and its spiritual fruit in his life.

**“*Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek Your statutes*” (155)**

There are two kinds of sinners: those who feel their sins, confess them, and seek the divine work; and those who, not caring for their sins, they do not seek the divine work; From those later, salvation is utterly far.

❖ Salvation is not far from all sinners; For Christ, who Himself is the Salvation, came to call them to repent and be saved. He is, though, far from those who do not seek repentance, that vindicate them from sin.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

❖ This separates you (David) from them, for they do not do what you do. You, looking at the righteousness of God, “*What do you have that you did not receive?*” (1 Corinthians 4: 7),,,, You received (from God) whom You called, the strength to keep His righteousness; And He, Himself, separated you from those who are far from safety (of the soul), on account of that they do not care for the righteousness of God.

(St. Augustine)

St. Augustine perceived the danger of any debate with the wicked, who only cares to draw the believers to him, to deprive them of their salvation; for “*Salvation is far from the wicked*”.

The sinners do not enjoy salvation, that becomes far from them, on account of that they do not keep the statutes of God; Namely, the Truth, who is Christ.

❖ Your law is the Truth; And the Truth is You (John 14: 6) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### **3- I RECEIVE YOUR TENDER MERCIES, WHICH THE WICKED REJECT:**

The secret of that salvation is far from the wicked, is not God, but is the sinners themselves. And lest anyone may refer cruelty to God, the psalmist consummates his talk by confirming the multitude of God’s tender mercies which are rejected by the wicked.

On His cross, the Savior Lord proclaims His divine mercies to the whole world; and the doors of His love remain wide open until the last moment of our life; Whoever desires, will enjoy them and live have life, to be consequently oppressed by the wicked; Yet, he remains faithful in keeping the words of his Savior, the Grantor of life, holding fast to the law of the Lord, and His mercy..

**“Great are Your tender mercies, O Lord; Revive me according to Your judgments” (156)**

By this, the psalmist indirectly rebukes the wicked, presenting his own experiences of receiving the tender mercies of God, which granted him life instead of death.... We were condemned to death, but

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<sup>1</sup> Confessions 4: 9 (14).

through the cross, the verdict was changed, and we were granted the resurrected life. ... The psalmist calls on the dead to enjoy the new life through the tender mercies of God, which he, himself, has enjoyed; For “*God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3: 9).

***“Many are my persecutors and my enemies; Yet I do not turn from Your testimonies” (157)***

❖ That is what we realize, know, and remember:

- \* The whole earth became red by the blood of the martyrs.
- \* Heavens flourish by the crowns of the martyrs.
- \* The churches are adorned by the memories of the martyrs.
- \* The seasons are distinguished by the birthdays of the martyrs.
- \* Many healings are realized through the worthiness of the martyrs.

Why so; except because of the prophecy of Him, that was realized and covered the whole earth; which we perceive, and for which we give thanks to the Lord our God. ... And you, man (the psalmist David), yourself: said “*If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, , when men rose against us, then they would have swallowed us alive*” (Psalm 124: 1-3); which was why you did not turn from His testimonies.

**(St. Augustine)**

It did not stop at getting far from salvation, and being deprived from the eternal life; but the wicked persecute the believers, and grieve them for no cause. They, themselves, do not intend to enjoy the salvation, and they do not intend to leave the others in their inner peace. They desire the destruction of every human soul! ... This makes the true believers grieve and cry for their sake!

As a public figure, David had a multitude of enemies, both hidden and manifest; Yet he did not fear any of them, nor flattered any at the expense of God’s testimonies and commandments.

***“I see the treacherous with disgust, because they do not keep Your commands” (158).***

❖ Who are those treacherous, but those who turn from the testimonies of God, and do not endure the troubles caused by their persecutors?!... As it is the covenant, that he, who overcomes will be crowned; those who do not endure the persecution, and turn from the testimonies of God, are not keeping His covenant. Those were seen by the psalmist, who was grieved because he loved them; for zeal is good, if it comes out of love, and not out of envy. Having seen how they denied in

their afflictions, the psalmist added “*Because they do not keep Your commands*”.

(St. Augustine)

Looking at the “*treacherous*”, who do not keep the commandments of God, grieving for them, and seeking their salvation, the Lord will pay us back for our sympathetic look at them, by His compassionate look on us; and for our longing for their salvation, by His tender mercy, that would grant us life. Whatever compassion we practice, even toward our persecutors, will come back to us double as much, on an exalted heavenly level.

“*Consider how I love Your precepts; Revive me, O Lord, according to Your loving kindness*” (159)

The prophet David did not say: “Consider how I consummate Your precepts”; for he knows for sure that he is far from it, and that he has his own weaknesses; but he says: “*Consider how I love Your precepts*”;... how I strive to consummate them.

“*The entirety of Your word is truth; and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever*” (160)

❖ Your words are the Truth, they deceive no one; and in them You proclaim life for the righteous, and punishment for the wicked. These are the eternal judgments of the divine righteousness.

(St. Augustine)

According to the scholar Origen, “*The beginning of the words of God*” (as it came in some versions), has been His promise to our father

Abraham, which was fully realized, as his descendants have become as numerous as the stars in heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore; and out of his seed came our Lord Jesus Christ who blessed the nations who believed in Him.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – Resh  
(153 – 160)**

**YOUR DIVINE LOOKS FILL ME WITH PEACE**

- ❖ Look at me in my affliction;  
Your looks save me and grant me peace and gladness;  
Your looks are full of practical compassion;  
Your looks work for my sake, and grant me the eternal life.
- ❖ Grant me to confess my sins;  
Presenting repentance, Your salvation would not be far from me;  
Let me seek the divine Truth ... You are the Truth;
- ❖ Your tender mercies are abundant, O Savior of the world;  
Yet, the wicked turn away from them, and do not care for them;  
They deprive themselves of the salvation;  
And they persecute those who seek their own salvation;  
That filled my soul with sorrow;  
I do not fear them; but I fear for their sake.
- ❖ I am filled with compassion, even on my persecutors;  
Look at me, and pay back my compassion on them, with Your  
compassion on me;  
As that is Your divine promise;  
And that is the eternal truth.

## 21 SHIN

# GREAT PEACE HAVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOUR NAME (161 – 168)

Attaching himself to the salvation of God, and enjoying the true life, brought on him the oppression of the wicked without a cause. Yet, that did not make him lose his great peace, nor the gladness of his heart; for he did not set his heart on the oppression, but on the great promises of God, being for him the greatest of spoils.

- 1- Persecution without a cause 161
- 2- His rejoice is, as of one who finds a great treasure 162 - 163
- 3- A perpetual state of joy and praise 164
- 4- His enjoyment of peace 165 – 168

### 1- PERSECUTION WITHOUT A CAUSE:

*“Princes persecute me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your word” (161)*

Crying out *“Princes persecute me without a cause”*, the psalmist reveals the bitterness inside him. It was befitting of those princes to care for him and for others; but instead of care and love, they presented to him persecution and hate without a cause. He did not seek their worldly positions, rebelled against them, nor opposed their authority; but they might have felt that his righteousness would expose their wickedness, and that his spiritual success might motivate him to seek temporal success, and provoke him to seek their positions of authority. That, was most probably how king Saul felt.... Persecution will always be the portion of the believers; as the more the believer attaches himself to God, the more the wicked cannot endure him. The believer desires, together with the apostle Paul, to make peace with everyone; but not everyone is ready to receive this peace; for no cause, but that they do not receive the Lord Christ who dwells in him.

In their oppression, persecution, and animosity against the psalmist, the princes used, beside the sword, the law itself; turning it against the truth, playing tricks with it to destroy the psalmist; and presenting a multitude of false justifications. Yet he has not preoccupied himself with their oppression, but with the words of God, that produce

energies of love, even toward the oppressors. By that, the psalmist was preoccupied with the positive, and not with the negative aspect.

He stands in awe, not of the wicked, but of the words of God, lest he might disobey the divine commandment; as the authority of God is greater than any human authority.

❖ The temptations of the devil are directed more to those who are sanctified, for he longs more to have conquest over the righteous<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers)**

❖ I do not fear my enemies, but I stand in awe of the death judged by Your word.

**(Pope St. Athanasius)**

❖ Being the truth, Your words deceive no one, but in them, life is proclaimed for the righteous, and punishment for the wicked. They are the eternal judgments of the righteousness of God..

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Did the Christians, whose King promised them a heavenly kingdom, harm the kingdoms of the earth?!

Did king keep them from giving the fitting service to the kings of the earth?!

Did He not say to the Jews who were stirred-up against Him: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22: 21)?!

Did He not pay the tax on Himself from the mouth of the fish (Matthew 17: 24-26)?!

When soldiers of that earthly kingdom asked St. John the Baptist what they should do for the sake of their eternal salvation; Did he tell them to forsake their weapons and the service of their king, to fight instead for the sake of the Lord; ... Did he not tell them: “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, but be content with your wages” (Luke 3: 14).

Hasn’t one of His very beloved soldiers (Paul) said: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13: 1)?! And hasn’t he exhorted the church to pray for the sake of the kings (1 Timothy 2: 1, 2)?!

How then would the Christians be accused of working against the kings?!

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<sup>1</sup> In Matt. Hom. 2.

What commitments have they not fulfilled toward their kings?!

That is why it is safe to say that the Christians are persecuted by the kings of the earth without a cause!

But he goes on to say: “*But my heart stands in awe of Your word*” (161)

My heart stands in awe of the words: “*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul*” (Matthew 10: 28).

I despise him who persecutes me, and overcome the devil who tends to seduce me.

(St. Augustine)

❖ He can utter such words, he, who is called to martyrdom,; who is persecuted by the princes of this world, who are entrusted with the life and death of men... Let us watch how the martyr does not stand in awe of the diverse tools of torture, but stands in awe of the words of God; ... Let us see how he is utterly preoccupied with remembering these words, and with the punishments set for those who deny God!

He says: the princes persecute me, not on account of that I am a thief, a murderer, or have done what warrants blame; but because I glorify You, O God, the Creator of the universe; and because I believe in the name of Your only-begotten Son. ... I stand in awe, not of their threats, but of the fear I feel toward Your judgments.

It is befitting of us to have the fear toward the words of God, and to turn from our sins, ... particularly from denying Him who died for our sake. ... He, who holds fast to this will rejoice at the words of God (162).

(The scholar Origen)

❖ Those princes who persecuted David without a cause, namely, against the truth, were king Saul and the like; But those who persecute us now, are the princes of the evil hosts (the devil and his hosts).

There are two kinds of awe: One that may happen out of anger in the soul without a cause, because of lack of faith; like that for which the Lord rebuked Peter when he attempted to walk on water, and said to him: “*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*” (Matthew 14: 31); And another kind of awe which occurs in man’s heart and mind, and bears the fear of God, which is good.

(Onesimus, bishop of Jerusalem)

**2- HIS REJOICE, IS AS OF ONE WHO FINDS A GREAT TREASURES:**

Although the oppression of men was bitter to the prophet David, yet the preoccupation of his heart with the words of God produced in him energies of exaltation; for he discovered what they include of heavenly promises and blessings.

Although David's heart stood in awe, and bore fear of the words of the Lord, yet this divine fear gives us, as well, gladness of the heart, for counting the Word of God as a precious and indispensable treasure. It is not the kind of fear that casts the perfect love out (1 John 4: 18), but that nourished by love.

In the name of the church of the new covenant, the psalmist proclaims his rejoice in the words of God, that he got from the church of the old covenant, as a rich treasure presenting to us the divine promises, the law, the covenants, the prophecies, and the symbols; which the Jews, who rejected faith in the Savior, could not perceive; ... the psalmist says:

***“I rejoice at Your word, as one who finds great treasure” (162)***

Instead of being preoccupied with the persecution and oppression of the princes, the soul of the psalmist exalted in the promises of God, and the treasures he acquired through His Word. ... In every spiritual battle against the devil, the believer comes out a conqueror, and a bearer of a multitude of spoils, new depths in his fellowship with God, and a greater enjoyment of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. ... Great is the joy that fills the hearts of the conquerors while dividing *the* spoils; And great would be the joy of the believer when he discovers his portion in the promises of God and the riches of His treasures.

❖ It is something worthy of research, to know why the psalmist binds the joy to the words of God, saying: ***“as one who finds great treasure”?***

If we take into consideration, those who received the words of God in the past; and those to whom the word ended up now; we would perceive, that we Christians, have robbed the Jews, according to the words of the Lord, saying to the Jews: *“The kingdom of God will be taken from you, and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it”* (Matthew 21: 43).

Plenty are those treasures, namely, the holy Scriptures, which the Jews do not possess now, for they do not understand their meaning.

**(The scholar Origen)**

**The scholar Origen**, complaining that some Christians are against him, on account of their persistence on the literal interpretation

of the Holy Book, and criticize those who adopt the spiritual interpretation, says:

[Friends of the literal interpretation cry out against me with slander, claiming that there is no truth, unless it has settled down on earth. As for us (like the servants of Isaac), we would rather have the wells of running water, and the living springs (See Genesis 26: 20). Let us then, separate ourselves from such men, together with their letter which bears no truth; ... **Let us forsake the land for them, the land which they love, and seek for ourselves the kingdom of heaven**<sup>1</sup>].

❖ Referring to the enemies who persecute him, he talked about “treasures” (or spoils). He means to say that, even if he manage to kill them all, and collect all their spoils, he will not rejoice as much as he does at having God’s word.

(Father Theodoret)

❖ When we defeat the devil, we take his spoils; he, about whom it is written in the holy gospel: “*How can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless we first bind the strong man*” (Matthew 12: 29).

Among the amazing spoils we (plunder) from him are the endurance of the martyrs; which led, even their persecutors to believe; those who plotted to harm our King through doing harm to His soldiers.

(St. Augustine)

Lest the “treasures” or (spoils) would be understood as something material, or a confiscation of the possessions of others, like the spoils of war, the psalmist goes on to say:

***“I hate and abhor lying, but I love Your law” (163)***

Love and hate, as the most prominent of human emotions, if put in their right direction, namely, if they are sanctified in the life of man, all the rest of the emotions will move as they should. That is how it happened with the prophet David, who loved God, His word, and His creation; and hated evil, oppression, and the hosts of darkness; he, who loved the truth, and hated and abhorred lying and vanity.

❖ These are the words of a righteous man, who, not only refrains from committing oppression, but hates it as well.

He means to say: My enemies hate and abhor me, as though I am a dead rat, a corpse, or a half-wit. As for me, I only hate what is worthy of being hated ... namely oppression.

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<sup>1</sup> *De Principiis* 13: 3.

Contrary to them, I love Your law, and understand it, not the way they do; for they use it for earthly things, and bring it down to the facts of the lower world ... *“If we were raised with Christ, we should seek things which are above, ... we should set our mind on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Colossians 3: 1, 2). We should understand the law with its spiritual meaning.

(St. Dedymus the blind).

❖ Standing in awe of His words, does not create hate ... but would support a plenty of love; For the words of God are His law; and far from it, that love would be destroyed by fear; as long as fear is pure.

This is how the lovable children fear their fathers, and how they love them at the same time.

And how the chaste wife fears her man, lest he would forsake her; and how she loves him to enjoy his love.

It would be much more, as far as our Father in heaven is concerned (Matthew 6: 9); and the Groom, who is *“fairer than the sons of men”* Psalm 45: 2); not according to the body, but in goodness; For who would love the law of God, other than those who love God?! And *“whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives”* (Hebrew 12: 6). ... Let us then praise the righteous judgments of the father, even when we are scourged by Him, as long as we anticipate the realization of His promises of reward.

(St. Augustine)

### 3- A PERPETUAL STATE OF JOY AND PRAISE:

Lest *someone* may think of the treasures as temporal things, the psalmist proclaims his continuous preoccupation with praising God, with his perpetual joy in God’s works with him, and with His righteous judgments.

*“Seven times a day I praise You because of your righteous judgments” (164)*

When some find difficulty to dedicate a single day, or few hours every week, to the Lord, the prophet David dedicated time to praise Him seven times every day, unceasingly giving God thanks in all situations. ... According to **St. Augustine**, [number 7 generally refers to absolute perfection<sup>1</sup>].

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<sup>1</sup> *City of God, 11: 32.*

❖ “*Seven times a day I praise You*” means ‘I shall never stop praising You’.... Seven times means all time<sup>1</sup>.

❖ He who says “*Seven times a day I praise You*”, says in another psalm: “*I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth*” (Psalm 34: 1). ... Seven times refer to continuity; on account of the fact that the whole system of time moves in a perfect circle, through seven days that repeats itself again and again<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Who is he who praises the judgments of the Lord several times a day, using the holy number that refers to rest, but him who rejoices in God’s judgments, being righteous?!

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ The enlightened righteous man, living in a perpetual day all the days of his life, a day never disrupted with darkness, praises God seven times. For he is lifted up above this world which was created in seven days. Once I reach the paradise of God, and meditate in the goal of creation, and the wisdom of God, I come to confess that God’s judgments are righteous.

**(St. Dedymus, the blind)**

❖ I will perpetually remember the judgments, commanded by Your righteousness, driving away the proud princes of darkness (the devils); and saving the victims of oppression.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ We should, as well, partake of this spiritual ministry, praising God seven times a day<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Cassian)**

❖ We were commanded to revere and honor the One, being convinced that He is the Word (Logos), the Savior, and the Leader, through whom we Revere the Father; not just in certain days, collectively with others, but we should do that on a continuous level, and in every way, in our life<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons on N.T. Lessons, 45: 2.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid 64: 1.*

<sup>3</sup> *The Institutes, 3: 4.*

<sup>4</sup> *Stromata 7: 7.*

❖ If he who says: “*I praise You seven times a day*”, is a king preoccupied with running the affairs of his kingdom; how much more should we do in light of the words of the Lord Himself who says: “*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation*” (Matthew 26: 41) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ Let us then watch the day and the night like David who gave thanks for the sake of God’s righteous judgments “*seven times a day*” (164); as well as at midnight<sup>2</sup>.

(Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic)

❖ To the wicked neighbors, sevenfold of their reproach to God, are returned (Psalm 79: 12); The house of wisdom is built on seven pillars (Proverb 9: 1); The stone of Zerubbabel laid before ‘Joshua’ the high priest, is decorated with seven eyes (Zecahariah 3: 9); God is praised by the prophet David seven times a day (Psalm 119: 164); and the barren woman who gives birth to seven (see Psalm 113: 9) <sup>3</sup>.

(St. Gregory the Nezianzen)

What increases the sweetness of these continuous praises, is that they come from a heart suffering from anguish and persecutions; For our praise in the midst of sufferings is sweeter than when it comes in the midst of peace.

#### 4- HIS ENJOYMENT OF PEACE:

“*Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble*” (165)

In some versions it came as: “*Great peace have those who love Your name*”

❖ “*Great peace have those who love the law of the Lord*”. He does not mean the outer peace (which does not depend on us), but that of the mind, which goes hand in hand with the absence of anxiety and disturbance ... Those who have this kind of peace, will at the same time have the grace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 1: 7; 1 Timothy 1: 2).

Having this kind of peace in the name of God, they will be in perfect exultation, and they will rise to the level where nothing causes them to stumble....”*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress?!*” (Romans 8: 35). And, “*Yet in all these things*

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning Virgius, book 3, 4: 18.

<sup>2</sup> Paschal Letters 6.

<sup>3</sup> On Pentecost, 3.

*we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8: 37-39).*

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ What does he mean by saying that the law itself does not cause those who love it to stumble; or that nothing of any source will be for those who love the law? Both facts are true; for if whoever loves the law of God, confesses that it includes things that he does not understand, and must have some hidden meaning; the law of God would not cause him to stumble.
- ❖ To avoid being stumbled wherever you go, you should fly to God who created the world! ... But how could we do that, unless we listen to His law which is preached everywhere?!... That would be a simple thing to do if we love it<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ As our Lord Jesus Christ is Himself Peace; Let us keep peace, so that peace would keep us in Christ Jesus<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ He did not say: “Let there be great peace for those who keep the commandment”; but, “.... For those who love Your (Your name)”; As no one could keep the commandment as he should; he who loves the (the name) of God would perpetually strive to keep His commandment, seeking the work of the Savior in his life.

He also says: “**Nothing causes them to stumble**” (165); For he, who enjoys the true peace of God, which springs from his love for His holy name, and his strife to obey His commandment, nothing whatsoever will cause him to stumble, but he will say together with the true believers: “*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8: 28). No tribulation, distress, or oppression, that may dwell upon them, will cause them to stumble, as they trust in the righteous judgments of God, and in His exalted care; Their peace springs from their depths and their fellowship with God, not from the outer circumstances..

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons on N. T. Lessons, 31: 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. Hom. 41.*

Finally, the secret of the great peace of the psalmist is his anticipation of the Savior, and his enjoyment of His salvation work, capable of supporting him to keep the divine commandment without breaking it; something that he never doubts, and no one, or any event could cause him to stumble. Here, the psalmist binds between the enjoyment of the free salvation of God, and the persistence on keeping the divine commandments; confirms it three times, and proclaims that keeping it, springs from his deep love for it; saying:

***“Lord, I hope for Your salvation, and I do Your commandments” (166)***

***“My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly” (167)***

***“I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways are before You” (168)***

❖ Hoping for the true salvation coming from You, I not only keep Your commandments, but ***“My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly”*** (166) ... By keeping the commandments with love, the anticipated salvation will be consummated.

In the beginning, he says: I loved Your commandments, one after the other;

Then he says: ***“My soul keeps Your testimonies;***

Then he binds the two together by saying: ***“I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways are before You, O Lord”***

No sinner can say: ***“my ways are before You”***, for the ways of the sinner are not before God; Only those of the righteous are.... Let all our ways be before God; Let us keep praying, and seeking that from God, until we reach God, the Father of all in Christ Jesus.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ What would profit the righteous of the Old Covenant, who loved the commandments of God, unless they are liberated by Christ, who is the salvation of God, by whose Spirit they would be able to love the commandments of God? ... That is why, those who loved the commandments of God, hoped for His salvation.... How much more would be the need for Jesus who is the salvation of God, for the sake of those who did not love His commandments?

This prophecy may be appropriate for the saints of the era of the declaration of grace, and the preaching of the gospel; As those who love the commandments of God look forward to Christ our life, when He appears together with them in glory.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The testimonies of God were kept, and were not denied, through the work of the martyrs; For the testimonies were called in Greek: “Martyria”. ... And on account of that, “*Though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing*” (1 Corinthians 13: 3); the psalmist added: “*I love them exceedingly*” (167) ... For he, who loves, would keep the commandments in the spirit of truth and faithfulness.

**(St. Augustine)**

Concentrating on keeping the commandments, the psalmist confirms the following:

\* His hope for the salvation work of the Lord; For keeping the commandments is not a self-human effort, but is the salvation work of God in him.

\* Keeping the commandments, would not be realized without outside his will: “*I do Your commandments*” ... There has to be a response to the divine grace.

\* Keeping the commandments springs from an exceeding love for them.

#### **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – 20 Shin THE PRINCES PERSECUTE ME WITHOUT A CAUSE**

- ❖ I desire peace for all;  
Yet the princes persecute me for no cause except for Your dwelling in me;  
They used every way to oppress me;  
I have no fear of them, but I stand in awe of the death judged by Your word;  
I despise him who persecutes me;  
And the devil who seeks to destroy me;  
But I fear my God, the Righteous Judge.
- ❖ Not fearing the enemy, but fearing Your words, O Lord;  
Your fear produces gladness in me;  
In Your words I see treasure beyond evaluation;

Together with every battle against the devil, I enjoy conquest  
And I come out bearing many treasures -- exalted divine gifts;

- ❖ The devil assumed that he could destroy the Lord Christ, by  
destroying His believers;  
Yet he himself was destroyed together with his followers;  
Many of the persecutors themselves have come to faith;  
And became members in the kingdom of Christ.
- ❖ I came to enjoy the treasures of joy;  
I praise You seven times a day;  
My night turned into day;  
And my troubles turned into unceasing praise;  
Amid distress I reach Your paradise;  
And enjoy Your perpetual praise.
- ❖ The oppression of the enemy against me increases my peace;  
For my great peace does not spring from outside, but from inside;  
In the oppression of the enemy I see my Savior inside me;  
I see Him come very close to me to save me;  
He hides me in Him, so that I would not become a party in the battle.
- ❖ With every spiritual battle, I hope for Your salvation;  
I exceedingly love, and keep Your commandments.  
And I see my ways laid before You, until I reach the bosom of Your  
Father;
- ❖ With every tribulation and distress, I enjoy an exceeding love of Your  
commandments;  
By enjoying love, I keep them with truth and faithfulness;  
Love will remain my perpetual deposit forever.

## 22 TAU

# TEACH ME, HELP ME, AND SEEK ME (169 – 176)

The conclusion of this psalm joyfully reveals to us the goal of the whole psalm, which is the exultation of the soul by the Lord -- her Teacher, who grants her life, understanding, salvation, give her help, and proclaims His initiation of love toward her.

The psalmist concludes the psalm by asking the Lord to guide his life; for He is the Grantor of understanding, life, joy, and salvation ... his prayers became stronger and more zealous, as though he enters into the divine presence; Yet he desires to enter into new depths, to see the Lord face-to-face.

Feeling his weakness in the presence of the Lord, he falls down before him, supplicates to Him to search for him, to seek him as a

Shepherd seeks a lost sheep; and not to wait for his servant to come to Him, for he is in need of the initiation of love of the Lord – the Unique Divine Teacher.

<b>1- Approaching the Lord -- his Teacher</b>	<b>169 - 170</b>
<b>2- His rejoice in His divine Teacher</b>	<b>171 - 172</b>
<b>3- The Lord is the Savior</b>	<b>173 - 174</b>
<b>4- The Lord is the Helper</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>5- The Lord is the Initiator of love</b>	<b>176</b>

### 1- APPROACHING THE LORD -- HIS TEACHER:

According to **the scholar Origen**, it came in the book of Genesis, “*God said to Moses: Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him*” (Exodus 24: 1, 2). By that God divided them into three categories:

a- The first category includes Moses alone; to go up the mountain and come before the Lord.

b- The second category includes the persons mentioned, to go up the mountain, but not allowed to come before the Lord.

c- The third category includes the people, who are not allowed, neither to go up the mountain, nor to come before the Lord.

The believer is committed to climb the steps of perfection to get qualified to go up the mountain, and even to come before the Lord, to

experience a unique fellowship, an amazing union, visions, and proclamations. That is what the psalmist desired at the end of his talk about the Word of God or the divine commandment; seeking from God to lift him up to that exalted level of perfection; he says:

***“Let my cry come before You, O Lord; Give me understanding according to Your word” (169)***

Whoever comes before the Lord, comes to the “Tree of Life”. Adam came to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and got the experience of evil. Whereas he who comes before the Lord, eats from the “Tree of Life”, and gets a new experience, that of the knowledge of good, and the perception of the divine Light. He would enjoy the resurrected life, instead of the death that has dwelt upon him; and would enjoy the shining of understanding, instead of the darkness of ignorance that has dwelt upon him.

Approaching with his supplication before the Lord -- his Teacher, the psalmist beseeches Him to allow it to come close to Him, to listen to it, to care for it, and to find pleasure in it; as he presents it to no one else. He seeks from the Lord to grant him understanding and knowledge, longing to enjoy his right as a spiritual bride who enters into the secret place of her heavenly Groom, and enjoys His personal divine secrets, as a sign of the exalted union. He has no material requests, but seeks the spiritual understanding and the heavenly wisdom. He could be seen by men as wise and a man of understanding, but he still seeks God’s judgment, to be counted among those taught by the Lord, according to the words: “*All Your children will be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of Your children*” (Isaiah 54: 13).; and, “*It is written in the prophets, ‘They shall be taught by God’*” (John 6: 45).

- ❖ Unless the Lord Christ opens up our eyes, how could we see the great secrets that were fulfilled in the fathers (Patriarchs) <sup>1</sup>!?
- ❖ The law could be understood, if the Lord Jesus personally reads it to us, and clarifies its spiritual meaning; In such a way, those who said: “*Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?*”, could perceive the meaning?! (See Luke 24: 32) <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. Gen. 12: 1, PG 12: 225.

<sup>2</sup> In Jos. Hom 9:8 PG 71: 62.

- ❖ Come again, O Lord Jesus, to explain these things to me, and to those who are here, searching for the spiritual food<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

The psalmist repeats the same supplication, saying:

***“Let my supplication come before You; Deliver me according to Your word” (170)***

Here he is like queen Esther, when in the daring of faith, she entered into the presence of the king to touch the top of his golden scepter and to enjoy his compassion; Finding favor in his sight he told her that her request shall be given to her up to half his kingdom and sharing his glories;

And she got saved together with her people.

Perceiving that sometimes, there would be certain obstacles that may deny his supplication from entering into the presence of God, the psalmist seeks from God to take away these obstacles, like the impurity of heart, or temporal preoccupations; as though he says: [Purify my heart, that I may seek what is befitting, as a son of Yours, to respond to my request].

Seeing in the Word of God, the secret of his life, the psalmist says: ***“Deliver me according to Your word”***.... For many are there who live in this world, yet they are dead; Whereas those who attach themselves to the word of God, stay alive even if they die in the body.... The life of the believer is not counted by the years he live while in the body, but his life would become everlasting, as long as he is bound to the eternal Word. Although the saints have died in the body., yet they are still living, praising God, interceding for mankind to have everlasting salvation.

## **2- HIS REJOICE IN HIS DIVINE TEACHER:**

Having a daring to bring his supplication up to the throne of grace, to encounter the Savior -- the Groom of his soul, and his divine Teacher -- the believer trains himself on the life of praise, or the life of inner joy, as a heavenly life, saying:

***“My lips shall utter praise, for you teach me Your statutes” (171)***

- ❖ We know how God teaches *“the meek”* of God (Mathew 5: 5), for everyone who has heard and learned from the Father would come to Him, who justifies the ungodly (John 6: 45; Romans 4: 5); to keep the

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<sup>1</sup> In Jer. Hom. 19: 14 (Source Chrictienne 288: 230).

righteousness of God, not only in their memory, but in their execution of the righteousness.... *“He who glorifies, let him glorify in the Lord”*, not in himself, and flow with praise.

(St. Augustine)

*“My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness” (172)*

Desiring to become exalted above all supplications, even the spiritual, to turn his prayers into praise for God, the psalmist unceasingly gives God thanks for the sake of the exalted riches of His grace; and his life turns into a fellowship with the heavenlies who unceasingly give Him praise. The topic of his praise would always be God’s words and commandments, proclaiming His justice and righteousness.

He praises God, both with his heart and his lips, expressing what is inside him with words. His praise helps him to testify to the commandment, and his tongue utters the words of God, and preaches by them. By that, the psalmist teaches us to concentrate our talk about God on His words and commandments, to confirm His valuable promises, and His exalted grace.

❖ Proclaiming these things, the psalmist became a minister of God’s word, preaching God who teaches inside; For, as *“Faith comes by hearing ... How shall they hear without a preacher?”* (Romans 17; 14); And as it is *“God who gives the increase”* (1 Corinthians 3: 7), we have no excuse not to plant or water.

(St. Augustine)

### **3- THE LORD IS THE SAVIOR:**

Having enjoyed the spirit of praise, the psalmist perceived the concept of salvation, not only as the forgiveness of sins, but also as the enjoyment of a fellowship with God in His glories; saying:

*“Let Your hand become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts. I long for Your salvation, O Lord, and Your law is my delight” (173, 174)*

❖ In order not to fear, my heart not only should stay steadfast, but even my tongue should utter Your words: *“I have chosen Your precepts”*, Having suppressed my fear with love, Let Your hand stretch to save me from the hand of the others; for so God has saved His martyrs, not allowing their souls to be killed;... *“For vain is the help of men”* (Psalm 60: 11), in the flesh.

The words "*Let Your Hand*", may also be understood as Christ, the Hand of God.

When we read the words: "*I long for Your salvation, O Lord*" (174), we shall certainly understand that even if our enemies keep us from working, Christ will work to our account. The righteous men of the old covenant confessed that that they longed for Him; And the church, then, longed for His coming from the limited womb of His mother; Now, the church of the new covenant longs for His coming on His Father's right hand.

He adds the words: "*Your law is my delight*"; for the law testifies to Christ.

- ❖ Who would not see, how the blood of Christ helps the church? How great is the crop of light that is manifest all over the world!
- ❖ "*Your law is my desire*" ... It would not be enough for your spiritual benefit to confine hearing the divine teachings, just to your presence in the church, but you should, while being among friends, or at home, be committed to read the words of God for long hours, specially at night; to be able to store the spiritual wheat, and the pearls of the holy Scripture in the storehouse of your souls. So that, on coming before the throne of the eternal Judge, on the ultimate day of judgment, we would not be naked, but clothed.

(St. Augustine)

#### **4- THE LORD IS THE HELPER:**

The psalmist's enjoyment of the life of praise, and of the inner glory, together with the living testimony to His divine words and promises, did not keep him from seeking the help of God, and the support of His divine judgments; saying:

***"Let my soul live, and it shall praise You" (175)***

He seeks from God to grant life to his soul, and to keep it from the way of death. He seeks the work of His Holy Spirit -- the Grantor of life, and the Giver of joy and wisdom -- that his soul may live, praise Him, and enjoy the help of His judgments.

- ❖ We are in need of the divine help to keep the truth forever; and not to falter with our mouth between truth and vanity.

He who has the truth would seek God's help to keep the commandments; as long as he keeps God's judgments in his memory in the time of distress.

I know for sure that, if I am purified of every sinful view, I would perpetually keep Your law, forever, without hindrance.

(Eusabius of Caesarea)

## 5- THE LORD IS THE INITIATOR OF LOVE:

Finally, at the end of “**The psalm of the divine commandment**”, having experienced it as an eternal life, and an everlasting life for his path, with its special sweetness and glories; he was not puffed-up with pride; but with humility, he considered himself as a lost sheep, which, being helpless to return on its own to the divine Word, it seeks His initiation of love to draw it to Him; saying:

*“I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek Your servant, for I do not forget Your commandments” (176)*

The psalmist ends the psalm by confessing his weakness, together with his trust in the love of the divine Shepherd who carries us on His shoulders. However may be the life of the believer, he would feel as being lost, on the way of keeping the commandments of God as is befitting; and of the enjoyment of the experience of heaven. ... He may be able to justify himself in the presence of his adversaries and oppressors; But in the presence of God, he would confess his past and present weaknesses, counting himself as a sheep gone astray from its fold, which needs the Good Shepherd to bring it back to the spiritual pasture... He bears a true longing for the divine bosoms.

❖ Like a lost sheep, I have gone astray; But, on the shoulders of my Shepherd who edifies you, I hope to come back to you<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

In one of his letters, **St. Jerome**, talking about the church as a mother seeking the lost sheep to return to the fold of the Shepherd, says:

[While you wander in your inner city – although you no more have a city, having lost all what is yours – to intercede for you, and to draw you to her by her prayers for your salvation, if not for the sake of your own works, it may be for the sake of her faith<sup>2</sup> ...].

The psalmist, answering the question: Who is to approach the other? God or man? ... he says: As man, the sinner, in his weakness cannot come near God -- the consuming fire --And God, being Holy, How could the sinner be attached to the Holy?!... The Word of God, have already come to man, initiated love, dwelt among us, became one

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<sup>1</sup> Confessions 12: 15.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 122: 4.

of us, and gave His precious blood to reconcile us with the Father; ... Now the door of encounter is wide open for us to pay His approach, back with our approach, and His love back with our love.

Anyway, feeling weakness, man cries out: "*Seek Your servant*" ... the way 'Zacchaeus' the tax-collector, when he could not come near the Lord Jesus, did his best, proclaiming his true intention to encounter Him (See Luke 19: 1-11).

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 119 – Tau**  
**I EXULT BY YOU, O INSTRUCTOR OF MY SOUL**

- ❖ My soul approaches You, for You are her Instructor;  
To go up the mountain together with the prophet Moses;  
To reach the divine light, and be filled with Your splendor;  
You shine on her with the light of understanding, and scatter the darkness of her ignorance!  
You come to her, O divine Groom, to bring her forth into Your heavenly secret place  
There, to experience a deeper union;  
And to perceive Your exalted secrets.
- ❖ O Savior, Open up the eyes of my soul;  
Let her see You, and enjoy Your great secrets;  
Let her understand Your law and commandments;  
Read to her Your Word;  
Burn her heart within her, by opening Your holy Scripture.
- ❖ Let my soul enter into the presence of her heavenly Teacher;  
Hold out Your golden royal scepter to her, and enquire from her about her wish;  
She would seek from You her life and that of Your people;  
Count her as another 'Esther', daring by faith, working with love.
- ❖ Let my soul rise by Your Holy Spirit, up to the throne of Your grace;  
There, her lips would flow with praise and thanksgiving;
- ❖ The church of the old covenant longed for Your coming incarnate;  
And the church of the new covenant longs for Your second coming in Your glory;

Because your law burns up my longing for You; I unceasingly meditate in it;  
Let me meditate in Your law among the holy congregation;  
Let me be preoccupied with it in my home, for long hours;  
Let me be preoccupied by it in mid-day;  
And let me meditate in it at midnight;  
Let the storehouses of my heart be filled with the wheat of Your Book, and the pearls of Your law.

❖ Finally, I confess my sins to You;  
As a Good Shepherd; Seek me -- the lost sheep;  
Seek me, for I am helpless to come to You;  
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## **PSALM 120**

### **MY GOD, MY SAVIOR FROM DEATH AND CORRUPTION**

This psalm represents a cry-out from someone moaning of sojourn; feeling that he is surrounded by cheat and deception on every side; whose soul became spiritually a captive, that he is in need of Him who could liberate and support him inside and outside.

The psalmist feels that God alone can save him from the lies and their destructive power; can condemn the liars, particularly the devil, “*the liar and the father of it*” (John 8: 44); can save him from those who “*like their bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on earth. For they proceed from evil to evil. And they do not know Me’ says the Lord*” (Jeremiah 9: 3).

The songs of Ascents begin from the lowest step, when the believer discovers that he is a sojourner on earth, suffers bitterness because of his liar enemy, who accuses him with his sharp tongue. Approaching Jerusalem, he feels unable to enter into the divine sanctuaries, because of his scoffing spiritual enemies, and feels his need for the help of God His Savior.

It is amazing how the psalmist mixes his moans and lamentation with thanksgiving to God the Grantor of peace who brought him over to the Higher Jerusalem, His eternal city, where the exalted peace is, in the company of the heavenly creatures and the saints, instead of his adversary enemies.

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#### **1- A CRY OF A CHILD TO HIS SAVIOR FATHER:**

A Song of Ascents “*In my distress I cried to the Lord, And He heard me*” (1)

This cry is analogous of that of the prophet Isaiah who says: “*Woe is me! I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips*” (Isaiah 6: 5). Yet despite the bitterness of his soul and his anguish inside and outside, he was so filled with hope to add: “*He heard me*” (1); the way Jonah said: “*Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice*” (Jonah 2: 2-3). Like a little child trusting in his father’s compassion, and ability to save him, he said: “*I called on the Lord in distress; The Lord answered me, and set me in a broad place*” (Psalm 118: 5).

+Distress, producing crying out to God, and supplication to Him with one’s whole might; would certainly brings forth His hearing and help. When the prophet Elisha saw the Shunammite woman approaching him in deep distress, he did not let his servant push her away, but allowed her to approach him and responded to her request (2 Kings 4: 17); to let us know that God would do the same to those who cry out to Him in their distress.

You, as well, O Christian brother, in your distress, do not despair, but cry out to the Lord.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Our inner man, in his distress has put his foot on the first step of the ladder.

Compared to the fifteen steps, what would be my benefit of standing on the first step? Although forsaking the things of this world, I have not yet reached the top of the ladder; I therefore am committed not to feel secure. With every step I ascend, I should pray for further help from God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ How could they be liberated from captivity? By their desire to get back to Jerusalem. Those who were not faithful, stayed and died there as slaves, did not benefit of the grace of God. We would suffer the same fate, if we follow their lead; if we do not acquire the love of the heavenly home, the desire for the Higher Jerusalem,

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 4 on Ps.

if we remain attached to the present life, and stay plunged in the mire of the worldly worries<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ To know that the prayers uttered in the time of affliction are always heard by God, listen to the words of the prophet, saying: *“In my distress I cried to the Lord, And He heard me”* (1). We therefore are committed to have our souls grieve by remembering our sins; not to be destroyed by despair, but to let our prayers be heard, and to have the chance to acquire heaven itself.

Nothing like praying in sorrow and anguish, to bring forth the gladness of heart<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ Once a Christian starts the ascent; namely, once he starts progressing in his spiritual reform, he will become the subject of ridicule by adversaries. ... Once he starts despising the earthly and temporal things, disregarding the worldly happiness, thinking of God alone, neither rejoicing for profit, nor becoming confused by losses; ... Once he sells everything he got, gives to the poor, and follows Christ; we will see how he would suffer from the tongues of the scoffers and the adversaries, and in particular of those who pretend to be counselors, who actually attempt to lead him away from salvation.... He who intends to ascend, should first of all pray to God to support him against such tongues; to be able to say: *“In my distress I cried to the Lord, and he heard me”* (1)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ An abundance of affliction would make prayers heard: *“In my distress I cried to the Lord, And He heard me”* (1); and: *“You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him ... It will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious”* (Exodus 21, 27)<sup>4</sup>.

**(Father Isaac)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Pn Ps. 120.*

<sup>2</sup> *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God, 5: 6.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 120 (119).*

<sup>4</sup> *Cassia, Conferences 9: 34.*

## 2- THE CORRUPTIVE DEBATE WITH THE DEVIL:

*“Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue” (2)*

Eve fell into sin through debating with the serpent with its deceitful tongue. According to **St. Athanasius** the apostolic, many souls as well, are destroyed by the deceitful tongues of the heretics.

And according to **St. Augustine**, as the real adversary to the believer who starts to ascend the ladder of spiritual reform, is not a human, but the ancient poisonous serpent; he should resort to prayers against the devil.

❖ Can't you see the value of tribulations? They lead to faithful prayer, and prepare for the sure gain of compassion once they are raised; the way it happened in the land of Egypt, when the Lord said: *“I have observed the misery of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters; ... And I have come down to deliver them”* (Exodus 3: 7-8). ... You as well, dear beloved, When you suffer a tribulation, do not despair, nor become slothful, but resort to prayers, which would then be more pure and well received by God.

The reason the inspired author said: *“In my distress I cried to the Lord, And He heard me”* (1), is to let you learn how to ascend gradually, and to provide your prayers with wings, lest you may become confused and lose your hearts in your tribulation, instead of profiting from them. If Elisha, the human prophet, did not allow his servant to push the woman away from approaching him, saying: *“Let her alone, for her soul is in deep distress”* (2 Kings 4: 27); How much more would God not push you away when you approach Him with distressful souls?

Therefore, do not delay, nor postpone; ... Start your ascent with strength; one or two steps every day<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 120.

❖ ***“Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue”*** (2). Notice here, how the evangelic counsel shine: *“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation”* (Mark 14: 38).

Before anything else, beloved brethren, Nothing like this temptation: A deceitful man is more dangerous than a fierce beast; the latter is the way it looks, whereas the former (the one with the lying lips and the deceitful tongue), mostly hides his evil nature behind an apparently sweet veil, which makes it difficult to discover his deceit, and his victim would fall into his snare unaware. Hence the psalmist seeks from God, day after day, to protect him against falling into such snares<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ What is the deceitful tongue? It is having the appearance of counsel, while having the poison of harm underneath<sup>2</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ This also applies to the heretics ... The wounds caused by the tongue are more dangerous than those inflicted by the sword!. The sword kills the body; whereas the evil tongue kills the soul! *“The tongue is a little member and boasts great things”* (James 3: 5).

Listen to the words of the wise Solomon: *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue”* (Proverbs 18: 21). We do no harm to the one we slander by our tongue, as much as we kill our own souls: *“A lying mouth destroys the soul”* (Wisdom of Solomon 1: 11).

**(St. Jerome)**

+Judas, the father of all lies, approached and gave peace by which he shed the innocent blood! He gave an apparent kiss, that was actually a knife; an apparent peace, that was actually a drawn sword!

Apparently he was like a meek dove, but inside, he was a poisonous serpent that stings and bites!

Daringly, he gave Him the poison hidden in honey; By iniquity, he concealed the sword in a show of peace!

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 120.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 120 (119).

Judas introduced a hateful deed to the whole world; I wish no one follow his deadly example!

Let us not kiss like that killer; Let us not conceal deceit in sweet words<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)**

***“What shall be given to you, Or what shall be done to you, You deceitful tongue?” (3)***

The psalmist stands amazed; No language could imagine the punishment that the one with a deceitful tongue deserves; God alone has the right to give him the fitting punishment. Deceit carries its punishment in itself; as there is no punishment more bitter than the evil itself!

❖ What would be the fitting punishment for such an evil, about which Isaiah said to the Jews: *“Why do you seek further beatings?”* (Isaiah 1: 5). Which means that the deceitful tongue is a punishment in itself! ... There is actually no more horrible punishment for the soul than evil itself! ... While no man could find a punishment fitting for this crime which surpasses punishment; Yet it is God who will give it<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“A warrior’s sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree” (4)***

Who is the one with a deceitful tongue but the devil who is called *“a liar and the father of it”* (John 8: 44), who, by his deceit, casts fiery arrows to destroy men; against which the apostle Paul warns and counsels us to use *“the whole armor of God”* (Ephesians 6: 13). If the devil fights us with his deceitful tongue as fiery arrows; God, on His side, provides us with His Word as arrows that would destroy the devil and all his hosts.

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<sup>1</sup> ميمر .53

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 120.

The broom tree is a kind of desert plant, abundant in south Palestine and the Sinai peninsula, scientifically known as *Retama retem*, of the *Leguminosea* family, whose stems and roots are used as a good kind of coal that produces a great thermal energy; hence the analogy to the deceitful tongue

According to **St. Augustine** the warriors sharp arrows are the Words of God; and the glowing coals of the broom tree are analogous to many sinners who return to God; those who were wounded by the strong arrows of the Words of God that scattered the evil in them, and took it away; like a scalpel in a clever physician's hand by which he cut off the corruption to restore health to the sick.

The Word of God turn the sinners into fiery coals glowing with divine love, that the water of sin could not quench.

The preceding psalm 119 was dedicated to the Words of God, as divine arrows which wound our hearts; that, by the divine wounds we become healed of the wounds caused by the deceitful words of men, which are poisonous sharp arrows that kill the soul. While the divine wounds are healthy, and would lead us along the practical way of love; the other wounds, on the other hand, are deceitful and destructive.

❖ “*A warrior's sharp arrows with glowing coals of the broom tree*”  
(4)

My whole tongue is swollen; Unless it is pierced by Your arrows, poison filling it would never be released! To give you an example: In case a body member is infected and is filled with pus, there would be no way to heal it except by an incision with a scalpel. ... Therefore, O Lord, wound my pus-laden swollen tongue by Your arrows to release its poison; then touch it by the glowing coals of Your words, to consume all the evil it contains!

Because the lips of the prophet Isaiah were unclean, God sent a Cherub with a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the

altar, and with it he touched Isaiah's lips and tongue, and purged his mouth (Isaiah 6: 5) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Here as well, he calls the punishment "arrows" and "fire"; the same way the chastisements of the Lord are called in the holy books<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ You should understand, beloved brethren, that the warrior's sharp arrows are the words of God ... Now, what is meant by the glowing coals of the broom tree? ... It is not enough to respond to the deceitful tongue and the lying lips by mere words of your own; But you should be yourselves good role models. ... The word "glowing coals" is used to refer to many sinners who returned to the Lord.

If you happen to see someone slow to follow God, pour on him the glowing coal, the sharp arrows of the Words of God, that are capable of dealing with the lying lips and the deceitful tongue<sup>3</sup>.

- ❖ God sends His coals (glowing with fire) to destroy what is built in us for evil; and once this location is purged, the building of the temple – the house -- will be set, where a kind of happiness of eternity will flow.

Before the coal glow with fire. we can say that it is dead, and once it glows with fire, it is called 'live'. This is a magnificent portrait of the change that happens when a man or woman returns to the Lord.

Sometimes you hear people say: You should see him as he was before: drunk and leading a shameful life; he was actually the most deceitful man on earth. Then they would add: We cannot believe how he has become! He is now living in an atmosphere of utter innocence, as though what was before never happened! He is zealously ministering to the Lord. ... Why would this be so amazing?!

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<sup>1</sup> Homily 41 on Ps.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 120.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 120 (119).

The sinner has been dead, and now he is a glowing live coal! The spirituals who are aware of these facts used to cry for the sake of such a man as though dead; And now, seeing him alive, they are swallowed with joy.

You should apply this example to yourselves. If you are wise, you should zealously look for what is quenched inside you. You should be well prepared and armor yourselves with the word of God. To return to God, you are committed to fight your old way, the deceitful voice within you<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### 3- THE FEELING OF SOJOURN AND THE LONGING FOR HEAVEN:

*“Woe is me that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!” (5)*

Meshech is one of the descendents of Aram (Genesis 10: 23; 1 Chronicles 1: 17). There is much controversy concerning the location of Meshech. As it appears in the Assyrian inscriptions, and according to the historian Herodot, the land of Meshech was east of Turkey; while Some others believe that he dwelt on the mountain of Masius (Tor Abedin) in Syria. The psalmist moans for dwelling among the tents of Kedar. who is a descendant of Ishmael; the head of an Arab tribe that dwelt in tents.

According to **St. Augustine**, those who intend to fly away and ascend to God to dwell in the Heavenly Jerusalem, where there are no lying lips nor deceitful tongues, ... live for God in a state of sojourn from their heavenly city, ... live the way Isaac did with Ishmael.

The role of the wicked, on the other hand, is to discourage and resist the righteous, plucking the feathers from their wings, by their lying lips and deceiving tongues, to bring them downward instead of rising upward.

❖ *“Woe is me that I sojourn”*. ... I departed from You, and my sojourn became too long. ... I have not reached that city where no

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. On Ps. 5.

wicked dwell; ... I have not reached yet the company of angels, where I fear no offense ,, There (n the heavenly Jerusalem), where all are righteous and saints, they enjoy the Word of God without reading any letter, because what is written for our sake, they will apprehend through the face of God.

How great is that city!; And how miserable are those who have lost their way to it<sup>1</sup>!

- ❖ “Kedar”, as I may recall, is interpreted in Hebrew to mean (darkness) ... You know that Abraham had two sons, mentioned by the apostle Paul (Galatians 4: 22; etc.) to refer to two kinds of eras ... ‘Ishmael’ was in darkness, whereas ‘Isaac’ was in light. Those, in the church, who seek the earthly happiness, belongs to Ishmael; Namely, those who belonging to Isaac dwell among those who belong to Ishmael, The former seek to ascend, and the later seek to apply pressure on them to descend. The former intend to fly up to God; while the later do their best to pluck the feathers off their wings<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Our present life, as you can see, is a journey. And why should I call it a journey when it is actually much less than that? Referring to it, the Lord Christ said: “*Narrow is the gate, and difficult is the way which leads to life*” (Matthew 7: 14) ... So did Paul, who said: “*Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God*” Why? For “*they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth*” (Hebrew 16, 13). That is the origin and foundation of their virtue: He who is a pilgrim here will be a citizen there. ... He who is a stranger here would not be happy to live among the present circumstances, nor be preoccupied with dwelling, wealth, food, or anything else of the sort. Instead, he would only care to return home to the land that embraces him. ... He who yearns for the things to come would never feel sorrow for the present things, nor

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 120 (119).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 120 (119).

care for the temporal prosperity, but would despise both, as a traveler on his way<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ “*That I dwell among the tents of Kedar*” (5). Kedar were a race known for dwelling in pitch black tents, and for being violent like fierce beasts against those enslaved by them<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

- ❖ Those sojourning in such pitch black tents lived as though in darkness; as dark is the night; a darkness that blinds the eyes of man, that he could not recognize his ways, nor know the true significance of his being. In such a darkness everything seem to man upside down, his being seems temporary, and his soul of no true value; he does not see the truth clearly, as the darkness blinds his eyes<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Gregory of Nyssa**)

- ❖ That is the complaint of the lover of Christ who seeks nothing from the body that sojourns in the world and longs for heaven.

The longer he stays in his earthly tent, he is sojourning from the Lord.

“*I sojourn*”, because, in the present world, I have no permanent home; I am a sojourner (a pilgrim) (1 Peter 2: 11).

“*Kedar*” in our language means (darkness) ... The longer I stay dwelling in this dead body, the longer I stay in the darkness<sup>4</sup>.

- ❖ To our flock, belong the sorrowful, the pale, and those with simple attire; who are sojourners in this world. Although their tongues may be silent, yet they talk by the way they dress and walk<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 120.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 120.*

<sup>3</sup> دير السريان: البتولية، 1966، ص 77-78.

<sup>4</sup> *Homily 41 on Ps.*

<sup>5</sup> *Against Jovinianus, Book 2: 36.*

- ❖ “*Kedar*”, means (darkness); and darkness represents the present world; as it is said that “*the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it*” (John 1: 5) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ In a following text, David saying: “*My soul has (sojourned) too long*” (6); he prays to the Lord to hasten his setting forth toward the goods. In the midst of the sufferings of this world, beside great comfort in the present things, there is hope for things to come, ... Who would not raise his heart hoping for a blessed portion in the heavenly tabernacles stored for him there?!

As in our weak condition, we generally feel some anxiety anticipating the things to come; So did the soul of the saintly psalmist because of such controversy flaring in his body<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ I long for one gift; and I strife for the sake of one unique glory – that of the heavenly kingdom ... Whenever such divine beauty shines over a saint, it creates in him a motive for an unbearable desire; In disturbance, he cries out because of his present life: “*Woe is me; my soul has (sojourned) too long; When shall I come and appear before God?*” (120: 5; 42: 2) <sup>3</sup>.

(St. Basil the Great)

- ❖ Tears would flow when one meditates in the good things, and longs for the glory to come; Tears would flow out of joy that could not be contained, and of exultation without limits. Feeling thirsty for the mighty living God, our souls say: “*When shall I come and appear before the Lord? My tears have been my food day and night*” (Psalm 42: 2, 3); My soul proclaims: “*Woe is me, my sojourn became too long*” (5) <sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 39 to Paula, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Prayer of David 4: 3: 10.

<sup>3</sup> Reg. Feus 2: 1.

<sup>4</sup> مناظرات يوحنا كاسيان مع مشاهير آباء البرية، 9: 29.

(Father Isaac)

*“My soul has dwelt too long among those who hate peace”*

(6)

Whenever the believer realizes the truth of his situation as a sojourner on earth, his longing becomes intense to dwell among the heavenlies, and to set forth away from those who hate peace.

In his letter to comfort Eustachium who lost her mother, **St. Jerome** talks about how she forsook the land of her sojourn to get attached to God in paradise, being one of His household. He wrote: [All those who return to God after living according to Him, are still counted as His own household. We have truly lost her, Yet she was gained by the heavenly places; As in body she sojourned from the Lord, and used to complain with tears: *“Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar; My soul has (sojourned) so long”* (5, 6)]<sup>1</sup>.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist moans because of his inner condition of feeling lost.

❖ The body is lost in places; and the soul is lost in emotions. ... If you love the earth, you are lost to God. Whereas if you love God you ascend to Him. ... Let us then experience the love of God and our neighbor; For if we fall down to earth, we will dry up and be corrupt<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“My soul has dwelt too long”*. Our life is actually not that long; being merely around seventy years; But he so called it, not because of the number of years, but because of his difficult situation; as even a short time may seem too long for those in tribulation. We, as well, are committed to adapt ourselves; Even if we live here a short time, we should consider it too long because of our desire and longing for the things to come. So saying, I am not prejudiced

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 108 to Eustachium, m 1.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 120 (119).

against the present life, but I am trying to incite in you the love for the future<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### **4- THE BITTERNESS OF LIVING AMONG THE WICKED:**

*“I am for peace; but when I speak they are for war” (7)*

The children of God feel sojourn in this world, together with a flaring desire toward peace; while the world presents to them hate.

Here we find a prophecy about the Lord Christ, the King of peace.

- ❖ Peace represents the might and greatness of the Christians who have *“the peace of Christ which surpasses all understanding”* (Philippians 4: 7). *“Blessed are the peacemakers”*, not just those who restore peace amid wars, but those who establish peace within themselves ... Blessed are those who present peace to the ones who hate it<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ ‘Among those who hate peace, I was a man of peace’

Beloved brethren, You cannot prove how truly you praise, unless you start to apply what you praise ... Start work, and watch over what you utter ... When tears flow together with every word, the psalm would praise, and the heart would practice what is praised with the psalm ... Who are they who hate peace? Those who tear up unity. For if they do not hate peace, they would have dwelt in unity... We are committed to say: Love peace to love Christ! Why? For the apostle say about Christ: *“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one”* (Ephesians 2: 14)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 41 on Ps.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 120 (119).

❖ It is obvious that our life would become odd, lacking harmony with God, who is exalting Righteous, on account of that the strings of our harp have become in harmony with the wicked.

We should preach the peaceful, not to fear the violent storms of disturbance that threaten to wipe away their earthly peace; and to break down the wall of silence by words of rebuke; Yet they should keep their inner love intact, before any probable disturbance of the outer peace because of their rebuke. ... Here the prophet David proclaims to us that he wisely managed to keep both sides, saying: “*I am for peace; but when I speak they are for war*” (7). Notice how, when he spoke, and was confronted by his adversaries, he remained peaceful; He neither stopped his rebuke, nor his love for those he rebuked<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory the Great)**

❖ He did not say: ‘with those who had no peace’, but said: “*with those who hate peace, I am for peace*” (6, 7). Do not you see the value of tribulations?! Do not you see the fruit of captivation?! ... Anyway, Who among us in these days could say such a thing? ... You should be commended if you are in peace together with those who love peace; But it would be different if you are living among those who hate peace. How could we manage to do that? ... If we live as sojourners; if we do not get attached to things of the present life! ... Nothing would create controversies and animosity like love of the present world, the desire to become a celebrity, and to have wealth and luxury.

That is why the Holy Book commands us to live like lambs among wolves (Matthew 10: 16) ... This or that could be wicked and corrupt; Yet you have the authority to overcome them. ... Who could be meeker than a lamb? And who could be more fierce than a wolf? Yet, the former overcomes the later; as it was shown in the case of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Pastoral Care Care*, 3 22.

apostles. Nothing is of more authority than compassion; nor stronger than longsuffering<sup>1</sup>!

- ❖ “When I speak to them they attack me for no reason” ... In the proper time I give a testimony of love; And in proper time I utter words of compassion ... Nevertheless, although neither this nor that had any impact on them, On my side, I kept presenting proofs of virtue<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 120

### WHO CAN SAVE ME FROM THE ARROWS OF THE ENEMY BUT YOU?

- ❖ My soul praises You, O who brings out of affliction, blessings of no limit.  
Amid my affliction, when I cried out to You;  
The door of hope opened before me;  
I saw Your arms stretched to embrace me;  
In the midst of suffering, I trusted in Your help;  
When the light of Your resurrection shone on me when I was among the dead.
- ❖ The devil is lying in wait for me;  
He is a liar and the father of lies;  
He casts his words in my mind like deadly arrows.  
Who can save me against his arrows but the arrows of Your fiery words?  
Their wounds are healers;

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 120.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 120.

Instead of the wounds of sin, my heart gets filled with the wounds  
of love;  
My soul would flare with the fire of Your Holy Spirit;  
It would turn into glowing coal of fire;  
That no enemy could quench.

❖ My depths desire to set forth to You.  
But the wicked oppose me;  
And the darkness intends to surround me;  
All are against me;  
But Your peace fills my heart;  
My depths love even my adversaries;  
Your peace is amazing; O King of Peace!;  
My God! You are my unique Savior!  
You save me from the devil and all his hosts!  
You grant me Yourself an eternal life instead of death;  
In You, I find my inner peace;  
By You, all corruption would be taken away from me;  
And my life is renewed day after day.

## ***PSALM 121***

### **THE SECRET OF MY PEACE BEING ATTACHED TO THE SAVIOR THE WORD OF GOD**

In the last chapter we saw those who come to Jerusalem to enjoy worship in the temple of the Lord; how they start their journey by feeling sojourn in the valley of tears; and how the devil, with his lying lips and deceiving tongue, opposes them and embitters their life to keep them from ascending. The psalmist, on behalf of all sojourners in this world, begins his psalm by crying out to the Lord, the Savior and compassionate, to save him from the fiery arrows of the devil, and ends it with the appearance of the savior who says: “*I am peace*” (Psalm 120: 7).

Now, having crossed over the first step, they lift up their eyes to the Lord, the unique Savior, the Helper of the sojourners.

The word “*keep*” and its derivatives is repeated 6 times, that we may call this psalm: ‘The psalm of keeping and security’.

In this psalm the psalmist’s whole thoughts and emotions are absorbed toward that unique Savior in His divine capabilities, fatherly compassion, and eternal features.

The psalmist presents to us a magnificent portrait of the unique Savior who helps, keeps, and grants us His amazing peace.

<b>1- The Word of God, the Holy Mountains</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2- Attachment to the Heavenly Guard</b>	<b>3 - 5</b>
<b>3- Holding fast to Christ and His church</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4- The holy behavior</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5- Feeling the divine presence</b>	<b>8</b>

#### **1- THE WORD OF GOD, THE HOLY MOUNTAINS:**

Those who come to Jerusalem, once they see the mountains surrounding their beloved city, they lift up their hearts to the secure divine mountain. The Jews used to consider Mount Zion as the most magnificent scenery in the whole nature, on which the city of God is set, and in which the holy temple is built. Now, the Lord of nature

Himself comes as a unique Mountain to save us against all evil and to lift us up to the heavenly city of God.

A Song of ascents.

*I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help? (1)*

In the Old Covenant, Noah found his comfort to some extent on Mount Ararat where the ark settled. Moses and Elijah found their comfort in speaking with the Lord on Mount Sinai or Horeb. Elijah dwelt for some time on Mount Carmel. And the Jews found their temporary happiness on Mount Zion on which Solomon built his temple. ... The psalmist, on the other hand lifts his eyes up to a unique Mountain, namely, **faith in the Savior Messiah**, who alone can grant the resurrection from the dead and the glories of the eternal life. ... Exulted and amazed, the prophet Zechariah says: “*Who are You, O Great Mountain?*” (Zechariah 4: 7).

What are those mountains, capable of helping man and saving him from the death that dwelt upon him, but the stone that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream: “*The stone that struck the image, ... and became a great mountain and filled the whole earth*” (Daniel 2: 35).

This Holy Mountain sets out of the believers of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, holy mountains that carry His light, toward which men, serious to enjoy the divine truth, look to find divine help, not from the mountains themselves, but from God who dwells in them, and who works in their life.

The scholar Origen believes that because of God’s love for us, He appears to us on the mountains, to spare us the effort of searching for Him; as we see Him “*come leaping upon the mountains*” (Song of Solomon 2: 8).

Our Christ, the true Savior, says about Himself that He is the Mountain that come down from heaven to be cast into the sea (Mathew 21: 21; Mark 11: 23).; to save us from the abyss, and lift us up to His heavens.

St Jerome believes that the mountains here refer to the prophets of the Old Covenant who prophesied about the coming of the Savior Messiah, and the apostles, and the disciples who preached Him in the New Covenant.

And **St. Augustine** proclaims that the hills and the holy mountains are the Holy Books, by which we are lighted by the sun Himself who keeps us from darkness.

And **St. John Chrysostom** believes that, of the blessings of the tribulations and the temptations, that, feeling loss and confusion, the soul longs to seek comfort in the Lord, who knows what is hidden, when it realizes the helplessness of humanity to give it help.

❖ The adulteress soul – Rahab in us – cries out: “*I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence comes my help?*” (1). The prince of this world truly cannot ascend to those places and reach our Lord Jesus in the heights; although in the temptations he took Him to a high place, and said to Him: “*If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down*” (Matthew 4: 6); as he only loves those who fall down to the low depths; where he reigns and makes his dwelling, and from where he goes down to hell<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ It is befitting of us to take off the dead leather (the shoe) of the letter, and to ascend barefoot up Mount Zion, together with Moses, saying: “*I must run aside and look at this great sight*” (Exodus 3: 3)<sup>2</sup>.

❖ They are the mountains to which we resort when “*the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet stands in the holy place*” (Matthew 24: 15)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

“*My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth*” (2)

In deadly literality, the Jews used to seek their help from the temple set in Jerusalem high on Mount Zion, not caring to return to God Himself.

But God allowed for the destruction of the temple, and for their captivation, to let them comprehend that their help would come from their attachment to God who made heaven and earth. Despite His care for His house amid His people, God wishes to set out of them a temple which He sanctifies and where He dwells.

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<sup>1</sup> *In Jos., hom 1: 5.*

<sup>2</sup> *Letter 121: 4.*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on Psalms.*

❖ “*My help comes from the Lord*”, and not from any human creature, nor from horses, possessions, or allies. Our help which comes from the Lord is not only undefeatable, but is also simple and easy; namely, we do not need to travel a long distance, nor to bribe the guards, to spend a great wealth, or to lift up our eyes high<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ The Sun of Righteousness has already shone; the gospel has been preached by the apostles; the secrets of the Old Covenant have been revealed, the veil has been torn, and the hidden place in the temple has been proclaimed. Hence, let them lift their eyes up to the mountains from whence come the help ... He says: “*Of His fullness we have all received*” (John 1: 16). The help is from Him, from whose fullness the hills took, and not from the hills themselves<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The second of the psalms of ascents (121) presents blessing to him who receives help from the Lord who made heaven and earth; as “*the sun shall not strike him by day, nor the moon by night*” (6). Prophesying about the church, Isaiah describes it as a special procession (Isaiah 60: 4; 66: 12). And the story shines more when he says: “*Your sons shall come from afar, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ hands*” (Isaiah 4), and your children in covered carriages, protected by shades from the hot sun rays<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

## 2- ATTACHMENT TO THE HEAVENLY GUARD:

Looking back at history, the Jews would never forget how they got out of the land of Egypt by a strong hand and a mighty arm; and how God Himself protected them day and night in the wilderness.

**“He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber” (3)**

<sup>1</sup> *Op Ps. 121.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 120 (119).*

<sup>3</sup> عظة 2 على نشيد الاناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

No one can keep our feet from being moved except Him about whom the psalmist says: “*He shall pluck my feet out of the net*” (Ps. 25: 15).

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, this phrase indicates that God, the source of our comfort and security, would never allow our feet to be moved; and would watch over us to grant us comfort and security.

❖ “*He will not allow your foot to be moved*”; namely, will not allow for you to stumble, but would stretch His hand to you, and would never forsake you ... Even in what we contribute, we need his grace to stay secure, and to continue undisturbed<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ You should first notice that he who was once have been among the angels; When his foot was moved he fell, and turned from an angel to a Satan ... He fell out of pride; for nothing would make the foot be moved like pride. While love cause the foot to walk, progress, and ascend; Pride, on the other hand, causes it to fall<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Choosing for yourself Him who never slumber nor sleep, your foot would never be moved. If you wish to have a Keeper who never sleep, choose God<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“Behold, He who keeps Israel, shall neither slumber nor sleep” (4)**

The creator, the Guard of the soul, does not submit to time; as for Him there is no night in which He seeks sleep and comfort; so how about guarding the believer? All the time He sees all, knows everything, nothing is hidden from Him; and for Him there is no darkness; He is the Almighty.

The Lord Christ, while in the body, slept at the rear of the boat in order to wake up the faith of the disciples, and to let them comprehend that, being the Keeper of their life and souls, He rebuked the wind and made it calm down (Mark 4: 35-40).

He never slumber nor sleep; is preoccupied with our salvation and comfort day and night; shades over us by day like a cloud that

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<sup>1</sup> *Op Ps. 121.*

<sup>2</sup> *Op Ps. 121 (120).*

<sup>3</sup> *Op Ps. 121 (120).*

never quit, and leads us amid the darkness of the night as a pillar of light that precedes us so that we do not stumble.

If it is said that the Lord Christ: *“He who keeps Israel, shall neither slumber nor sleep”* (4), His bride, the church, sings saying: *“I sleep, but my heart is awake”* (Songs 5: 2). ... According to **St. Jerome**, [*“there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night”* (Luke 2: 8); They would not find Christ unless they keep watch; as this is the commitment of the shepherd. Christ would not be found except by those who keep watch<sup>1</sup>].

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that this saying indicates that God would never forsake His role to care; He keeps watching over us in great security.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, many church fathers believe that, by the good Samaritan, The Lord Christ meant His own Person; as the word ‘Samaritan’ means (a guard) or (a keeper). The Lord Christ is the Guard of the soul who does not trust another to guard it. That good Samaritan who cares for the divine guardianship of the soul, personally cares for the believer; the psalmist says: *“Your Keeper”*, who never slumber nor sleep, but watches over you and keeps you, that your foot will not be moved, nor fall, as did the feet of some of the angels who fell from their heavenly rank, and through pride became Satans.

❖ You are kept by the good Samaritan -- the Savior and the Guard – holy in body and spirit; He, about whom the psalm says: *“He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep”*. I wish the holy Guard who came down to Daniel, would come to you, to be able to say: *“I sleep, but my heart is awake”* (Songs 5: 2)<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ I wish no man fears perdition, whatever his fall is, as the Good Samaritan, the Guard of souls, will never pass him by, but will have compassion on him and will heal his wounds<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Ambrose**)

❖ Our Guard is our Creator<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Jerome: Homily 88, on the nativity of the Lord.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 75 to Theodora, 13.

<sup>3</sup> In Luc. Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> In Joan, tract 43: 2.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Let us do our best to keep watch together with Him, He who will never slumber nor sleep, the Keeper of Israel<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ Concerning the departure of the wise men from the East for their own country another way (Matthew 2: 12); This is an example for us in humility and faith. Once we come to know Christ and worship Him, we should forsake our old way which we took before, the wrong way (coming to Herod); and walk along another route, in which Christ will be our Guide. We should return to the paradise from which Adam has been driven out; that location referred to in the psalm, as bringing pleasure to God in the land of the living<sup>2</sup>.

(Father Chromatius)

- ❖ Let us now go back to some previous parts of the text. Passing by His bride, who did not recognize Her beloved, the Word did not proceed forward, deserting her, but intended to draw her to Him.

The bride said: My heart went out to him when he spoke”; namely, her soul went out of the place she was, where “*the watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me, The keepers of the walls took my veil away from me*” (Song 5: 7).

To experience some suffering by a thief, would be a bitter experience for the bride; as “*The thief does not come except to steal, to kill, and to destroy*” (John 10: 10); But to be found by the city watchmen, that is actually a grace, as what they find would never be stolen by thieves. ... Who are those watchmen? They are the watchmen of Israel; the watchmen on our right side, whom we believe will keep our souls against evil, and guard our coming in and going out. God is the Guard of the city, about whom the psalm says: “*Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain*” (Psalm 127: 1). Those to whom the text refers as the watchmen of the city are “*the ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation*” (Hebrew 1: 14)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Matt., 91.

<sup>2</sup> Chromatius: Tractate on Matt. 5: 2.

<sup>3</sup> عظة 12 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

❖ The soul is enlightened by repentance, to see and practice by work to drive out the whole evil ... And seeing that the process is too tough and difficult for her, she calls upon the divine mercies to come to support her effort. She drags the iniquity out of her house, by hiring the divine compassion by her tears to come to her help. She tries to gather all the transgressions that entered into her since her childhood, and knowingly sheds the water of her eyes ... The robber, though a beginner in confession, came to inherit the kingdom. By one word he moved all the mountains of iniquity, he has built in his life, because his faith was strong (Matthew 17: 19); having got the help of the divine mercies in such a huge accomplishment. You as well, if you seek it, it will come to your help. You just have to start, then the divine mercies will be on your side. You have just to Initiate a reason, then your Aid will not delay (Psalm 121: 3, 4) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougy)**

❖ Be Israel! What does Israel mean? It is interpreted as (Seeing God). And How would God be seen? First by faith, then by vision. If you cannot see Him by your eyes, behold Him by faith.

Do not lean upon man; for the mortal may slumber, or may sleep in death; Therefore do not seek a guard among the mortals<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“The Lord is your Keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand” (5)***

Being the Philanthropic, He intends to save the whole world. Being His personal God, He wishes to embrace every single man, and to grant him all His love and care.

If the Lord has granted Peter to heal infirmities by his shadow, How much more would be the shadow of the Lord Himself, who stretched His hands on the cross to cast His shadow on all mankind?!

❖ He is your Keeper, ally, and helper... He is your refuge<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> راجع الدكتور الأب بهنام سُني: الإنسان في تعليم مار يعقوب السروجي الملفان، 1995، ص 152.

<sup>2</sup> Op Ps. 121 (120).

<sup>3</sup> Op Ps. 121.

❖ Our left hand means all what we temporarily have; and our right hand means what God promises us, which are unchangeable and eternal. Yet, together with the eternal life, He comforts our present life by temporal blessings. He Himself is the maker of both our right and left hands.

Your faith is your right hand; namely, the authority given to you to be among the children of God<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### **3- HOLDING FAST TO CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH:**

*“The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night” (6)*

The Lord Christ is called the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in its wings; And the church is called the moon that carries the reflection of the Sun of Righteousness<sup>2</sup>. He who denies faith in the Lord Christ is burnt by the sun; and he who causes dissension in the church is burnt by the moon. God keeps us in the upright faith and in the true unity of the church.

On the contrary, the deceitful devil appears like a sun, not to give healing to the souls, but to burn and destroy them by his wickedness. And he appears like a moon, a reference to the small jackals that corrupt the vineyard of the soul through depression. Some believe that the strikes of the sun is falling into pride and self-righteousness; and the strikes of the moon is the destruction by temptations. The Lord keeps His children from both this and that.

❖ He intends to confirm His care toward His children in an abundant way; not only by liberating them from troubles, but He even does not allow for them to go through the regular human difficulties ... His help is realized by His generosity and compassion beyond any appreciation. His help is not given to us according to the measure of our need, but it even surpasses our requirements<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ The soldier of Christ walks forward by evil report and by good report (2 Corinthians 6: 8); one on his right side and the other on his left. Commendation does not puff him up, and rebuke does not

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<sup>1</sup> *Op Ps. 121 (120).*

<sup>2</sup> *Gaebelian, p. 445.*

<sup>3</sup> *Op Ps. 121.*

destroy him. He does not boast his riches, and is not destroyed by poverty. Both joy and sorrow he despises; He is not burnt neither by the sun by day nor by the moon by night<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ He who does not err to the Wisdom Himself is not burnt by the Sun; And he who does not err to the church, to the body of the Lord, and to the things done for our sake, is not burnt by the moon<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ You can see therefore that the sun does not burn the saints in whom there is no evil; As the sun is double-edged: while it gives light to the righteous, it does not give light to the wicked, but burns them; as they themselves hate the light, by doing evil<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ The sun of temptations does not burn the righteous who finds comfort in the shade of the Word of God. The sun that burns is not Him Who is praised, but it is rather him who transforms himself to an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11: 14)<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ *“Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair. You have dove’s eyes”* (Songs 1: 15). When the bride heard this commendation, she, in turn, commended the Groom; not commending a beauty she does not see, No but she has seen His beauty and looked at it long enough to say: *“Behold, You are handsome, my beloved! Yes pleasant! Also our bed is green!”* (Songs 1: 16). I search for a bed where the bride and the Groom find comfort; ... It is the human body! The paralyzed who was lying on his bed was called by the Lord to go home carrying his bed (Matthew 9: 6). He used to lie on it while miserable because of the weakness of his members, that got strength by the divine power. That is the meaning of the Lord’s command: *“Carry your bed and go home”*; As the Son of God did not come down to earth to care about a bed; nor came down to let the one healed go home without his bed. You as well, whom the Savior healed, carry your bed and go home; where the Groom will join you to sleep. Then,

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 52 to Nepotian, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Op Ps. 121 (120).

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on Songs 2: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on Songs.

you can say to Him: “Behold, You are handsome, my beloved! Yes pleasant! Also our bed is green! <sup>1</sup>”.

(The scholar Origen)

#### 4- THE HOLY BEHAVIOR:

The care of the Savior is on an eternal level; He cares for our salvation to bring us forth to the eternal glories.

**“The Lord shall preserve you of all evil. He shall preserve your soul” (7)**

Being attached to Him like a treasure in an earthen vessel, He preserves and sanctifies us. It is therefore unbefitting of us to get preoccupied with anything, even with church affairs. Those who lean on Him and look at Him are preserved from every ethical evil, namely, from sin, and not from what we wrongly call evil, like sufferings, sorrow, and material losses of temporal things.

- ❖ Preserving from evil implies a secure and exulting life amid the sufferings and afflictions, and not necessarily taking away the afflictions.

(The scholar Origen)

- ❖ In other words, He who does not allow for you to suffer even from the simple problems, but his care extends to such a degree, His hands is active and wholly capable of exempting you from others ... of saving you from every trouble, whatever it is, and of setting you free<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ “The Lord shall preserve you of every evil” (7); of transgressions under the sun, and transgressions under the moon; He, who never sleep will preserve your right hand<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ When you hear good news, despise them, and do not lean on them, as they may not be true; And when you hear bad news, do not be afraid, as they are not steadfast.

In this time, both good and bad news come riding chariots, and chase one another day and night; yet none of them is able to settle

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 52.

<sup>2</sup> Op Ps. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Op Ps. 121 (120).

down in, nor to come out; Because it is the divine wisdom who intend for them to do that.

Do not panic to hear any of them; ... Do not let any of them cause you to rejoice or be sorrowful. Let the news come and go; Lean on God and on the hope of faith, and take into consideration the verse saying: *“The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve you from evil”* (6-7)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougy)

## 5- FEELING THE DIVINE PRESENCE:

*“The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in, from this time forth, and even forevermore”* (8)

He preserves our going out of the love of the world, and preserves our coming into the experience of the heavenly life.

He came out from the Father and came down to carry us in Him, and to bring us forth into the bosom of the Father. By His going out and His coming in, He sanctified our going out and our coming in,

❖ Here he refers to everything in life; Life as a whole is covered by this care, both the entrance and the exit; not for one, two, three, ten, twenty, or even a hundred days, but perpetually. Contrary to the case of men who continuously change, and are subject to unceasing events; The friend of today is the enemy of tomorrow; and the helper of today will forsake you tomorrow; ... What come from God, however, is unchangeable, eternal, steady, and limitless<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ *“The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in, from this time forth, and even forevermore”* (8). Not your body; as even the bodies of the martyrs were equally destroyed; but the Lord will preserve your soul<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

The Jews used the expression: “going out and coming in” to refer to (everything) in our daily activity (Deuteronomy 6: 28; Joshua 11: 14; 2

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<sup>1</sup> الرسالة السادسة والعشرون

<sup>2</sup> Op Ps. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Op Ps. 121 (120).

Samuel 25: 3). It probably also refers to man's life from his birth to his departure from the world; namely from the dawn to the setting of this life. Some however, interpret this expression in a spiritual way; namely, that the Lord will preserve man from his entry into this life to his exit, to practice the new life in the Lord; He will preserve him in his weakness until He brings him forth to a fellowship with the Heavenly One.

❖ Our going out of our present condition is rather a coming into a world of absolute goodness. It is the going out enjoyed by the soul when it is guided by the Word (the Logos), who said: "*I am the Word*" (John 10: 9). That soul will never cease going out and coming in; as its comfort is only in its continuous coming in, through its progress in the things that were before; and in its coming out from the condition that it already perceived. In such a way, the beloved face of God passed before Moses; by which the soul of the receiver of the law continued to go out from the condition it was in, to perpetually follow the Word who walked before it<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Com. On Canticle, Sermon 12.*

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 121

### LET ME ATTACH TO YOU, O GUARD OF MY SOUL

- ❖ Who will guard my soul and preserve me from evil but You?  
For my sake You became a huge Mountain;  
You carry me to the top;  
That the devil, who intends to bring me down to the abyss, his  
ultimate dwelling place cannot come near me;  
Whereas You bring me up to the summit of the high mountains.
- ❖ For my sake You have incarnated;  
You came to be a small stone, not cut by human hand;  
Then You filled the earth, as a huge Mountain, O Holy One!  
You set out of us holy and enlightened mountains;  
You shine with Your light on us;  
To scatter every trace of the darkness of the devil;  
That he would have no place in us.
- ❖ My soul exults when I see how You have set mountains in all  
generations;  
That testifies to Your splendor, Your salvation, and Your divine  
truth.
- ❖ Let us take away our shoes;  
To ascend the holy Mount of Zion;  
To say, together with Your prophet Moses:  
“I must turn aside and look at this great sight”;  
Together with him I hear Your voice,  
And together with him I discover the secrets of Your incarnation;  
I see You as a fire that burns in the bush, not to consume, but to  
light it.
- ❖ You have granted me Your holy books, as enlightening mountains;  
By which I enjoy Your knowledge, and help  
Your Book is light and life, strength, and sweetness.
- ❖ The believers longed to ascend to Jerusalem;  
To see Your temple built according to the image of Your heaven;  
You granted me to be carried to the deposit of heaven;  
My soul settles down in Your bosom to find perpetual comfort;  
Let the devil be stirred up together with all his hosts;

For You are my help and Guardian;  
Let me be attached to You, O my Guardian.

- ❖ If the enemy is only preoccupied with plotting against me;  
You take my feet out of his snares.  
You are the way with no offense;  
You carry me and bring me forth to the eternal comfort.
- ❖ You are the keeper who never slumber nor sleep.  
You grant me the spirit of watching, that my soul sings saying:  
“I sleep, but my heart is awake”  
My heart will never sleep as long as I am with You.
- ❖ You keep me from the strikes of both the sun and the moon;  
I shall not sin against faith, to fall under the strikes of the sun;  
Nor shall I sin against the church, to fall under the strikes of the moon.  
Take the pride away from me, lest I would be destroyed by the sun;  
And take the smallness of the soul away from me, lest I would be destroyed by the moon.  
By You, I shall not be destroyed by the riches.  
By You, I would not be corrupted by the unbefitting joy, nor by the deadly sorrow.
- ❖ Preserve my going out and my coming in;  
By You, my heart will find comfort in going out of the love of the world;  
And by You, my soul will find comfort in coming into the deposit of heaven.  
Preserve me from my coming into the world, till my departure from it.  
Preserve me from the time I am conceived till the day I set forth to You.

## **PSALM 122**

### **REJOICING IN APPROACHING THE ETERNAL HOUSE OF THE LORD**

This is the third of the psalms of Ascents, sung by those coming to Jerusalem, the symbol of the heavenly city, “*the joy of the whole earth*” (Psalm 48: 2): Zion, chosen by the Lord, He has desired for His habitation (Psalm 132: 13).

In psalm 120 we heard the cry out of humanity to God, proclaiming its need for the Savior capable of saving it from its inner and outer anguish; and the proclamation of those coming to the house of the Lord that they are sojourners in this world.

In psalm 121, the psalmist presents to us the features of this unique Savior. And those approaching the divine Mountains look at the mountains of the holy scriptures, ascending them with the spirit of joy and praise, seeking the protection of God.

In the present psalm 122, the psalmist presents to us a magnificent portrait of the soul exulted for approaching the eternal house of the Lord with a great joy. Reaching to the holy city after such a long and exhausting journey, he who approaches it sees how the tribes hasten together toward the house of the Lord to worship God and to honor “the house of David”. In the house of the Lord, the believer experiences the unity of all together in peace with God, to get to enjoy the heavenly joy.

In the Septuagint version, the title of this psalm came as “A journey to the house of the Lord”.

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|--|--------------|
| <b>1- An angelic call to come forth to the house of the Lord</b> | <b>1 - 2</b> |
| <b>2- A collective church call</b>                               | <b>3 - 4</b> |
| <b>3- A royal call</b>   | <b>5</b>     |
| <b>4- Peace, comfort, joy, and goodness</b>                      | <b>6 – 9</b> |

#### **1- AN ANGELIC CALL TO COME FORTH TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:**

This is the end of our happy journey together with the Savior; bringing us forth from this world, the land of sojourn, to the house of our Father, where there is the true joy. Once our feet stand at the

threshold of heaven, we experience an immeasurable joy: “*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor had entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for those who love Him*” (1 Corinthians 2: 9). The believer sees that his soul has set forth to the Higher Jerusalem, singing: “*Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem*”; praising and glorifying God who preserves him from falling all along the way, and brings him blameless before His glorious presence with joy.

A Song of Ascents. Of David

***“I was glad when they said to me: Let us go into the house of the Lord” (1)***

Who are they who are glad for our setting forth to the heavenly house of the Lord, but the angels who dwell in heaven?! They are our companions in our journey; and exhort us to ascend to join them there, and run toward it with joy.

- ❖ We moan in our journey, yet we shall rejoice in the heavenly city. We have the company of those who have already seen it, who exhort us to hasten toward it; whom the psalmist mean by saying: “*I was glad when they said to me: Let us go to the house of the Lord*”<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Before captivity, many Hebrews used to despise the temple and to offer sacrifices to the idols on the hills and the mountains. But, after suffering the sorrows and anguish of captivity, they longed for the temple of God. And when they got the good news of the liberation from their bondage and the setting forth to Jerusalem, they were overwhelmed with joy, and started to say to one another: “*Let us go to the house of the Lord*”. That is the great profit that comes from sorrow and tribulation!

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ By captivity they became in a better condition. Through that experience, those who were lukewarm, despised the temple, disregarded the hearing the divine words, dedicated themselves to the great evil on the mountains, and the isolated valleys (in the idol worship); In them a great desire to go back to the old worship has been incited; they became zealous believers in the divine promise;

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 122 (121).

got that befitting and upright transformation, and the exultation of the heart.

They came to be hungry and thirsty, not hungry for bread, or thirsty for water, but for listening to the word of the Lord (Amos 8: 11)<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Our presence in the church is nothing but a cry out to the divine Being, a demonstration of our servitude to Him, and a thanksgiving for the free grace He gave us, despite being enemies, adversaries, and non-submissive. He sent His only begotten Son from heaven to shed His precious blood, and to deliver His honored and pure body to redeem us; Remembering His glorious sufferings, we do these honorable and beloved rites under the veil of the nature of bread and wine, the sacraments of the given body and the shed blood; we have communion in these unique graces, united in those divine glories.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

On the literal side, this joy was realized for some of the captives in Babylon, when Cyrus issued his decree allowing them to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple of the Lord. On the spiritual side this psalm was realized by the coming of the lord Christ, who opened before us the gates of heaven to go forth to our heavenly home. According to the apostle Paul: “*All these things happened to them as examples, and were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come*” (1 Corinthians 10: 11).

***“Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem” (2)***

Together with enjoying the pleasure of the company of Christ with us in our journey in this world, in the midst of our sufferings; Yet our gladness will be realized in a magnificent way, when we come to stand at the gates of the Higher Jerusalem, when we are truly liberated from the captivity of sin, and would have no more battle with it.

Trusting in God’s mercies and his work with us; and seeing by the spirit of prophecy what will be realized, the psalmist, in the past tense says: “*Our feet have been standing ...*”; although it is a talk about the future.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 122.

St. John Chrysostom believes that he whose heart is on fire, longing to the Word of God, will find his deep satisfaction even in standing within the gates of the house of God, knocking on them with his hands, feeling his deep debt to the city, and the house of the lord, to enjoy his heavenly home.

❖ Notice that, although those people were still on their way to the city, yet they were truly hoping to be there, and to join their heavenly brethren.

❖ Although you are still on your way, put it before your eyes as though you already there standing within its gates; ... as though you were unceasingly rejoicing together with the angels; ... as though what is written is actually realized in you: *“Blessed are those who dwell in Your house”* (Psalm 84: 4)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## **2- A COLLECTIVE CHURCH CALL:**

Bringing us forth into the bosom of the Father, to let our souls exult with what he has prepared for us as His beloved; Our encounter grants us a new look at our unity with one another, as members of one glorious body.

*“Jerusalem – built as a city that is bound firmly together”*

(3)

In the days of Jeroboam son of Solomon, the Jews were divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah. But by returning from captivity, there was no more division among them; which was one of the fruits of captivity. The true believers will. Likewise, gather together in the Higher Jerusalem as one church bound firmly together.

If the hearts of believers were on fire while standing within the gates of Jerusalem to hear the words of the Lord, and to have fellowship in the spiritual worship; they as living stones connect together by the spirit of love, for the Holy Spirit to set out of them a temple for the Lord, and a holy city – the Spiritual Jerusalem.

According to St. Augustine, the psalmist sang as he sees from afar, by the spirit of prophecy, the earthly Jerusalem coming to be the city of God, that gathers together those who come from different

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 122 (121).

places. We as well, see by the eyes of faith, the Higher Jerusalem being built along the generations, to be consummate by the second coming of the Lord; as according to Peter: “*You also as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house*” (1 Peter 2: 5).

In the book of acts it came that the church was gathering every day those who were saved, as living stones, cut from the mountains by the hands of those preaching the truth, conformed in the water of baptism, in harmony by the work of the Holy Spirit of God through the strife of the church, until the building is consummated.

❖ Woe is he who gets rich through deception, and builds his city – namely his soul – by blood. Although it is so built like a city (Psalm 122: 3 LXX), yet greed would not preserve it, but would ignite a fire that burns it down. To build your city well, “*Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble*” (see Proverbs 15: 16). Man’s riches should work for the sake of the salvation of his soul, not for its destruction. As there is salvation in the riches if it is well used, it would also be a snare in case man does not know how to use it well (See Proverbs 13: 8). What would be the benefit of man’s riches, if it is not to help him in his journey?<sup>1</sup>

According to **St. Augustine**, Jerusalem is not a ‘city’, but “*as a city*”; being a spiritual city built by living stone, and its foundation is Jesus Christ up in the highs.

❖ He is speaking about a city that is being built now, out of living stones by faith; about which Peter says: “*you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house*” (1 Peter 2: 5); namely, the holy house of God. What does he mean by “*as living stones, are built...*”? If you believe, you will be the temple of God; which, according to the apostle Paul: “*The temple of God is holy, which temple you are*” (1 Corinthians 3: 17).

This city is now under construction; and the stones are cut off the hills by the hands of those who preach the Truth. They are cut as cubes to enter into the eternal establishments. There are still many stones in the hands of the Builder (God). I wish they do not fall from His hands, until the temple is complete. This then, is Jerusalem built as a city, whose foundation is Christ; about which the apostle Paul

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<sup>1</sup> In Letter 15.

says: “*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ*” (1 Corinthians 3: 11).

When a foundation is laid down in earth. Walls are built on it upwards, and their weight fall on it downwards. Our foundation, however, being in heaven; and we are spiritually built on a foundation up high; let us then run there where the building is set<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

The psalmist confirms that the tribes gathered together in the city of God, being “*the tribes of the Lord*”; are distinguished tribes, each has its own features (Genesis 29; Deuteronomy 33). Yet having united together in the Lord, although having distinguished talents, yet they all belong to the Lord; What connect them is not blood relationship, but the Spirit of God, the Grantor of unity.

All came to thank and praise god (4); forming together one musical band that plays a symphony of love and unity under the leadership of the Spirit of the Lord.

***“Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to the testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord” (4)***

Those who dwell in it are tribes ascending toward the foundation, the heavenly Jesus Christ, bearing a testimony to Israel; namely, with no guile in them; as the Lord said about Nathanael: “*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile*” (John 1: 47).

The people of all tribes used to go up to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the feasts of Passover, the tabernacles, and the weeks; And he who does not go up is counted as cut off the people of Israel.

That symbolic portrait refers to the ascent of the believers, not only of all tribes, but of all nations, to celebrate the Savior Christ, our Feast, and through Him to enter into the High Jerusalem.

Being “*the tribes of the Lord*”, the beauty and adornment of Jerusalem is the love that connects the tribes together in the Lord, that proclaims the glory of the name of the Lord.

### **3- A ROYAL CALL:**

***“For thrones are set there for judgment, The thrones of the house of David” (5)***

The throne of the king, as a judge was set in Jerusalem, to judge in the serious cases, to put an end to injustice, and to realize

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 122 (121).

justice and peace. All people used to rejoice going up to Jerusalem, the site of the throne and justice. We, as well, ascending every day toward the High Jerusalem, our souls exult, for we are going to stand before the throne of the Lord Christ, “*of whose kingdom there will be no end*” (Luke 1: 33).

It is amazing how the psalmist sees the thrones of judgment set in Jerusalem, to judge the devil and his hosts for their rebellion against God, through the enjoyment of the disciples and the apostles of great heavenly honors.

What does the psalmist see in the house of the Lord – the High Jerusalem? Thrones of judgment, thrones of the house of David; all bound to the Lord Christ, the heavenly High Priest, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords; in whom “*they became kings and priests to His God and Father*” (Revelation 1: 6); and they got an exalted royal feature, having overcome the devil, and being crowned with an eternal royal crown.

According to **St. Augustine**, those chairs came in the Greek language as “thrones” – the thrones of the soul, namely, of wisdom and righteousness. **St. Augustine** marvels at the expression of the psalmist that the thrones were set (or sat), he says: [There are thrones for the wisdom, about which the Lord says to His disciples: “*You who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Matthew 19: 28). They sit on twelve thrones of judgment; when they, themselves, are (thrones) of God, about whom it is said: “*For thrones are set there*”. ... Who did sit? The thrones... Who are the thrones? Those about whom is written: “The soul of the righteous is a throne of wisdom “.

..... Where are the thrones? In heaven; ... And what is heaven? It is about which the Lord says: “*Heaven is My throne*” (Isaiah 66: 1); ...

Therefore, the righteous, themselves, are thrones, and have thrones; and the thrones are set in Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>.

#### **4- PEACE, COMFORT, JOY, AND GOODNESS:**

The psalm ends with a marvelous prayer of peace, in which the psalmist restores his feeling of peace, having come to be together with his brethren, enjoying the exalted peace of God.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 122 (121).

If the psalmist seeks from the believers to pray for the sake of the earthly Jerusalem; he calls them, as lovers of Jerusalem, to enjoy the High Jerusalem, with the peace of its high towers, eternal comfort, and heavenly goods.

***“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; May they prosper who love you” (6)***

As the thrones of judgment are set in Jerusalem; there will be no more dissension, but an exalted peace, comfort, and love.

How could they ask for the peace in Jerusalem? According to St. Augustine: by practicing love themselves!

***“Peace be within your walls; prosperity within your palaces” (7)***

What are the ‘walls’ of Jerusalem, but the prophets, the apostles, the disciples, and the saints, on whom peace prevails. Whereas its palaces are the true believers who became a holy temple for the Lord.

❖ The power of love could not be expressed by a more exalted analogy: *“Love is as strong as death”* (Songs 8: 6). Who can oppose death, O brethren? Fire, waves, sword, all these, we can oppose! ... We can oppose rulers and kings; ... But death alone could never be opposed! ... Nothing is stronger than it<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ As war could bring a calamity on a city, we pray for the sake of its peace ... Here, the psalmist prays for them, not only to be liberated from evils, but to enjoy limitless goods, peace, abundance, and prosperity<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ If controversies, dissensions, and divisions, happen among you because of me, I will depart away from you; with or without your consent; to let the flock of Christ live in peace with the priests ordained over them. ... He who so does will bring upon himself a great glory in the Lord, and will be welcome anywhere he goes; as *“The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness”* (Psalm 24: 1)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 122 (121).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 122.

<sup>3</sup> First Epistle, 54.

(St. Clement of Rome)

*“For the sake of my brethren and friends, I will now say: ‘Peace be within you’”* (8)

The psalmist prays for the sake of his brethren and friends, to enjoy those heavenly blessings, not for any favor on their part, but for the sake of the glory of God, and for that of His holy heavenly house.

❖ So the prophet says, lest the Jews might assume that setting forth to Jerusalem was on account of their own goodness. He seeks peace for them for the sake of the prophets and the righteous who were with them, whom he calls his brethren; as well as for the sake of the honor of the house of God, the temple. This could also refer to the peace given by our Lord to us, Christians, through His disciples whom He called His brethren and friends.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ He says: *“Peace be upon you”*, For whose sake? For the sake of my brethren and friends; and not for the sake of my honor, wealth, or my own life<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 122 (121).

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 122

### JOY, COMFORT, AND PEACE IN THE HOUSE OF MY GOD

- ❖ My depths exult, as I approach the house of my God;  
I hear a sweet angelic voice calling me: “Let us go to the house of the Lord”;  
On my way, I am joined by angels;  
Proclaiming their longing that humanity would set forth to the heavenly house of the Lord.  
To experience what they, themselves, enjoy.
- ❖ Once the old people crossed over the Red Sea;  
They praised God who saved them from their enemies;  
There, they felt as though their feet were within the gates of Jerusalem;  
As for us, we were brought through the water of baptism, to sonhood to God.  
We are granted the right to enter into heaven, to crush Loyathan and all his hosts.  
By hope we came to be within the gates of the High Jerusalem.
- ❖ My heart would not find comfort until my brethren find it with You;  
I will count myself in the High Jerusalem when all the elect enjoy it;  
I wish all mankind stand within its gates.
- ❖ My Savior, You are the foundation of Jerusalem;  
Your place is not in the lower depths, but high up;  
Draw us as living stones that do not fall down, but go up to unite with You;  
Grant us to run toward You.
- ❖ After the return from captivity, Israel reunited with Judah;  
All set forth with the spirit of unity to praise you;  
All returned as one temple for You, O the only Holy One!  
Remember the unity of the church from one end of the world to the other end;  
Remember Your church extending from Adam till the end of time;  
Which comes from all nations and tongues.

- ❖ You call us Your children, O King of kings, and grant us the spirit of royalty.  
To sit as though on thrones to judge the devil and all his hosts.  
We, the earthlies are to be counted among the heavenlies;  
When heavenly fell down to be judged by the dust;
- ❖ Out of Your prophets and apostles You set walls for Jerusalem;  
And out of the believers You set palaces;  
On which peace, comfort, joy, and goodness prevail;  
You are their Peace, Comfort, Joy, and Goodness.

## PSALM 123

# LIBERATION FROM THE SERVITUDE OF THE DEVIL

In the preceding three psalms of Ascents (120-122), the believer talked for himself, although in the name of all believers, or in the name of the one body of Christ. But once he ascended to the house of the Lord, and got together in the spirit of unity with his brethren, he began to talk in the plural tense, to utter openly, in the name of the congregation as a whole. In their name, every member shows his obedience to the Lord who dwells in heaven, and supplicates to him with the contrition of heart to have mercy upon the church.

The liberation from the servitude of the devil, filled with humiliation, is realized through our consent of the servitude to God with our whole free will, with the spirit of joy and exultation. While the work of the devil is to humiliate the soul and to bring its insight down to the depth of hell, the joyful servitude to God lifts the soul up to heaven, and opens the insight on the secrets of God.

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|---|--------------|
| <b>1- The eyes lifted up to heaven</b>    | <b>1 – 2</b> |
| <b>2- Our liberation from humiliation</b> | <b>3 – 4</b> |

### **1- THE EYES LIFTED UP TO HEAVEN:**

Reaching up to the house of the Lord, every believer supplicates to God anticipating His mercy; proclaiming that they are all obedient and submissive to Him. Their eyes are concentrated on the compassionate hand of the Lord which keep on doing good.

A Song of Ascents

*“Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens” (1)*

According to **St. Augustine**, the believer here speaks in the singular tense, on account of that all believers praise together as one person.

Realizing his true position as a man created out of nothing, he counts himself unworthy of being called a servant or a maid of God;

As there is no point of comparison between the Creator and His creation.

He cries out to God, saying: “*O, You who dwell in the heavens*”, distinguishing Him from humans down below. The Lord Christ is from above, above all, and speaks from heaven (See John 3: 31). God is the One filling heaven and earth, There is no place without Him

**St. Augustine** confirms that it is befitting of the believer to ascend through the psalms of Ascents, as though on a ladder, to Him who dwells in the heavens; ... He who does not ascend by his heart would fall.

By faith, our souls are lifted up as though to God who dwells in the heavens, in the city of God, the Higher Jerusalem. And by faith the Lord Christ dwells in our hearts, to make them a new heaven.

- ❖ Let the one who praises ascend. Let this praise be in the heart of each one of you; And let each of you be this man; Because, when each of you so says, as you all are one in Christ; he does not say: “*Unto You, O Lord, we lift our eyes*”, but he says: “*Unto You, O Lord, I lift my eyes*”. You should imagine that when each one of you speaks, he represents all men on earth<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ As you are dwelling in a house (the heavenly house of the Lord), if this house is taken away, you will fall. God dwells in the saints; if He forsakes them, they will fall<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Where man’s treasure is, there, his heart will also be (Matthew 6: 21); Hence the proverb saying: “*The eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth*” (Proverb 17: 24).

Those, on the other hand, who are chastised by tribulations, and gain experience and wisdom by sorrows, lift their eyes above the earthly things up to God who finds comfort among the angels and saints.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 123 (122).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 123 (122).

❖ Lift up your eyes to heavens, like the one who says: “*Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwells in the heavens*” (1). Look up to the Sun of Righteousness; For if you are guided by the Lord’s commandments, which represent the most splendid stars, you would have alert eyes.

Do not “*give sleep to the eyes (of your soul), or slumber to your eyelids*” (Psalm 132: 4); Let the commandments perpetually guide you; as it is written: “*Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path*” (Psalm 119: 105). Actually if you never sleep while being at the rudder that guides your life, you will get the help of the Spirit who will guide you in a gentle breeze, and in peace, until you cross over and reach, by the will of God, the secure port without harm<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

❖ David sings: “*Unto You I lift my eyes (my spirit), O You who dwell in the heavens*” (1); and: “*To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul*” (Psalm 25: 1). ...

How could the soul be lifted up to follow the Spirit, until it comes to be in Him?!

**St. Paul** says: “*The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts, knows what the mind of the Spirit is; because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God*” (Romans 8: 26, 27). The Spirit cries out: “*Abba, Father!*” (Romans 8: 15) in the hearts of the blessed, and is aware of our groaning in this temple; groaning that intercedes for those who have fallen, or have crossed the line. He intercedes to our account, taking unto Himself our groaning according to His love and compassion toward men.

**(The scholar Origen)**

**“Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters; As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress; So our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us” (2)**

They have no hope for help or support from anywhere else; and they do not expect any from any other source; being like the

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<sup>1</sup> Homily on the Beginning Proverbs 17.

servant and the maid who would have no food, clothes, or any other necessities of life, except by keeping their eyes on the hands of their masters; and would not cease to do that until they get them, and give thanks. It is a practice they do all the time<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ Everyone is committed to care for his personal task with desire, and to consummate it blamelessly, with zeal, enthusiasm, and watching, lest he would become worthy of curse; as it is written: *“Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully”* (Jeremiah 48: 10). He is also committed to do it under God’s eyes, to be worthy of saying daringly: *“As the eyes of servants to the hand of their masters; As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, So our eyes look to the Lord our God”* (2)<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ If you seek glory, even through the spirituals, What would be your excuse for refraining to submit to God, as much as you, yourself, seek from your servants and slaves? *“The eyes of servants look to the hands of their masters; and the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress”* (2); ... Yet you, whom God has made His minister, look to the eyes of your fellow ministers; when you surely know that God will remember your good works in the life to come; while your fellow ministers commend you only here.

Although you can surround yourself with witnesses from heaven, Yet you substitute them with ones on earth. It is natural for a wrestler to have a winning crown. Your wrestling arena is heaven; Yet you choose to get your winning crown on earth! What a folly this is!

Let us look at the crowns given in this life: a crown of haughtiness, another of envy, and a third of flattery ... Nevertheless, men do that like kids who, in their play put crowns of weeds on one another’s head, then make fun of the one they crown. ... So, do those who pour commendation on your head, then scoff you in your absence ... They even crown you with a crown of weeds, mixed with dirt.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 123.

<sup>2</sup> القوانين المطولة - سؤال 41.

If the psalmist likens himself, together with the whole church, to servants who look to the hands of their masters, and to a maid who looks at the hand of her mistress, anticipating mercy and compassion, yet, on another aspect, there is a difference in analogy.

Looking at the masters entails humiliation and fear; while, when the church looks to the Lord dwelling in the heavens, their eyes, ears, and hearts are sanctified by looking at the heavenly Holy One, and meditating in Him.

While looking to the masters entails humiliation and bitterness; and the servant or the maid do not dare to lift their eyes up, the believers lift their eyes toward heaven with daring and love.

❖ Submitting to Christ a bad ear for the sake of chastisement, so as not to submit it instead to slander the others; You would be worthy of commendation and blessing. You would, as well be, if you train your eyes on the sound vision, so as not ever to desire what is foreign to you. And when you are preoccupied with looking to God, and meditating, together with the Psalmist David, saying: *“Unto you I lift my eyes, O You who dwells in the heavens. Behold, As the eyes of servants look to the hands of their masters, As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, So our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us”* (2) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. (Abba) Serapion, bishop of Tammy)**

Commenting on the use of the word ‘until’, **St. Augustine** says that it does not imply that believers will cease to look to the Lord after gaining the Lord’s mercy. The Holy Book often uses the words ‘until’ or ‘till’, meaning (continuation), as in the following examples:

*“He did not know her **till** she had brought forth her firstborn Son”* (Matthew 1: 25)

*“Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there **till** you have paid the last penny”* (Matthew 5: 26)

*“For He must reign **till** He has put all enemies under His feet”* (1 Corinthians 15: 25).

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<sup>1</sup> *Letters des Peres du Desert, p. traduit de P>G> 40, 925D- 941B.* عن : فردوس الآباء ج 1

“(The raven) went to and fro *until* the waters were dried up from the earth” (Genesis 8: 7) <sup>1</sup>.

## **2- OUR LIBERATION FROM CONTEMPT AND HUMILIATION:**

The believers become a subject of humiliation, scoff, and insults, the way their Christ did. In the house of the Lord, the believers cry out seeking help; yet without complaint or murmur.

***“Have mercy on us, O Lord, Have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled with contempt” (3)***

The Babylonians used to parade processions of their gods through the Jewish quarters in Babylon, as a kind of scoffing of the God of the Jews, who, according to them, is helpless to protect His subjects, who, accordingly were filled with contempt and humiliation.

❖ Do not you see the extent of contrition?! They supplicate to God to save them from such tough conditions, for the sake of His mercies, and not for worthiness on their part.

According to Daniel: “We have become the least of all nations; humiliated in the whole earth; because of our sins” (The Septuagint version). That is exactly what the captives in Babylon say in their supplication: We suffer a tough calamity; were taken away from our home, are deprived of our freedom, became slaves to savages, spend our days in humiliation, hunger, and thirst; are beaten and treaded upon by feet. ... Have mercy on us , O Lord, Have mercy on us<sup>2</sup>!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ “*For we are exceedingly filled with contempt*”. All those who live with Piety according to Christ, will necessarily need to endure contempt. ... Those who do not choose this way, those with earthly happiness, should be despised.

As long as we hope for the things to come, and long for the future happiness; even if it is not yet apparent how we shall be, although, actually, “ *we are the children of God*” (1 John 3: 2), and

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<sup>1</sup> *City of God, book 20.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 123.*

“*our life is hidden with Christ in God*” (Colossians 3: 3), ... We are utterly despised by those who seek to enjoy happiness in this world.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ He says: “*Have mercy on us, O Lord, Have mercy on us*”; For, when we were in prosperity and honor, we did not thank You as we should have! ... You have allowed for us to fall into contempt and humiliation as a chastisement and reform. ... Now, pray, Put the shame, instead, upon those who boast the riches of this world, and who despise the poor.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ This awful attitude (despair) weighs upon the soul like a yoke, make her bend, and so depriving her of being able to lift her eyes to look up to God. A man of courage, therefore, is committed to break that yoke, and to remove every burden over Him, uttering the words of the prophet: “*As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, So our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us! Have mercy on us, O Lord, Have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled with contempt*” (2, 3).

He says: “*We are exceedingly filled with contempt*”, Although we are under so many afflictions, we shall never cease to look to God, nor to pray to Him, until He responds to our supplication. A sign of a noble soul, is that it would never bow, nor be terrified, under a multitude of calamities that weigh on her, nor make her stop praying to God, but would rather persist on this until He has mercy on her, according to the previous saying of the blessed David<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“*Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorn of those who are at ease, With the contempt of the proud*” (4)**

According to **St. Augustine**, ‘scorn’ and ‘contempt’ are one and the same; So are ‘at ease’ and ‘proud’!

Those who lean upon their riches in haughtiness and pride, scorn those who trust in the promise of eternal life by the Lord Christ; on account of that it is not perceivable in the present time. ... The true

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<sup>1</sup> رسالة من القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم إلى ثيودور بعد سقوطه.

Christian, on the other hand, even though he may be rich and wealthy, yet he considers himself poor, because he anticipates the heavenly riches and wealth; And does not boast what he possesses now; counting what he has, as not his, but he is just a steward on what is the Lord's.. ... At the same time, the true Christian feels that he is rich, for he needs nothing, nor covets anything.

❖ Do not get terrified, O beloved brethren, when a temptation dwells on you; but you should rather recall the words of the inspired David, saying: "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes*" (Psalm 119: 71).

Accept the affliction as a medication; And use the temptation befittingly, to be worthy of great joy<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 123.

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 123**

### **DWELL IN MY HEART THAT MY EYES BECOME LIFTED UP TO YOUR HEAVENS**

- ❖ As though from a deep pit, I cry out to You;  
Come to dwell in my heart, O heavenly One;  
That my eyes be lifted up to You;  
And with joy and exultation, they would meditate in Your glories.
- ❖ The devil has enslaved me; and with humiliation he drew me to him;  
He humiliated my whole life'  
And brought my insight down to the depth of hell;  
He destroyed every hope in me;  
I lost every taste of peace, comfort, or joy;  
Counting myself a captive and a prisoner, I had no hope of being set free from humiliation;  
And I counted myself as created to lead a life of a humiliated slave.
- ❖ Come, O heavenly One, and dwell in my heart;  
To become my Treasure, Glory, Joy, and the exultation of my soul;  
Together with my eyes, my heart will be lifted up to You;  
I shall find every sweetness in worshipping You;  
Your authority is sweet, and Your Kingdom is joyful.  
Let me be liberated from everything earthly and temporal;  
Let me set forth, as though from the depths of hell;  
Let Your Holy Spirit carry me and fly away with me;  
To settle down eternally in Your bosom.

## ***PSALM 124***

# **GOD THE LEADER OF OUR SALVATION**

Reaching the house of the Lord, the believer as a member in the holy congregation, looks back on the road, and marvels how he has safely managed to cross over it. This psalm, the fifth of the psalms of Ascents, as a thanksgiving to the Savior, is presented by the congregation as whole, or by every true member in the name of the whole congregation; as they have all reached the house of the Lord by a miraculous divine work. They have got an amazing salvation from overwhelming dangers which almost destroyed them, if the Lord was not on their side.

The psalmist portrays the lack of balance between our human possibilities and those of the enemy, who, not only intends to enslave us, but to swallow us alive. ... Again he likens the believers in their battle against the devil and the hosts of darkness, to those overwhelmed by water, that has gone over their souls; with no hope for salvation. ... And likens them to a bird fallen in the snare of the fowlers, with no power to be saved. ... Yet by the entrance of the factor of God's presence with us, and on our side, all measures will utterly change. ... The psalmist confirms that the leader of salvation is God Himself, the Grantor of conquest.

In portraying the enemy, the psalmist chose four kinds of devastating calamities, always feared by men; which are:

- a- Earthquakes
- b- Floods
- c- Vicious wild animals
- d- Snares

- 1- God saves from the earthquakes<sup>1</sup> - 3**
- 2- God saves from the overwhelming current<sup>4</sup> - 5**
- 3- God saves from the fangs of the vicious wild beasts <sup>6</sup>**
- 4- God saves from the snares of the fowlers<sup>7</sup>**
- 5- God, the Creator, is the Savior<sup>8</sup>**

### **1- GOD SAVES FROM THE EARTHQUAKES:**

Here, the psalmist likens the enemies, in their multitude and mighty possibilities, to the earthquake which is difficult to confront, as it buries many alive underneath the earth. No power can control or confront an earthquake, but the mighty Creator Himself. It is the same in our confrontation of the devil and his temptations; we have to resort to the Lord, so that our souls would not be buried in the love of the world, and become like those buried alive underneath the earth because of an earthquake.

A Song of Ascents. Of David

***“If it had not been the Lord who was on our side’, let Israel now say” (1)***

The goal of the book of Genesis is to confirm that the salvation from the bondage of Pharaoh, has not been by the power of Moses or Aaron, nor by their wisdom or planning, but God, Himself, was the real Leader of the procession of their conquest, and their liberation from the servitude. This is the experience of salvation in all eras, as a symbol of the true salvation from the servitude of the devil, by Christ Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the psalmist here, is like a conductor of music training his students on how to sing and praise together, God who surrounds them like a Wall, and preserves them like a tower, so that the enemy would not swallow them.

***“If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose against us” (2)***

Here, the psalmist speaks in the plural tense, because, although the devil uses all the ways of deception to catch every believer, yet his war is actually against all: children, elders, men, women, young men and girls, priests, ministers, congregation, the spiritually weak and the strong. He would never rest until he brings all together with him to the eternal perdition.

The devil keeps stirring men against one another; and in particular against the believers. He uses men as tools of iniquity to oppose God’s work of salvation in the life of believers.

❖ Sometimes they sing as though they are one man, and other times as a multitude; because the multitude are one, as Christ is One; They are several members of the One Christ; ... The Head of all members is in heaven, and although the body is on earth, yet it is not cut off its Head. ... The Head looks from high above, caring

for the body ... So, whether those who sing are one or many, yet those many are one man; This is the unity. Christ, as we say, is One, and all Christians are His members.

”If it had not been the Lord who was (in us) or on our side’, let Israel now say” (1)... When? “When men arose against us”. Do not marvel! ... They submit because they are human; Yet it was God who was (in them) or on their side, and not men, who arose against them. ... Men destroy men, unless there is in them, He who could never be destroyed – God, and not men. ... What can men do to you, when you are singing and rejoicing; and in security, you are holding fast to the eternal blessing<sup>1</sup>!?

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Returning to Jerusalem from captivity, the Hebrews were weak and frail because of the severe bondage they have gone through all along seventy years of captivity; and on account of their small number, as they have not all returned together, but in separate groups, and without weapons. Their city having been in ruins and without walls, they were an easy target for every one who intended to devour them. The nations around them gathered together to attack them, and to wipe them altogether out of existence. But when they put them under siege, they did not seek help from the Egyptians, nor from the false idols as they used to do before captivity, but sought it from God, who supported them and strengthened them against their enemies, became a Wall around them, and relieved them of the authority of their adversaries.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

The believers uttered the words of their father Jacob, who said to Laban his father-in-law, when he was about to begin his journey back home: “If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed” (Genesis 31: 42).

❖ What keeps the devil from harming us, but the presence of God on our side? ... Listen to what the Lord Christ says to Peter: “Simon, Simon! Indeed Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail” (Luke 22: 31).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 124 (123).

The devil, the fierce beast is, before anything else, evil and greedy; if he is not continuously reined, he will come back to devour everything. If, in the case of the righteous 'Job', having got a little permission, he destroyed his household, corrupted his body, killed his children, filled his flesh with worms, and stirred up his wife, friends and servants against him; how could he not destroy everything, unless there is a super power to reign him?! Hence the words of the psalmist: *"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side ..."*<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

***"Then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us" (3)***

The enemy, in his wrath, wishes to swallow me alive; as though he is an earthquake which no one can oppose. Yet he is miserably helpless, and has no authority over me. If he intends to swallow me alive, I have been already crucified together with my Savior, died, and by Him, am risen again; The enemy, therefore cannot swallow me anymore.

- ❖ Those in whom the Lord is, are slain but do not die ... Those who suffer, yet do not submit to temptations, rejoice and say: *"If it had not been the Lord (in us), ...etc."*<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Do not you see how he demonstrates the ferocity of the attackers? They are actually more fierce than the wild beasts, if not more so in their dealings. The wild beast, once he attacks, his rage comes to an end, and, in most cases, it does attack again. Humans, on the other hand, in case they initially fail, would, in most cases resume their offense, to satisfy their evil instinct to shed and taste blood. That is the nature of human wrath, it often surpasses the limit of reason, keeps stirred-up again and again<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## **2- GOD SAVES FROM THE OVERWHELMING CURRENT:**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 124.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 124 (123).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 124.

***“Then the waters would have overwhelmed us; the streams would have gone over our soul” (4)***

The devil is stirred up against us like an earthquake, wishing to bury those alive by Christ in earth like dead; And if he fails, he would be like an overwhelming current. Pharaoh and his army chased the people of God who were fleeing from servitude, intending to push them into the waters of the red Sea. The believer marvels how all those people could be saved from such raging waters that could not be opposed, that would bury men alive?! They would have no salvation except by striking the sea by the rod of God in Moses’ hand. The people were saved, while Pharaoh and his men sank like lead in the mighty waters (Exodus 15: 10).

What are these floods of raging water in which the devil intends to drown us, but the evil nations that do not accept the name of the Savior, and do not endure His cross; who, according to **St. Augustine**, are stirred up against the children of God, and descend on them like raging waters, then retreat. ... They could be, as well, the sins and temptations poured by the devil for our perdition; Or they probably also refer to the strong and mighty armies that come against us (Isaiah 8: 7, etc.)....

Those have been actually stirred up against Jesus Christ who have been confronted by a flood of sufferings, which could not swallow Him up; But, by His death He rather swallowed death; and the power and glory of His resurrection was proclaimed. Now, as our Lord risen from the dead dwells in us, we do not fear the raging flood; For through it we go forth to the fellowship of the heavenly glory.

❖ He likens the wrath of the enemy to the exceptionally overwhelming current of water that sweeps everything in its way ... Do not you see the support of God, who would not allow for his children to drown?! He may allow for the increase of problems and troubles, but not to let His children drown in them, but to make them more upright, and to provide them with more confirmation of His power<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

The psalmist sees as though the enemy, intending to get rid of the Lord Christ, brought over him death like an overwhelming current

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 124.

of water; But it turned into a calm brook from which to drinks by the wayside. That is why *“He lifted up His head”*, and granted His body -- the church -to be lifted together with Him. In other words, having received death by His own free will, the Lord Christ is risen, and let us, as well, rise together with Him. Hence the psalmist says: *“He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; therefore He shall lift up His head”* (Psalm 110: 7).

- ❖ *“When their wrath was kindled against us”* (3). They are now highly stirred up against us. *“Then the waters would have overwhelmed us”* (4). Our Head drank from it first; He, about whom is said in the psalms: *“He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; therefore He shall lift up His head”* (Psalm 110: 7). If our Head is actually risen, Why then would the body fear the flood? <sup>1</sup> ...

**(St. Augustine)**

**(5)** *“Then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul”*

According to **St. Augustine**, the swollen waters are the waters of sin which are truly without being; as what man desires of the temporal things would not hold for long.

- ❖ What does: *“Then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul”* mean? They endure a great death; they are in great danger; they are under such a great pressure, to receive it while alive<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Love should work in us in such a way that would keep us from forsaking Christ under any danger that may dwell on us. It is written: *“Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the flood drown it”* (Songs 8: 7); because *“the soul of the lover can pass over through the raging flood”* (Psalm 124: 4,5). Neither a violent storm, nor a serious danger, or the fear of death, or of punishment, can appease the power of love<sup>3</sup>.

- ❖ Lovingly, the bride says: *“I went down to the garden of nuts to see the verdure of the valley”* (Songs 6: 11). Now, Where is the

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 124 (123).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 124 (123).

<sup>3</sup> Jacob.

church, but where the bishop's rod that sprouted and put forth buds (Numbers 17: 8), is found, and where his spiritual talents are? There it is found to be tested by bitterness and temptation; (as nuts implies bitterness); and the flood means temptations, that could be endured; according to what is written: "*The swollen waters have gone over our souls*" (5). Hence she went down to the site of bitterness, where the vine blossoms, and many fruits like pomegranates bloom (Songs 6: 11). In bitterness the soul recognizes herself; the corrupt body may weigh it down; but she has to know herself<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ This analogy to the overwhelming current was used because man's life is like a raging river that rushes down to the plains to find its natural course. Nothing of the things that we see in life give satisfaction to the soul; for all that float on the water of the river, and seem like coming close to you, once you touch it, it would disappear; because the following wave would take it away from you; that the present moment in this raging river, is a waste of an expected pleasure.

Let us care therefore, to keep away from this river, lest, in caring for the temporary things, we may forget about the eternal things<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

### **3- GOD SAVES FROM THE FANGS OF THE VICIOUS WILD ANIMALS:**

The devil walks about like a fierce lion, attacking, tearing, smashing, and swallowing; Yet he will soon discover his helplessness, because the Lion of the tribe of Judah will never allow for His body to be a victim of the enemy.

*"Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth"* (6)

The enemy, in his wrath, attempts to shake our hearts to let us lose our inner peace, and to be buried in dust. And as he finds out that we do not fear his wrath, he brings over us temptations and evil

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<sup>1</sup>إسحق أو النفس، 8: 64.

<sup>2</sup>دير السريان: البتولية، 1966، ص 81-82.

thoughts like an overwhelming current to drown us; and when, again, he fails he comes forth “*like a roaring lion , seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5: 8). Who can save us from him, but the Lion coming from the tribe of Judah! And as **St. Augustine** says: [Do not assume, O brethren, that those have overcome their enemies because they are strong men, but because the Lord was on their side].

❖ “*Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth*” (6). The hunters chase us, and provide their traps with bait. What bait? The sweetness of this life, for which every man puts his head into evil, and falls into the trap. Yet not those in whom the Lord is, who say: “*If it had not been the Lord who was (in us)...*”, as these would never fall into the trap<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

#### **4- GOD SAVES FROM THE SNARE OF THE FOWLERS:**

*“Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; The snare is broken, and we have escaped”* (7)

The psalmist stood in awe before the amazing work of God. In the midst of the battle between God and the devil, he saw himself like a bird, helpless to escape from the snare of the fowler, namely, from the devil and his angels; But the Mighty God helped him, broke the snare, and set him free.

The fathers often confirm the following facts:

(1) The great weakness of man before the power and the deception of the devil; In his own possibilities, he is like a helpless bird.

(2) By grace, man came to be in the position of strength and not of weakness; So it is not befitting of him to fear and worry, but to trust in the possibility of victory by Christ Jesus “*who went out conquering and to conquer*”(Revelation 6: 2).

(3) The devil collapsed and lost his might and authority, to become like a toy, unable to oppose the true believers.

(4) The riches of God’s grace is not given, nor work by force, but through man’s readiness to receive it, with the spirit of seriousness, and with no slothfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 124 (123).

(5) Continuously giving thanksgiving to God for the conquests He gives to the believer; that his eyes would look at spiritual memorials which support him in his hope in the Lord. By that he would not become a denier of God's grace; And by thanksgiving he will come to enjoy a greater abundance of continuous conquests.

(6) He should give thanks to the Holy Trinity: to the Father who delivered His only-begotten Son; to the Son, the Savior; and to the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of life, sanctification, and renewal.

The psalmist sang, saying: "*Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped; Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth*" (7).

If the enemy sometimes appear as a roaring lion to terrify the believers; In other times he sets hidden snares to catch them; counting them like a bird that falls into a snare, with no possibility to escape. But strangely enough, the snare is broken, and the bird escapes unharmed; which could never be realized except by the divine salvation.

❖ "*Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of fowlers*" (7).

As the Lord dwells in the soul, it escaped as a bird from the snare of fowlers. Why does he liken the soul to a bird? Because, like a bird it fell unaware ... Let the Lord be inside you; He will save you from greater threats ... The snare will be broken; Be sure of that! As the pleasures of this life, will not hold for long when its ultimate end is realized, Let us then, not get confused by them, so as to rejoice when the snare is broken, to say: "*The snare is broken and we have escaped*". And lest you may assume that you can do that on your own, Look at Him who works on your escape, and say: "*Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth*"<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ If you wish to oppose, do not dare to enter into an open battle against the enemy. On another aspect, the enemy overcomes him who is asleep, not on account of his strength, but because of his

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 124 (123).

slothfulness. ... Who would not overcome someone sleeping, even if the attacker is the weakest of the weak?!

The mighty enemy is in chains, his sword is broken, his strength collapsed, and his dwelling place is destroyed! What more would you ask for? Why are you still afraid of him? Why are you terrified?

Why do you worry? Do you wish to know the kind of help that you have? Your enemy has not only become weak, but your help has become great!

The rebellion of the body is destroyed; The weight of sin is no more; You have gained the power of the Spirit, the power of the Holy Anointment! *“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh; On account of sin; He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”* (Romans 8: 3,4).

He made the body obedient, provided you with the weapons: *“the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, and girded your waist with truth”* (see Ephesians 6: 13-17); And the deposit given to you (2 Corinthians 1: 22) is that He feeds you with His own body, grants you His precious blood to drink, and puts a cross in your hand like a spear, a spear that would never bend<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ What is this snare which is broken? According to the apostle Paul: *“The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly”* (Romans 16: 20); *“That you may come to your senses, and escape the snare of the devil”* (2 Timothy 2: 26). Now you see that the devil is the *“fowler”*, who longs to catch a multitude of souls for perdition. He is the master of many snares, and deceptions of every kind ... When we are in a state of grace, our souls will be secure, But once we play with sin, our souls will be disturbed, and will become like a boat struck by mighty waves<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 124.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. Hom. 20.

❖ Conquest is not realized by the size of wealth, nor the height of glory; but the Lord grants his help free to those who seek it by the dense sorrows. So was the apostle Paul, who made his sorrow the subject of his boasting; to be able to say: *‘When I am weak, then I am strong’* (2 Corinthians 12: 10) <sup>1</sup>.

Do you see where sorrows will lead you? ... To the hope that does not fail.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

❖ The Groom appears among the snares. ... For you, Jesus prepared a way of escape; Having seen a great multitude of mankind fallen into snares; and knowing that no one but Him can save them, He has taken a human body, came down to earth, and exposed Himself to the adversary snares of the world; was caught in them; but broke them utterly for your sake; and yet you say: *“Behold, my beloved stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice”* (Songs 2: 9) <sup>2</sup>.

❖ But, having torn (the nets), and treaded upon them, He, as well, encourages His church to tear the nets, and to tread upon the snares, to be able to say with joy: *“Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped”* (7). Who is He who has broken the snares, but, alone could not be caught? ... Although He suffered death, yet it was by His own free will, and not as what happen to us because of our sin. He alone, became free among the dead. He is the living among the dead, having destroyed by His death, him who has the power of death (Hebrew 2: 14); and brought forth, those who were captivated by death. He us not risen alone from the dead, but, together with Himself, he raised those who were overcome by death, and made them sit with Him in the heavenly glories; *“When He ascended on high, he led captivity captive”* (Ephesians 4: 8). He did not only bring forth the souls, but He resurrected the bodies as well, as is testified by the gospel: *“Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many”* (Matthew 27: 52; Hebrew 12: 22)

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 20 On Ps.59.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Songs 2: 12.

### (The scholar Origen)

- ❖ Let us always draw the mercies of God, to save our souls from the sword, rescue our souls from the mouth of the dog, and set us free from the mouth of the lion. Let us hasten to free our souls from the snares of the earthly lusts, that the devil would not be able to devour us. Let us, by the help of God, acquire spiritual wings, to say together with the prophet: *“Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers;... Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth”*(7-8). Let Him begin granting that to us, He who lives and reigns over the world, forever, Amen<sup>1</sup>.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

- ❖ Greed is the mother of serpents, and the companion of those who do not practice self-poverty.... When our souls get rid of all that, they will never fall into the snares of the fowlers, but can elegantly fly toward God, where they can find salvation<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Saba)

- ❖ Blessed is the soul that is not overcome by any adversary struggle in the body; For such a soul would flee like a bird from a broken snare (124); Because the pleasures of the flesh are the food of evil; he who is drawn to them will fall into the snare<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

- ❖ The Cedar of Lebanon which is planted by God, where the big birds build their nests, symbolize the virtues. Cedar is the support of the wedding house, and of the bride's room; They are the dwelling place of the souls that liken the birds which escape from the snares of the fowlers, where they build their nests, and find refuge.... The pure bride of the Songs looks at the Cedar beams in her room, and sees the Oak adorning its ceiling, give the room more beauty and elegance, emit a nice fragrance (the oak wood is anti-rot, light, and easy to shape). From this example we learn that we should plant the virtue in our souls, without disregarding the

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<sup>1</sup> Sermons, 136: 7.

<sup>2</sup> الرسالة الرابعة: 2 (ترجمة الرب سليم دكاش اليسوعي).

<sup>3</sup> إسحق أو النفس، 7: 61.

beauty of our outer appearance; as we are committed to care for what is honorable before God and men (see 2 Corinthians 5: 11) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

## 5- GOD, THE CREATOR, IS THE SAVIOR:

*“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (8)*

Realizing that the secret of his salvation is the name of the Lord, the psalmist did not say: “I broke the snare and escaped”, but said: *“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth”*.

- ❖ Be sure that the snare will be broken; ... I wish we are not enslaved to the present life which will, eventually, be no more; so that, when the snare is broken we may rejoice and say: *“The snare is broken, and we escaped”*. And lest you assume that this was realized by your own strength, Remember by whom you were saved; For if you are proud, you will fall into the snare. ... Say: Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Do not you see what kind of Leader you have? It is the King; the Creator of all! He, who has created such a great multitude of things by His Word!

Be of courage, Let your hearts not fail! It is befitting of you, beloved brethren, to awake, and persist on your strife!

I wish we do not slumber, but rather polish our weapon, strengthen our wills, strive well without diversion, until we reach the glorious conquest, and enjoy the kingdom of heaven with a great glory. Let this be the good portion of us all, Thanks for the grace and the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom the glory, and the authority, to the age of ages, Amen<sup>3</sup>!

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ Let us then beware, and give thanks to Him who has the heaven as His throne, and the earth as His footstool (Isaiah 66: 1), who is served by the whole creation. Starting from the previously

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 4 على نشيط الاناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار .

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 124 (123).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 124.

mentioned example.... Let us give thanks to the Father who had mercy on the world, and did not spare His only-begotten Son, and sent Him a Savior of the world (Romans 8: 32; John 4: 14), and a Redeemer for our souls. ... Let us give thanks to the Son who delivered Himself and obeyed even to death, death on the cross (Philippians 2: 8), for our sake, we humans. ... And let us give thanks to the Holy Spirit, the life-Giver; who spoke in the law, the prophets, and the teachers; who instructed the repentant Peter to go to Cornelius (Acts 10: 19-20), glorified him, and gave him the authority to raise the dead, like Tabitha (Acts 9: 40); ... The Lord who always precedes by breaking the snares of the enemy for those who call Him, according to the prophecy of the prophet David, saying: *“The snare is broken, and we escaped; Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made the heaven and the earth”* (7, 8).

**(St. Parsenovius)**

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 124

### YOU ARE MINE, WITH, AND IN ME

- ❖ How can I describe my adversary enemy?  
Is he like an earthquake, intending to destroy me?  
And to bury me alive under earth?  
Is he a torrent flood and a terrifying overwhelming current?  
Who intend to swallow me and to sweep me to the deep?  
Is he like a roaring lion, who walks around to devour me?  
Is he like a crafty dangerous fowler?  
Who sets for me hidden snares and nets?  
To catch me like a helpless bird?  
No, he is far more dangerous than all that!  
There is no fitting analogy for him!
- ❖ But my God is my Savior  
He is mine, with me; and I am always in His presence.  
Who dares to come near me?  
He is in my depths.; setting His kingdom inside me!  
He turns my dust into a high heaven.
- ❖ Let the earthquakes move; whatever their strength is!  
They have no authority on me!  
How can they burry me, when I am alive by the Creator of heaven  
and earth?
- ❖ Let the heavy rain pour;  
They cannot drown me!  
By the cross, I can be like Moses who crossed over the Red Sea!  
And the devil and his hosts will drown in the lake of raging fire!  
I will sing together with Jonah the prophet, saying:  
“You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God”
- ❖ Like a flood, death poured over my Savior!  
The enemy thought that he can finish Him off by death!  
Yet, by death, my Savior put death to death!  
And death turned into a brook from which my Savior drank, and  
raised His head!  
He is risen, and raised me together with Him!  
What can the enemy do with his earthquakes and flood?!

- ❖ Let the enemy come like a roaring lion to devour me!  
Can he confront the Lion of the tribe of Judah?!
- ❖ Let the enemy set his snares!  
Even if I am as helpless as a little bird;  
Yet my savior is inside me;  
By His Holy Spirit He sets me forth to His heavens;  
All the snares of the enemy will be broken; and I will escape;
- ❖ By You, O my savior, my soul will never worry;  
By You, I will enjoy unceasing conquests!  
By You, the enemy will be crushed under the feet of Your church!  
By You, even if I am weak, I shall be strong.  
My hope in You will never fail, O Maker of heavens and earth!

## PSALM 125

### THE ETERNAL DWELLING PLACE

This second section of the psalms of Ascents did not end by setting the tabernacle of meeting, which was built according to the likeness of heaven, for God to dwell among His people; But the psalmist, while singing the psalms of Ascents, sees the Lord dwelling around His people *“from this time forth and forever”* . He sees eternity before his eyes, where *“those, who are upright in their hearts”* live in the Higher Jerusalem; Whereas those who *“turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them away with the workers of iniquity”*.

Reaching Jerusalem, the believer, seeing himself in the holy city built on a high hill, surrounded by mountains, he would realize the following spiritual facts:

(1) God surrounds His church, embraces her, and protects every one of her members, as long as he stays within her walls. He who abides to the true spiritual church membership, God will surround him like mountains; He will never fear storms or hurricanes; for he is hidden in God, the Well-established Mountain.

(2) The believer who seems like Jerusalem, built over a high till, will stay well-established like a rock, not to be moved forever; For his faith is in His Christ, the Rock of Ages;... All that would never be shaken, for God is its Builder on the Rock.

(3) The believer sees the only secure way, the land of peace with God, where there is the true freedom on an eternal level! He also sees twisted ways where thieves hide, to rob and to kill; he who take them will bring on himself a curse as an evil doer.

<b>1- An eternal dwelling place</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- The Lord surrounds His people</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3- The good and free citizens</b>	<b>3 - 4</b>
<b>4- Separating the wicked from the good</b>	<b>5</b>

#### **1- AN ETERNAL DWELLING PLACE:**

A Song of Ascents

*“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever”* (1)

Having liberated them from the bondage of Pharaoh, and brought them forth under the leadership of Moses and Aaron to the wilderness; God, their true Liberator, commanded Moses to build the tabernacle of meeting, as His dwelling place among His people.

It is a symbolic portrait of what we have enjoyed, after He, by His cross presented to us freedom, and granted us the authority over the devil and all the hosts of darkness; As He prepared us to enter into the Higher Jerusalem, where we live, together with our Heavenly Liberator forever.

By His amazing cross He opened before us the gate of hope, and presented to us new possibilities to lean on Him, to become truly holy unmovable mountains; having our Savior dwelling in our depths.

The psalmist calls the people of God "*those who trust in the Lord*" (1). During the period of captivity, Mount Zion was subjected to devastation, and became deserted, yet temporarily; to resume its beauty after the captivity. So, will those who trust in the Lord, they may go through temptations and sorrows; but would soon be eternally glorified. The apostle Paul says: "*You have to come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven to God*" (Hebrew 12: 22-23).

❖ "*Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion*" (1). What is the significance of adding the word "*Zion*"? I mean, instead of just saying: "like a mountain". Why is he referring to a specific mountain? ... It is to teach us not to fall down under any tribulation, nor be drown in it, but to trust in God with hope, and endure everything nobly; whether it is wars, dissensions, or dangers. That mountain "*Zion*" has been once deserted and without inhabitants; then resumed its past prosperity, and restored its old popularity through the pouring of inhabitants and the happening of miracles. So it is with the noble person; He would never collapse, even if he suffers limitless troubles.

Therefore, do not expect a life without dangers; because he who seeks a comfortable life is not like him who sails through a storm. The former will become lifeless, soft, and corrupt; whereas the later struggles against a multitude of obstacles above and below the surface, confronts gales of huge caliber, and several other

unpredictable sea dangers; and by going safely through all of them, he will come out with more strength. In other words, you have come to this life, not to live in slothfulness, nor to lead a lukewarm life, or to escape from confronting troubles; but rather to become worthy of commendation through suffering. So, do not seek relaxation, nor a life of luxury, as that would be a sign of unworthy lazy and unreasonable life ... But instead, seek not to fall into temptation, in case you confront it. Anyway, do not get depressed, terrified, or horrified, but do everything to become more worthy of commendation.

Do not you notice the courageous soldiers, how once they hear the horn, they concentrate their sight, on memories of past brave actions by their predecessors?! ... You have a brave Leader, capable of going through any risk, and of solving any kind of problem. Everything is His: heaven, earth, sea, beasts, and fire! He can easily alter every situation!

Do not you hear the saying of the inspired author: "*Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion*"? He said "*like a mountain*" to refer to the feature of hope in God, which is undefeatable, well-established, and secure; just like being unable to wipe out a mountain or to destroy it, whatever weapon you may use; So it is with attacking him who trust in the Lord; he will go back empty-handed. Trusting in the Lord is more secure than a mountain!

*"Which cannot be moved, but abides forever"* (1)

What then? Didn't the three young men and Daniel move? ... It is not that way! ... Although taken away from their city to captivity; yet. Under no circumstances, they ever moved! Although they were going through a multitude of difficult situations, yet they were as though standing on a rock in a calm harbor; they did not suffer any harm! ... Therefore, do not refer to certain situations as examples of being shaken; but take into consideration that shaking is a kind of movement, implying a loss of soul, and a fall from virtue ... Those who manage to go safely through them, nothing can shake them or make them sin: no lust, nor pleasure, sorrow, struggle, or danger; As all these will eventually pass and vanish<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 125.

❖ How amazing, that a single person (**St. Anthony the Great**) living alone in such a wilderness, had no fear, neither of the demons who attacked him, nor the ferocity of the multitude of wild beasts and reptiles; but, as it is written: “*He trusted in the Lord, and became like Mount Zion*” (1), in an unmoving, nor disturbed faith; until the demons fled away from him, and the wild beasts, as it is written, “were at peace with him” (Job 5: 23).

The devil, as David the prophet says in his psalm, was watching **St. Anthony**, “*gnashing at him with his teeth*” (Psalm 35: 16). But the blessed saint, comforted by the Savior, stayed safe of his various tricks and snares. While watching the night, the devil released on St. Anthony the wild beasts of the wilderness, each threatening to devour him. Discovering the trick of the enemy, he used to say to them: [You have no authority over me. I am ready to be devoured by you, if you so intend; Yet, if you are sent by the devil, go away from me, for I am the servant of Christ. Before these words they all fled away, as though struck by whips<sup>1</sup>!

❖ They abide like Mount Zion, even if tens of thousands of temptations were stirred up against them; They are founded on a Rock; “*that Rock was Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10: 14; Matthew 7: 25)<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Athanasius the apostolic**)

❖ All those who intend to stay in pride, belong to Babylon; Whereas those who stay in humility, belong to Jerusalem. The saints and the holy books blessed and are still blessing the humble by the words: “Bless, O Lord the good, and those with upright hearts”<sup>3</sup>

(**Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle**)

❖ This psalm psalms of Ascents, teaches us, while ascending and lifting our minds to the Lord our God, in sweet love and piety; not to concentrate our sight on those of authority in this world, whose happiness is vain and unsettled, who cling to nothing but pride, and, because their hearts deny God’s grace, they are fruitless!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Vita Antonii*, 52. فردوس الآباء، ص 38.

<sup>2</sup> *Paschal Letters*, 11: 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Sermon 48*: 5.

<sup>4</sup> *On Ps. 125 (124)*.

❖ Why is it then, that those dwelling in Zion will abide forever? but because there is another Jerusalem, for which they long! the mother of us all, for whose sake we moan and sigh in our journey, until we reach it ... The eternal Jerusalem, our mother, that is in heaven<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

## 2- THE LORD SURROUNDS HIS PEOPLE:

*“As the mountains surround Jerusalem, the Lord surrounds His people, from this time forth and forever” (2)*

He likens the believers to the steady mountains, on account of that they are never moved by temptations, not because of their own strength, but because God surrounds His people.

They are holy mountains because the Holy One surrounds His people, and lighted, because He is the secret of their enlightenment, strength, and goodness.

❖ What is this Jerusalem, surrounded by mountains?

Is it a great thing for a city to be surrounded by mountains?

Don't you know what these mountains are?

These mountains are different from the mountains we love. These high mountains are those who preach the truth, whether they are angels, apostles, or prophets. They surround Jerusalem as though a stronghold around it. The Holy Book often talks about these beautiful mountains ... It does not say that their peace is their own, nor that they make peace, or provide peace, but that they receive peace; So that you may lift your eyes up to the mountains for the sake of the peace they give from the Lord, who made heaven and earth ... And lest you may linger in these mountains, he added momentarily: *“And the Lord surrounds His people” (2)*, so that your hope may not be in the mountains, but in Him who enlightens the mountains. As, when He dwells in the mountains, namely, in the saints, He, Himself, will be around His people, and protects them by spiritual strongholds, so that they would not be moved forever!

Love these mountains where the Lord is; so that they may love you, if you do not put your hope on them ... If you wish to be loved

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 125 (124).

by the good mountains, do not put your trust even in the good mountains<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ He says that even though the mountains give it strength, yet it needs a protection from God to make it stronger.

“*The Lord surrounds His people*” means: Do not trust in the chains of mountains<sup>2</sup>!

(St. John Chrysostom)

### 3- THE GOOD AND FREE CITIZENS:

***“For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous; lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity” (3)***

God surrounds His people to sanctify, enlighten, establish, and protect them from falling under temptation; Yet, although He does not, altogether, keep temptations away, in order that they would be justified, crowned, and enjoy maturity and continuous growth. but God will definitely not allow the enemy to aim a knock-out to His people.

- ❖ God may sometimes allow the scepter of the wicked to strike the righteous; Yet He will never let it rest for long on them. ... What is the scepter of the wicked, but their strength, authority, and harm.
- ❖ The Lord would not let His people live in comfort for long, lest they may turn slothful concerning their salvation; He may sometimes allow for temptations; which have to come, like labor to the pregnant; ... Yet, even if He allows for temptations, He will never forsake His people, lest they may fail. “*God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape*” (1 Corinthians 10: 12).
- ❖ What he means is: God will not allow the wicked to have authority on the portion of the righteous; And if He allows it for sometime, it would be for the sake of reforming, warning, and chastising them... “*lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity*”. Everything happens for this goal, to let His people become more

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 125 (124).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 125 (124).

zealous, and for their souls to become better through reforming them by temptations<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

- ❖ In the present time, the righteous may be suffering indeed, within a certain limit. If the God of heaven and earth, by whom all things were created, has served the unworthy, presented Himself as their Physician, and sought mercy for the sake of His persecutors; How much would it be befitting of man not to refrain from serving a wicked master! .... The better may serve the worse! ... But it will only be for some time<sup>2</sup>!
- ❖ The scepter of wickedness may come upon the portion of the righteous, but will not stay there forever. The time will come when Christ will appear in His glory, and all the nations will be gathered before Him (Matthew 25: 32-33). There, you will see many servants among the flock of sheep on His right hand, and many masters among the goats. As not all the servants are good, and not all the masters are wicked, It is befitting of the good servants who happen to be serving wicked masters, to endure them for some time<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

***“Do good, O Lord, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts” (4)***

Everyone needs prayers for their sake, even the good, for whose sake, and for that of those who are upright in their hearts, the psalmist pray to the Lord to support them in the moments of temptation and affliction, lest they go astray.

As long as man is still in the body, whatever be his spiritual exaltation, his brethren pray for his sake, until he crosses over this world in peace.

**St. John Chrysostom** distinguishes between the good and the upright in their hearts, on the one hand, and the workers of iniquity, on the other. He sees the good in the simple and the uncomplicated; while the workers of iniquity are crooked and complicated. The good

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 125 (124).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 125 (124).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 125 (124).

utter the truth without cheating, deception, or hypocrisy; ... What is on their outer countenance conform with what is inside them.

The saint often repeats this view: that the goodness bears its reward inside it; And evil, bears its punishment.

- ❖ Those who are upright in their hearts, who follow, or intend to follow the will of God, and not their own, will let God go before them, follow Him; and recognize His goodness in everything, whether in chastisement, comfort, training, crowning, purification, or enlightenment; as the apostle says: “*We know that all things work together to good for those who love God*” (Romans 8: 28)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

#### **4- SEPARATING THE WICKED FROM THE GOOD:**

*“As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, The Lord shall lead them away with the workers of iniquity; Peace be upon Israel”* (5)

To whom does he refer by “*such as turn aside to their crooked ways*”? But to those who divert to doubt faith, the unbelieving apostates? As according to the apostle: “*But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, ... shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*” (Revelations 21: 8); And as is written: “*I will surely take away their harvest*” (Jeremiah 8: 13); as when the dry branches are taken away from the vine, or the thorns and thistles from the good land, to be consumed by fire.

- ❖ Those who forfeit their works, find comfort in the present pleasures, and do not believe in the punishments to come. How about those who are upright in their hearts, those who do not go astray? ... Being children, What shall we acquire? What will be our inheritance? What is our city? How is it called? ... It is called “peace”! ... Peace in Christ ...

What is this inheritance called, but “Peace”?... You should know that whoever does not like peace, will have no inheritance! ... Those who split unity, do not like peace ... Peace is the portion of the righteous, the portion of the heirs. of the children! ... And as Christ, the Son of God, is Peace; He will therefore, come, to gather what is

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 125 (124).

His, and to separate them from the wicked. ... From which wicked? Those who hate Jerusalem; who intend to tear the unity apart; who do not believe in peace, and who preach vain peace to the people, when they do not acquire it themselves<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Yes, the Lord is Good, yet He is also Just! And one of the features of the Just, is to reward according to worthiness ... The Lord is merciful, yet He is also Just!. The Lord loves mercy and justice<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

- ❖ God does not make crookedness that causes destruction; But He exposes those who do. ... It is written: “*As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them away*” (5). It is not the Lord who leads them away against their will, together with the workers of iniquity; but will expose those who divert from the way after following the lead of such people<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

- ❖ Before applying the punishment, the iniquity will have its own punishment in it; And before getting the reward, the virtue will also have its own reward in it. ... Before anything else, What would be more evil than sin itself?! ... For this reason, the apostle Paul, referring to some males who dedicate the prime of their youth to practicing what is against the laws of nature; says that this behavior bears, in itself the heaviest of punishment, even before punishment is applied! ... “*men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due*” (Romans 1: 27); calling their abominable behavior a punishment for the sin<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 125 (124).

<sup>2</sup> حفظ الوصايا والتعليم: 4 ترجمة يوسف شماس المخلصي.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on Ecclesiastes 212: 12.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 125.

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 125

### A CITIZEN IN THE LAND OF THE FREE

- ❖ Having liberated the old people;  
You have set for them the tabernacle of meeting, as a shadow of  
the eternal city of the free;  
The people moved from working brick,  
From the mire and straw,  
To worship God in the tabernacle of meeting, filled with splendor.  
You intended to draw their hearts to the city of their heavenly  
Father;  
The free heavenly Jerusalem!;  
Where they dwell as citizens and household;  
together with their Father, the True Liberator, who defend them.  
To be partners with the heavenly hosts;  
Who have never tasted the humiliation of bondage.
- ❖ In Your exalted love and care.,  
You open before me the gate of joyful hope;  
And grant me the trust and surety in Your compassionate  
fatherhood;  
Leaning on Your chest,  
I become like a huge unmovable mountain;  
Whom no enemy can destroy, whatever his possibilities and  
weapons are.  
No; he cannot even move my feelings;  
Nor approach me; For You are my strength and weapon.  
He will be terrified when he sees You in my depths.  
Dwelling in me, and I in You.  
O, You, the amazing Rock!
- ❖ By Your exalted love, You set out of us, enlightened, and  
unmovable mountains.  
The secret of our enlightenment, and of our perseverance is that  
You surround us;  
And protect us against the destructive temptations;  
Yet, by Your exalted care, and divine wisdom, You may allow for  
afflictions;

You may allow them, as much as of benefit for our growth and maturation; and for a limited time!

Until we are justified and crowned before you;

How amazing is Your love! Together with the temptation, You give the way out!

Together with each temptation, Your grace conforms me;

To be prepared to become a living stone, fit for the heavenly temple.

The strikes of the enemy will not destroy me;

But, through Your grace, they will give me more splendor.

❖ Let the wicked be as arrogant as they wish;

I am hidden in You;

You are preoccupied with my eternal glory.

They strike me for some time; But You will glorify me forever.

❖ Amid my affliction, my brethren support me with their prayers;

And I, in turn, will never cease to pray for the sake of those afflicted!

When shall we gather together as citizens in our eternal Father's house?

Where there is no trace of the devil and his hosts?

Nor of the wicked persisting on their evil.

There, I shall see my city that, for which I longed?

There, I shall discover how much I was preoccupied with my eternal glory!

There, I shall encounter You, O Father of all believers, and Savior of all!

## *PSALM 126*

# **A HOLY EXULTANT WORSHIP OR A HEAVENY JOY, TOGETHER WITH A RIVER OF HOLY TEARS**

This psalm is considered the beginning of the third group, corresponding to the Book of Leviticus, the book concerning the sanctification. If God is my only Savior who raises me up from the grave and death (the Book of Genesis); Who grants me the inner freedom from the devil, the tyrant, and from sin (the Book of Exodus); The present book is a call for us to enjoy the holy life as an icon of the Holy Savior. This holiness is realized through the heavenly High Priest, who accepted to deliver Himself as a Sacrifice; and presented to us commandments concerning the purifications, realized through obedience to Him, He who is capable of realizing them in us. That is why this psalm came to reveal to us the essence of the worship to God; which is entering into a holy exultant worship, to turn our life to a deposit of the heavenly life; and for our days to become like a heavenly wedding, whose secret is hope for what we shall get, despite what we suffer here of troubles and temptations.

The three psalms, corresponding to the book of Leviticus, came to reveal the feature of the heavenly church worship:

1- Psalm 126: A holy exultant worship

2- Psalm 127: A worship to God, the Builder and the Keeper of the house.

3- Psalm 128: The worship of the blessed household.

The present psalm is like unceasing cry-outs of joy! As the believers are liberated from the captivity of sin, their hearts are lifted up as though to heaven in purity and holiness, exultant in the Holy One working in them, and experiencing the holy heavenly life, filled with unutterable joy.

This psalm is also considered a national lamentation, which, in its form is like psalm 85, and in its style is like Jeremiah 31; when the believers recall the salvation help of the Lord, having brought

them over from captivity, and rescued them from tribulation and famine. Such was the condition of some of those returning from captivity to Jerusalem; they were like someone in a dream, because of the intensity of joy; as it was said to the people: “*Do not mourn nor weep, ... For the joy of the Lord is your strength*” (Nehemiah 8: 10). This is a simplified portrait of how we, ourselves, shall be when we set forth to paradise.

❖ This psalm speaking to those persistent on going ahead with their spiritual journey to God, suits us fine to help us in the time of grief and depression; as this world is no doubt the valley of tears, in which man plants while weeping. But it supports you to hold fast to your faith.

This psalm refers to the seeds which we sow now, which are “*the good works prepared and planned beforehand by the power of the Spirit of God, that each of us should walk in them*” (Ephesians 2: 10), amid the labors of this disturbed life.

He who knows how to practice the work of God in this world – the valley of tears and labors, will exult like the diligent farmer who sows the seeds even during the death of winter, and no cold wind nor severe weather can keep him from doing that! ... That is how we should look at the labors of this life. The devil puts the pleasures on our way, intending to distract and turn us aside from the good works for which we are created to do. Listen to what the psalmist says: “*Those who continuously go forth weeping...*”; Each of us, indeed, can find some reason for weeping; Yet we are committed to go on walking, doing the good works on our way.

How miserable we would be if we are called to work diligently, just to weep, without watching the fruit of our work! How miserable we would be if we find no one to wipe out our tears.

But we surely know that the Holy Spirit works in us to keep on sowing amid our tears; promising us through the psalmist, that we shall return amazed by joy! bearing the fruit of our work as an offering for Him<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

**1- An exultant joyful life**  
**2- A divine joyful work**

**1**  
**2 – 3**

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps. 2.*

**1- AN EXULTANT JOYFUL LIFE:**

A Song of Ascents

***“When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream” (1)***

Reaching the city of Jerusalem, the believers count themselves like those who dream; not believing that they were liberated from captivity, and set forth toward their home; namely toward the High Heavenly Jerusalem, our mother.

Nothing would bring gladness to man’s soul like being liberated from the captivity of sin, to live in the glorious liberty of the children of God, with no authority of the sin, nor of the devil on him. He would live like an angel of the Lord, as though in a dream, without the authority of the old man on him, nor of the chains of the circumstances of this world to bind him.

**St. John Chrysostom** tells us about two kinds of captivity: one good, and the other evil. The first, according to the apostle Paul: *“bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10: 5); And the second, being a captive under a cruel and violent mistress; namely, sin: *“those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins”* (2 Timothy 3: 6).

❖ I beg you to avoid with great awareness, coming under her authority, to fight against her, and never to reconcile with her; For, once we are liberated from her, we shall be free. Above everything else, like those people who became in comfort after being liberated from the savage enemy; We should rejoice and exult when we become liberated from sin, and should preserve this eternal joy, instead of corrupting and distorting it by being preoccupied with the same iniquities<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Think about how we became captives in the first place; having become *“sold under sin”* (Romans 7: 14) .... Who has sold us? ... We, ourselves by accepting the deceiver. We sold ourselves, yet we cannot redeem ourselves! ... We sold ourselves because we

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 126.

accepted the sin; and we shall be saved by the faith of righteousness. ... The Righteous was delivered to save us ... has shed His blood; ... He who did not become righteous, but was so born<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ We grieve on our present portion, and are in comfort by hope. Once the present cross over, Instead of grief, we shall have eternal joy, when we need no more comfort, being not prone to any calamity. Hence he says: “*like*”, a term which does not always imply analogy, but sometimes refers to an actual fact, as it does here ... That is why we should walk in Christ, and joyfully praise; praise like those in comfort; for He walks before you, He who commands you to follow Him<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## 2- A DIVINE JOYFUL WORK:

***“Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them” (2)***

What a marvelous psalm! That joyful return to Jerusalem was nothing but a deposit of the return to the heavenly home!

Those who returned home from captivity expressed their joy by praising; and their mouths were filled with spiritual joyful laughter. They praised God who, by His mighty arm, brought them back to the promised land. Cyrus, the king of Persia and Made – who represents the Gentiles – had to confess and recognize that mighty arm and hand of the Lord; he, about whom Isaiah prophesied more than fifty years before his birth.

They returned shouting for joy to rebuild the temple, and to repair the walls of their city; as a deposit of what they will gain on an eternal heavenly level.

- ❖ This mouth, O brethren, given to us by the Lord, ... we should fill it with spiritual joy and praise, and not with food, drink, or vain talk.
- ❖ This mouth, O brethren, how could it be said that “*It was filled with laughter*”; when it is so filled with food and drink that we

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 126 (125).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 126 (125).

cannot even talk.... But we have another mouth inside, namely, in our heart; which, if it produces evil, it defiles us; and if goodness, it purifies us. ... About such a mouth you hear when the gospel is read ... The Lord seeks our inner purity, which, if acquired, the outside needs to be purified as well. He says: “*First cleanse the inside of the cup; ... that the outside may also be clean*” (see Mathew 23: 26)<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ Keep the mouth of your hearts from evil, to become innocent. The tongue of your body will become innocent; so will be its hands, feet, eyes, and ears; all your members will serve with innocence; on account of that the righteous leader is your heart. “*Then they said among the nations: ‘The Lord has done great things for them’*” (2)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

The nations will marvel about how our hearts are filled with joy, and our tongues with praise, amid the troubles and temptations of this life. They will have to testify that this could not be a natural thing to happen; but that it has to be the work of God in us.

- ❖ Our mouths will be filled with joy, if we do not utter vain talk, nor slander one another; or say filthy words; but our tongues will be filled with singing through studying the Words of God, through wisdom and thanksgiving to Him; on account of that He set us free of the house of bondage.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad”* (3)

- ❖ Repetition here is not without meaning; but confirms the great joy that took place in them<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

When we offer a holy worship to the Lord, those on the outside would stand in awe before such a great joy dwelling on us.

- ❖ Exultation on the liberation from captivity is not a simple contribution for being transformed to the better.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 126 (125).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 126 (125).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 126.

Asking who would not rejoice for such a thing, the psalmist has in mind when their grandfathers were liberated from the land of Egypt, and were transformed from horrible servitude to freedom; How, as a result of their denying murmur, protest, and complaint, amid the blessings they have got, they remained in their grief... This is not befitting of us; they complained; whereas we rejoice and exult... not only because of our liberation from a calamity, but because everyone of us will realize the extent of God's care for us<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Cyrus, himself, as an example; has set free those who were under his authority, without being asked by them; but it was God who "*stirred up his spirit*" (Ezra 1: 1). And he did not only set them free, but gave them "*silver, gold, livestock, etc.*" (Ezra 1: 1-4)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Take into consideration, brethren, that, although Zion does not so says nowadays among the nations, Yet, men, all over the world, run toward the church<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### 3- JOYFUL FOUNTAINS:

*"Restore our fortunes, O Lord, as the streams of the South"*

(4)

It is a cry-out by the psalmist to God; seeing that many of the Jews have chosen to stay in Babylon, rejecting the freedom from its captivity.

When Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jewish captives to return to Jerusalem, Only 50,000 did return, while the rest chose to remain in Babylon, on account of that they managed to have economic interests there, and counted their return to Jerusalem as substantial material loss. .... Exulted for the sake of those who did return, the Psalmist keeps on crying out to the Lord, until the last captive returns.

Likewise with us; Together with the exultation of our souls for God's work in us; Our souls will not find comfort, until all humanity come to enjoy salvation, and taste the joy of the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 126.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 126.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 126 (125).

The psalmist likens the church to the streams of the south, inundated with the water of the divine grace; and gather together those who are saved, or liberated from the captivity of sin. The way the heavy rain create a torrent of water in the dry brooks in 'Negeb', south of Jerusalem, So the Lord renews our life.

In the Old Testament, the south wind used to refer to the warmth of the Spirit, or to the work of the fiery Holy Spirit; Whereas the north wind used to refer to the coolness of the spirit by evil.

- ❖ This psalm means that the rain pours after the warm south wind blows, as a reference to the Holy Spirit sought by the heart, that became hardened like snow, But once the warmth of the Holy Spirit dissolves the snow accumulated in it, tears will flow like rain from the eyes.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Those who sow in tears, shall reap in joy” (5)***

The believer stands in awe, his heart gets filled with heavenly joy, and feels as though heaven has occupied his heart, or that his heart is lifted up to heaven. Tears flow into his depths, not to dampen or quench his joy, but to water and nourish it. It is as though the heart turns into an exultant heaven, or into a river of tears to water the city of God inside it.

While the laughter of the world contradicts with tears; the spiritual laughter is in harmony with the spiritual tears, both of them work together like two siblings.

Our Christ, the true Source of joy, leads us on the way of tears, to bring us forth to His heavenly joy. He cried over Lazarus, as well as over Jerusalem, and in the garden of Gethsemane. And He promised us: *“You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy”* (John 16: 20). This is the harvest of the holy tears.

David *“All night made his bed swim, and drenched his couch with his tears”*(Psalm 6: 6). And Jeremiah the prophet says: *“Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I may weep day and night”* (Jeremiah 9: 1).

According to **St. Gregory the Nezianzen**: [These tears are rivers whose water shall make glad the city of God]. And according to St. Augustine: [These tears water the seed of faith in our hearts].

❖ We are committed first to labor and strive before we seek comfort. As this applies to every thing in life, the psalmist often says that sowing precedes reaping; And like the sower who has to exert labor, sweat, and tears; So is he, who practices virtue. As nothing is more unbefitting of man like slothfulness, God made the way narrow and difficult, not only in practicing virtue, but in all aspects of life, The sower, the builder, the traveler, the carpenter, the artist; and everyone who intends to earn a profit, is committed to present labor and effort. And as much as the seeds need rain, so we need tears; And as much as the soil needs plowing, so the souls needs labor and even troubles; Like a shovel that plows the soil to soften it, and to rid it of harmful weeds. The soil, not treated with labor shall never produce anything good<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Oh, Such a life full of tears! ... Let us sow! ... What should we sow? ... The good works ... The works of mercy are our seeds. That is what the apostle means by saying: “*Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart*” (Galatians 6: 9).

No field is wider than Christ to sow in! Your soil is the church, Sow in it as much as you can! ... But, unless you have the good will, all what you do would be counted as nothing! ... Do not lose heart if you have nothing much to give, as long as you have the good will!

What do you sow? Mercy!... And what do you reap? Peace!

Did the angels say: “*Peace on earth (for the rich)*”? ... No, they said: “*Peace on earth for those with good will*” (see Luke 2: 14). Zaccchaeus had good will; as well as great love (Luke 19: 8) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*Weeping may linger for a night, but joy comes with the morning*” (Psalm 30: 5). To understand what I am saying, remember the passions of the Lord ... In the evening the disciples wept as they saw the Lord hanged on the cross; But in the morning (of Sunday), they shouted for joy to see Him risen ... and ran around to give one

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 126.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 126 (125).

another the good news of His resurrection ... They have seen the Lord!

To speak in general, the evening refers to life in this world; those who weep will be comforted with the morning: *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”* (Matthew 5: 4); and: *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh”* (Luke 6: 21). Those whose life approaches its end, is close to its sunset, and weep with tears for their sins, will rejoice with the coming of the true morning ... For *“Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy”* (Psalm 126: 5), in the future<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

❖ Concerning food, there are several offenses attached to it. Some do not care for what is offered to the idols; whereas others, trained themselves to abstain from eating it; yet they condemn those who do. Men deal with food in several ways, because of their ignorance of the reasonable basis on which to eat or to abstain from eating it.

We abstain from eating meat or drinking wine while fasting, not despising them as something unclean, but hoping for a reward; Namely, we disregard certain material things, to enjoy later on, the mental spiritual banquet. *“Sowing now in tears, to reap (in the coming world) in joy”* (Psalm 126: 5)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

❖ Let us sow now in tears to reap in joy. Let us show ourselves like the people of Nineveh, and not like those of Sodom (Genesis 19: 17, 23). ... Let us mend our ways, lest we perish. ... Let us listen to the preaching of Jonah, to save ourselves from the fire and brimstone<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Gregory the Nezenzian)**

❖ Many believe that the phrase, saying: *“O, My people, what have I done to you, And how have I wearied you?”* (Micah 6: 3), is more fitting to be referred to the Lord Jesus; who had no fear to be tried by the unjust; but entered into trial by His own free will;. But, as the Father have committed all judgment, not to someone weak, but

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<sup>1</sup> مز 30.

<sup>2</sup> مقال 3 : 27.

<sup>3</sup> On His Father's silence, Oration 16: 14.

to the Son (John 5: 22); what judgment could He suffer?! ... “He is justified when judged” (Psalm 51: 4) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ The sufferings of the present time for the sake of truth, is not worthy to be compared with the glory prepared for those who strive in good works (See Romans 8: 18). And as the sheaves of joy (like the sheaves of wheat) are the portion of those who sow in tears; So joy will be the portion of those who suffer for the sake of God. Like the bread acquired by much sweat tastes sweet in the mouth of the sower; so is the sweetness of the works for the sake of righteousness in the hearts of those who acquired the knowledge of Christ<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)**

- ❖ I wish, O brethren, no one deceives himself; There is no time for laughter in this world! ... I know that everyone wants to be joyful, but not everyone seek joy in the location befitting of him<sup>3</sup>!
- ❖ “*Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy*” (5). Someone may say: It would be unfair to weep; and it is so difficult to endure sorrow. If such is said among you, Just think of the great beauty of the fields, green with the crop sown with the perseverance of the heart!  
And at the same time, it is befitting of us not to shed tears on any earthly losses, but we should rather shed them longing for the eternal life<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ If we feel sad, and sigh while thinking of our weaknesses, the multitude of temptations, the crawling of sins, and the resistance of destructive lusts, that stir up against the good thoughts; ... We would be qualified to exult forever in the time of joy, comfort, happiness, and the eternal life to come<sup>5</sup>.

**(St. Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Peayer of Job and David, 4 8: 29.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ascetic Homilies, 4.*

<sup>3</sup> *Sermon 215: 2*

<sup>4</sup> *Sermon 162: 2*

<sup>5</sup> *Sermo 126: 5.*

- ❖ When you see a soul that sows good in tears, prepared to reap with cries of joy (5); That sowed field has a king – the Logos – who leads, judges, and reigns<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

- ❖ For those who intend to work with diligence, and not with slothfulness; there will be a happy life; and they will never miss the tranquility<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great)

*“He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (6)*

**St. Augustine** sees in the parable of the Good Samaritan who symbolizes the Lord Christ, being the Good Guardian; an actual portrait of the believer who, while coming down from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead (Luke 10: 30), etc.). The Good Samaritan had compassion on him, brought him to an inn (most probably in Jerusalem), and took care of him.

**St. Augustine** asks us not to get disturbed because of our coming down and falling among the thieves, as our Christ – the Good Samaritan -- intends to carry us and to bring us up to His holy church. In coming up together with Him, we shall forget about our wounds, and our souls will exult, praise, give thanks, grow spiritually, and have comfort in the heavenly inn!

- ❖ I wish we do not fail to sow our seed amid the troubles. As, if we sow in tears, we shall reap in joy ... If we have come down, and were wounded, We shall go up together (with the Good Samaritan), sing, and proceed until we reach our final destination – the Heavenly Jerusalem)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Christ does not lie when He says on the tongue of His apostle: *“What man sows, he will reap”*. With God’s help, let us always sow in the field of our hearts by reading, praying, and good works; by which we shall come to reap righteousness and mercy, in the

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Ecclesiastes 145: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Luke, Homily 43.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 126 (125).

day to come, the day of judgment; when, in us, what is written will be realized: “*He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seeds for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him*” (6). Through this joy, you will be led by the Good Lord, who is, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit; lives and reigns with no end<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

- ❖ He is not talking about crops, but about regular life, teaching the listeners not to feel sorrow in temptations. Like the sower who feels no sorrow, carrying such a heavy load of seeds, for he looks forward to the great crop he will eventually reap; So he is who passes through temptation, he should not feel its heavy load, as the anticipation of the crop would help keep his mind sound. ... So, let us put in our mind to give thanks for the temptation, as well as for being liberated from it<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ Don't you see, O beloved brethren, how great are the benefit of the temptations that dwell on the righteous? Don't you see how great will be the reward of his endurance will? ... This blessed elderly couple, testify for that, by their perseverance and love for one another along the years.... What could be like such bond of love? ...If we all follow this example, no sorrow will ever dwell on us; Nor shall will count the dwelling of afflictions on us, as a sign that God has forsaken us, or has forgotten about us; But we would rather deal with them as being a clear sign of the divine care toward us<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ The grace of God has indeed shone on Joseph, even in his young age; for he had a dream: He and his brothers were binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly his sheave rose and stood upright, while his brothers' sheaves gathered around, and bowed down to his sheave (Genesis 37: 5-8). By that dream, the resurrection of Christ to come, was proclaimed to him; Who, seen in Jerusalem, His eleven disciples and all the saints bowed down before Him; ... Although Joseph's brothers, driven by envy, despised his dream, and denied

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 8: 5.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 126.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Genesis, 32: 24-25.

its actuality, yet they unconsciously interpreted it by saying: “*Are you indeed to reign over us?*” (Genesis 37: 8); As this vision has actually shown the Person of the King to come, “*before whom every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth*” (Philippians 2: 10) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Joseph 2: 7.*

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 126

### HOW GREAT IS YOUR LOVE, O GRANTOR OF HOLINESS!

- ❖ In the midst of the valley of tears;  
You shine on me with the light of Your exalted love;  
You bring me into the deposit of heaven;  
And turn my life into a continuous feast;  
You liberate me every day from the captivity of sin;  
And set me forth to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God.
- ❖ You liberate me from the captivity of the devil;  
And grant me instead the captivity of Your exalted love;  
My eyes will no more concentrate on my sins and weaknesses;  
But on Your exalted works;  
I became as though in a dream;  
No language can ever express what You have granted me;  
How much more would be what You prepare for me in the day  
You will come;  
When I see You face to face?
- ❖ You filled my mouth with spiritual laughter, and my tongue with exultation;  
With exalted love I testify to the greatness of Your works in and with me;  
Joy became for me, food to fill my mouth, and satisfy my soul;  
Eating and drinking no more preoccupy me;  
For You are the Bread coming down from heaven  
Who eats You will know nothing but satisfaction and exultation.
- ❖ The more our depths are filled with Your joy;  
Our feelings are ignited by longing for all to share this joy with us;  
In Your house we rejoice in the holiness pouring in it;  
But when will the day come for all mankind to become holy for You?
- ❖ Amid the exalted joy of the spirit, You grant me the tears of love;  
My tears run like a river that brings gladness to the city of God;  
My tears cry out to You;

O You who has compassion on the sighs of the heart and its hidden tears!

My tears water the hidden garden of my heart;

That it would bear fruits of the work of Your Holy Spirit.

## PSALM 127

# WORSHIPPING GOD, THE BUILDER AND KEEPER OF THE HOUSE

The eyes of the Jews in Jerusalem concentrated on the temple of Solomon, being the house of the Lord, outside which no holy sacrifice, well-received by God, would be offered. The temple was the center of the holy worship in the Old Covenant, and the center of the joy and exultation of believers. The prophet David wished to build it, but he got a promise from God that it will be built by his son. Yet, it was God Himself who actually built it, and who kept the city of Jerusalem that cherished the house.

So is the longing of the believer, that God would work in him, and set a new temple in his heart, as a divine heavenly house, not made by man, but is God's work through His believers. The Lord is the Builder and the Keeper of the spiritual house; He is the Grantor of peace; and the Grantor of children, as a heritage from God.

God calls us to experience of the heavenly life; The essence of worship is to set a spiritual house for the Lord in the heart, to liberate the land of our heart from the curse of producing thorns and thistles, but to become a new heaven exulting in the Lord. God works in the serious souls, not in the slothful and lazy ones; The Lord Himself will always be the One who works in and with us.

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that the talk here reveals what happened when the returning captives to Jerusalem were confronted by a great opposition which caused the building of the temple of God to take many years; to which the Jews referred by saying: "*It has taken 46 years to build this temple*" (John 2: 20). The Jews were not talking here about the initial building it in the days of Solomon, which was built in 20 years; but, according to **St. John Chrysostom**, about its rebuilding after the return from captivity. And still some others believe that rebuilding it began by Herod the Great in the second year of his reign<sup>1</sup>, when the main task was finished in nine and a half

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<sup>1</sup> *Josephus: Antiq. B. 15c. 11 s. 1; b. 20 c. 9 s. 7.*

years; but other repairs and additions were done along several years. At the beginning of the ministry of the Lord, the Jews were then, at the climax of their cherishing the newly built temple.

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|--|--------------|
| <b>1- The Lord is the Builder of the house, and the Keeper of the city</b> | <b>1</b>     |
| <b>2-The Lord, Grantor of comfort</b>                                      | <b>2</b>     |
| <b>3- The Lord, Grantor of mighty children</b>                             | <b>3 – 5</b> |

## **1- THE LORD IS THE BUILDER OF THE HOUSE AND THE GUARDIAN OF THE CITY:**

A Song of Ascents. of Solomon

***“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (1)***

The Word of God incarnated and took the body of man, *“that He may dwell in our hearts through faith”* (Ephesians 3: 17), to take away the curse from our hearts; and instead of the thorns and thistles, the truth may grow (Psalm 85: 11). By His resurrection He builds our souls as a holy temple for Himself, and grants us His Holy Spirit dwelling in it. Indeed, *“He who built all things is God”* (Hebrew 3: 4); and, *“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2: 10).

The Jews boasted the temple built by Solomon, counted it as one of the seven wonders of the world, and the center of the whole earth; as the dwelling place of God among His people. Whereas our Lord Jesus has drawn our attention to the resurrection of His body, proclaiming that, in three days He would raise it up (John 2: 19-22).

Our Lord Jesus does not disregard the labor of the builders; yet He confirms that the building would not be realized without Him; Namely, that without the divine grace, our whole effort would be in vain. The word *“vain”* came three times in this concise psalm.

The Lord is the Creator who, alone, has the ability to build His house in the depths of our hearts; By His care for us, He preserves us as His holy city; and grants us the fruits of His Holy Spirit (the children); ... but not in the life of the slothful and the loose.

Cain built a city in the name of his son; Some intended to build the tower of Babel; and the people of Jericho surrounded their city by strong walls; But, because all those works were not according

to the pleasure of God, they did not hold. Hence the words of the psalmist: “*unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain*” (1). ... The ‘city’ here refers to the congregation of the church, who need the divine care against the various evils, dangerous threats, and wicked men. “*Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain*”; As away from Him, there is no help, protection, or blessing.

According to **St. Augustine**, as the body cannot work without the spirit, man cannot work without the grace of God, who builds the house by us, and guards the city. **St. John Cassian** says that the early fathers monks believed that one of the fundamentals of the spiritual behavior, is that it is impossible for any man to acquire the purity of heart or the perfection of virtue, unless he believes first that all his diligence and labors are not enough for what he seeks, but are vain without the help of God and His grace; who, alone, is the Grantor of goods.

- ❖ However clever and alert you may be in your work, O Shepherd, you cannot refer your success to your good ministry, to your strong personality, or to your diligence in work. The Lord, alone, is the keeper of the souls, and His grace watches over them<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ “*Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain*” (1)... We guard you as stewards of God; Yet, we, as well, wish Him to guard us together with you.

Although we may be your shepherds, Yet we are, as well, under the care of the Great Shepherd – God; We are your fellow sheep.

We may be your teachers; Yet we are your fellow students in the school of the One Great Teacher.

If we wish to be guarded by Him, who humbled Himself for our sake, and was glorified to guard us, Let us then be humble in our turn; Let no one count himself as something; As no one has any thing good, that he did not take from God, who is alone Good.

- ❖ This is the house we should build by virtuous living life; which God builds by helping us to live a virtuous life; as “*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it*” (1)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On ps. 127 (126).

<sup>2</sup> City of God 17: 12.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Concerning Psalm 127: 1: “*Unless the Lord builds the house ...*”, Such a blessing may be beyond the limit of our choice; as the power of God lays the foundation for the builder, and works together with him until the building is consummated, something he cannot achieve on his own.... The same in agriculture: a bountiful crop is the product of what is within the authority of the farmer, as for example his diligence in his work; and what is beyond his authority, depending on the divine care, like convenient weather conditions, enough rain, etc. ... So it will be concerning the good which is sought by the reasonable man; it depends on his works and the effort he exerts through his own choice; as well as on the divine power that supports him, who chooses the exalted life as his goal. We therefore need our own choice, together with the divine support, not only to realize the honor and goodness, but to continue having them<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Notice how we say that nothing happens without His care, and do not say, without His will; As although many things may happen, not according to His will, but nothing happen without His help, by which He cares, divides, distributes the portions, grants, and consummates all that happen<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ From Psalm 127: 1, we learn that, not because it is God who builds, man would sit idle, while God builds the house for him. But, because he diligently works as much as his human possibilities allow, God would take away all the difficulties that he may encounter, and consummates the work with success. Therefore it is befitting of man, in truth and piety, to leave the consummation of his work to God, and not to any human. This way, “*I (Paul) planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase; So then, neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase*” (1 Corinthians 3: 6-7). We can say that it depends, not on the will or the strife of man, but on the mercies of God<sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Sel. Ps. 4; 6. (See Drewery)*

<sup>2</sup> *In Gen. hom 3: 2. (See Drewery)*

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on rom 9: 16.*

❖ Why should we suffer, because we have neither house, nor protection, or human support?! Is it not better for us to dwell in the Builder of our house, and under the protection of the Guardian of our city?!... If David had no place for comfort until he found it in God, how then could we seek comfort outside Him<sup>1</sup>?!

(St. John Saba)

❖ God made all the resistance to the devil within the limit of man's will and freedom; Yet He did not grant man a perfect power by which he can have the authority over his psychological reactions and lusts; Hence it is written: *"Unless God builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain"* (1).

(St. (Abba) Macarius the Great)

❖ The Lord Himself explained the reason for His baptism, saying to John the Baptist: *"Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill the righteousness"* (Matthew 3: 15). Among His multitude of mercies, is His building of the church; After the fathers, and the prophets, the only begotten Son came down and came to be baptized. Here, is revealed, the divine fact, mentioned concerning the church, that: *"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it"* (1); and that man cannot guard, as: *"unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain"*. I even dare to say that man cannot even walk on a way, unless the Lord is with him, leading him; as it is written: *"You shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear Him"* (Deuteronomy 13: 4), and: *"The Lord leads the steps of man"*<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ These words instigate humility, and uproot the great evil, namely, pride, that made Lucifer, the Morning star collapse and fall down to earth<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Oghris)

❖ The house built by Solomon did not realize the faith like the church did, the true temple of God; which is not formed of walls,

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<sup>1</sup> الرسالة السابعة والثلاثون عن الحرمان من التعزية: 3 (ترجمة الرب سليم دكاش اليسوعي).

<sup>2</sup> In Lic. Ch 3.

<sup>3</sup> Praktikos, Introd.

but is in the hearts of believers. The temple of Solomon, having been built by human hands, By human hands it has fallen<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Lectantius)**

- ❖ We are committed to ask; And it would be for Him to grant us what we ask for. It is befitting of us to present what is within our possibilities, And it is up to Him to consummate what we are not able to do; as: “*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; and unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain*” (1). The apostle commands us to strive in order to get<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Those who believe that human affairs are led by the divine care, refer nothing achieved by them, to their own effort; as: “*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; and unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain*” (1). He does not say that no one should build or guard the city, but it is befitting of man to remember that unless God grants success to the effort exerted, both the effort and those who strive for its sake, will be without success. On our side, we have to begin, but it is on God’s side to grant success. We should begin building the house; and God will help us, and consummate the work. We guard our city, but it is God who would keep it from being destroyed or defeated by enemies who attack it. This was expressed by the book of proverbs, saying: “*Keep your heart with all diligence*” (Proverb 4: 23). And yet, you still say to God: “You, O Lord, guard and keep us”. This line of thought is confirmed by the apostle Paul, saying: “*It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy*” (Romans 9: 16). He does not mean to keep us from running and seeking what we wish to have, but forbids us to think that we can reach it by our own effort. Many of those who so thought ended up to failure<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Divine Institutes*, 4: 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Against the Pelagians*, 3: 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 282: 1.

How could we hold fast to, and keep our talent? By the Holy Spirit dwelling in us<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom** says: It is not within the ability of human soul to keep such great thing. Why?! ... Because there are many thieves who lie in wait for it; there is dense darkness, and there is a devil at the doors, who plot against it. ... How then can we keep it? By the Holy Spirit. ... Namely, if the Holy Spirit dwells in us; ... If we do not drive the grace away, God will stand on our side; as "*Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain*" (1). That is our stronghold; that is our castle; that is our refuge! ... If the Spirit dwells in us, and guards us, what would be the need for the commandment? ... To hold fast to the Spirit, and to keep Him from deserting us<sup>2</sup>!

❖ Paul went here and there like a bird with wings; and with a single mouth (by preaching) he fought against the enemy... The tent-maker, having got the deposit, and carried the ring of marriage, he was stronger than Satan!

Seeing that God has betrothed the nature of mankind, Satan retreated; ... Seeing the deposit (the Holy Spirit), he was terrified; ... Seeing the (aprons) of the apostle, he fled away (Acts 19: 11). Great is the power of the Holy Spirit; He gave authority, not only to the spirit, or to the body of the apostles, but also to their garments, and even to their shadow<sup>3</sup>!

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 2- THE LORD, GRANTOR OF COMFORT:

*"It is vain for you to rise up early, and stay up late, toiling for food to eat; For He grants sleep for those He loves"* (2)

Some interpret it, that it is befitting of the believer not to rush time; not to assume that he would enjoy the reward amid the darkness of temporal life; but he should anticipate the dawn of eternity, when he will enjoy the eternal light, and see God face to face. Let us therefore walk with hope in the shine of eternity, and enjoy the fellowship of the eternal glory in its due time.

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<sup>1</sup>لدراسة سكنى الروح القدس فينا، وهل هو يهجرنا أم لا، راجع مقال: "لا تطفئوا الروح القدس" للقديس مار فيلوكسينوس".

<sup>2</sup> In 2 Yim. Hom 3.

<sup>3</sup> Two Sermons on Eutropius.

By His resurrection in the dawn of Sunday, the Lord Christ granted us the risen life, and granted us the true comfort. He grants sleep for those He loves; not the slumber of slothfulness and laziness; but, by sleep, he means security, inner peace, and non-anxiety. The beloved only-begotten Son slept on the cross like a victorious Lion, destroying the power of Satan. He also slept in the boat amid the violent storm, to grant us peace amid the storms of this life.

It is in vain for man to think that he would enjoy comfort before the resurrection of the Lord of Glory, and the rise of the Sun of Righteousness on us.

When Simon Peter intended to (rise up early) ahead of the resurrection of Christ, and said: "I put myself for Your sake"; the Lord rejected his statement as vain, and said to him: "*Get behind Me Satan!*" (Matthew 16: 23).

God created man, to share His glory, and to be in peace. The psalmist calls man "God's beloved".

- ❖ "Rise after sitting"; namely, rise up after death ... For the Lord is risen on our behalf, to grant us (by His death) to follow His lead; By His resurrection, He gave us comfort<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ The Lord did not rise up from the dead, except after He granted sleep to those He loved; For those who died, died on hope; So the Lord came and realized their hope by His resurrection; and turned their death into 'sleep', to be followed by an eternal awakening; ... Therefore, we go to sleep in hope<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ We can escape from the snare of that spear of more evil; namely of pride; if, when we feel that we have achieved success or progress in any virtue, we hasten to say the words of Paul the apostle: "*It is God who works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure*" (Philippians 2: 13). The Fountain of our salvation, Himself, says: "*He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing*" (John 15: 5); and: "*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; and unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain; It is vain for you to rise up early...*" (Psalm 127: 1, 2); "*So then, it is not of him*

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<sup>1</sup> On ps. 127 (126).

<sup>2</sup> On ps. 127 (126).

*who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy”*  
(Romans 9: 16) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Cassian)

- ❖ How does God help man? He gives him sweet sleep, and life without dangers, full of security. By giving him sleep, he grants him comfort. ... He grants those whom He loves, not only the security of their city, but in addition, He grants them the grace to become parents to a multitude of children, and to get increasing family blessings<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

### **3- THE LORD, GRANTOR OF MIGHTY CHILDREN:**

*“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward”* (3)

The Hebrews used to count children as blessing from the Lord: *“Blessed shall be the fruit of your body”* (Deuteronomy 28: 4); and, *“And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body”* (Deuteronomy 28: 11).

If the children according to the flesh are a grant from the Lord, Much more will be those who enjoy the grace of adoption as children of God; they are a gift from the Lord.

- ❖ The church as well, our beloved mother, gives birth to good children. ... Now, meditate in how she gives birth; She gives birth by baptism, the womb of the church into which enter those who intend to be born again, *“enters into his mother’s womb again and be born”*; a miracle that Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel could not comprehend<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

In a letter of condolence to ‘Salvina’ for the departure of her husband, **St. Jerome** used this phrase: [Instead of one husband, you have got two children; by which your emotion will be more objective than before<sup>4</sup>].

*“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth”* (4)

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<sup>1</sup> *De institutis caenoborum, Book 12: 9*

<sup>2</sup> *On ps. 127.*

<sup>3</sup> *On ps. 127 (126).*

<sup>4</sup> *Letter 79 to Salvina, 7.*

Presenting His Holy Spirit as a divine sword or arrow coming out of his mouth, the Lord Christ makes His believers, the bearers of His Spirit, “*Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth*” (4).

According to **St. Augustine**, the children of one’s youth, who are like arrows in the hand of a warrior, are the disciples and the apostles, whom the Lord Christ sent forth like arrows all over the earth, from the hand of a divine Warrior, God: “*Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world*” (Romans 10: 18). They were called the children of youth because they preached with the Spirit of power, and were not inflicted by the weakness of old age until the last breath; as the Holy Spirit renewed their youth like an eagle.

**St. Augustine** believes that the Mighty Warrior who aims His arrows by His hand to the whole earth, is the Savior Himself, to whom is said: “*Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession*” (Psalm 2: 8).

❖ How could that possession reach the ends of the earth? ... Because it is “*like arrows in the hand of a (Mighty) Warrior*”.

As the arrows are sent forth from the bow; the stronger the hand that holds the bow, the greater the distance the arrows reach. What arrows are stronger than those in the hand of the Lord; From His bow, He sent forth His apostles, and there is no place on earth where those mighty arrows have not reached<sup>1</sup>!

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ The arrows are terrifying, but not in themselves, but when the bow is held by a strong hand. So were the apostles sent forth by the Lord<sup>2</sup>!

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

“*Happy are those who have their quivers full of them, They shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate*” (5)

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<sup>1</sup> On ps. 127 (126).

<sup>2</sup> On ps. 127.

Tribunals were mostly held at the gate of a city. But according to **St. Jerome**<sup>1</sup>, he probably means here, the gate of paradise; where the enemy has nothing against the true believers in paradise.

Those who preached with the spirit of power did not fear opposition but “*spoke with their enemies in the gate*”. When messengers were sent to strong kings from their enemies, they were not allowed to enter the city, but delegates of the king would come to meet them at the gate.

The “*quiver*” is a container to keep arrows (see Isaiah 49: 2), carried by a warrior on his back, with the opening on the right shoulder.

According to **St. Augustine**, the quivers of the disciples and the apostles are their holy minds, the arrows are the Words of God, while the enemies are the evil thoughts and works of the devil, opposing the Word of God. According to him, who has his quiver filled with them, is he who does not covet the world and its riches, but the living faith, preached by the apostles. The gate here, is the Lord Christ, who said: “*I am the Gate*” (John 10: 9), through which will enter into the city, those who receive the preaching of the apostles; Whereas those who reject their preaching will stay out of the city, until the gate is closed.

According to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, it is befitting of the believer not to allow the enemies, namely, the evil thoughts, to enter into his city, namely, his mind and heart, but resist them before they manage to crawl into his depths.

❖ The wise Solomon believes that the riches may be evil for him who acquires them; on account of that the fear of losing them causes him great worry and a loss of peace. Actually they are as good as lost for a dead man who left them behind. ... They are far from being what is meant by: “*Happy is those who have their quivers full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate*” (5). whose inheritance is the Lord; their reward is the seed of the Virgin St. Mary; and are praised by the wise<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Ambrose**)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Jerome: Letter 118 to Julian.

<sup>2</sup> The Prayer of Job and David 2: 4: 12.

❖ “*Blessed are those who have their quivers full of them*”; meaning the privileges of having children: strong bodies, irresistible awe, family blessing, security, and victory in war; Blessed are they who have such abundance of good; they would never hide their faces from their enemies, but will daringly go to confront them with great courage, exalted appearance, and a trusted plan of battle; as God confirms to help them in every way<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On ps. 127.*

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 127

### SET UP YOUR TEMPLE IN YOUR BELOVED

- ❖ Who could imagine that the great temple of Solomon would be destroyed?!  
Yet, what is built by human hand, could be destroyed by the same!  
Whereas what is built by the Lord of hosts,  
Will challenge the time, and remain forever.  
Stretch Your hand, O Lord, and set Your temple in me;  
That the enemy would not dare to approach it;  
Nor time would destroy it.
- ❖ You came down, O my Savior, to our earth;  
Not to bring us back to the lost garden of Eden;  
But to set out of us a heavenly spiritual paradise;  
By Your Holy Spirit, You set out of us a holy temple;  
That in us, the voice of joy and exultation would be heard;
- ❖ Let Your fiery Spirit guard me;  
And lead me to Your eternal kingdom;  
Enter, O Beloved, into my heart, so much beloved by You;  
There, You dwell and find comfort;  
And I, as well, will find comfort by and in You;  
You grant Your beloved the sleep of eternal comfort
- ❖ By Your resurrection, You destroyed death, and granted us the risen life;  
You made us Your beloved, granting us the true comfort;  
Our life became an unceasing Sabbath;  
As long as You are inside us, Your peace will dwell on and in us;
- ❖ You are the Builder of the house, and the Guardian of the city;  
Your grace works in us and surrounds us;  
It becomes like a wall of fire, through which the arrows of the enemy cannot penetrate;
- ❖ You granted us the fruit of the Spirit, as blessed children;  
You set out of us witnesses for You, to draw souls to You;  
That many would taste the sweetness of sonhood to You;
- ❖ Your dwelling would turn my wilderness into a fruitful paradise;  
To be filled with love, peace, and goodness.

My heart, as well as my mind, would be filled with Your mighty arrows;

Your active word would be set in me;

That the enemy would not dare to knock on the door of my heart;

- ❖ The devil and all the hosts of darkness would stand in shame;  
As there is no place for them in Your presence, O Holy One;  
For, You, the Zealous One, dwells in me.

## **PSALM 128**

### **THE WORSHIP BY THE BLESSED FAMILY**

In the last psalm, looking at the house of the Lord, the psalmist was drawn to the Lord, the Builder of His holy house, the Guardian of His holy city, and the Grantor of the true comfort for His beloved, together with exalted fruits. Now the psalmist looks at the worshippers of the Lord themselves, to see them as one family with special features, practicing a blessed life, namely, of a heavenly feature.

In the present psalm, the soul of the believer exults, praising the Lord, who made a family with such an almost heavenly portrait; and at the same time let the believer himself enjoy having a family holy in the Lord.

Here, the psalmist presents a magnificent description for the happy family, based upon the fear of God; and consequently walk properly along the way of the Lord. Here, the believer enjoys the fruit of the labor of his own hands, to become, like His Lord and Savior, the Head of an exultant family, while he, himself is blessed and happy.

The believer becomes, like the Lord Christ, honored by His bride, the church, while bearing fruitful branches (namely her children); The believers: men and women, all become a small holy church filled with the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

<b>1- Members of the blessed family</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- A working family</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3- A fruitful family</b>	<b>3 – 4</b>
<b>4- A heavenly church life</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5- An extended life filled with peace</b>	<b>6</b>

#### **1- MEMBERS OF THE BLESSED FAMILY:**

A song of ascents

*“Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways” (1)*

It is difficult to give a proper translation of the word “*blessed*”; as it does not mean just (happy), but implies tasting the deposit of the blessed heavenly life, that provides an inner joy and an exalted peace; which do not depend upon temporal gifts or possibilities, but upon an entrance into the eternal circle.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the word “*blessed*” covers enough of everything. It represents a well-established state; while all the other gifts, whether riches, honor, many children, etc. could all eventually come to an end. ... On another aspect, the young Joseph has been blessed under all situations: He was sold, became a foreigner, a slave, then a prisoner; Yet all those situations did not make him lose the feature of blessing, having been fearing the Lord, and walking in His ways. Faith is therefore, not enough for man, without the fear of God, and keeping His commandments.

The main feature of such a blessed family is the fear of God, which we call (piety), a feature that touches the inner depths, which makes the believer, realizing his sonhood to God, bears a kind of the fear of a son toward his very beloved father; This fear is translated through his practical behavior, and his obedience of the divine commandment.

A sign of the fear of God is that the believer walks in the way of the Lord; according to what is written: “*Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it*” (Jeremiah 6: 16). Because, with the diversity of ways and the upright paths, all bear one spirit; to be called “the one good way”; namely, it is a union with Christ “the One Way”.

But, the One Christ, our Way to enter into the bosom of the Father, has presented many ways for a life with Him: for the pious married man to enjoy; and for the virgin as well. Every believer has a certain talent: this in teaching, that in giving, and a third in continuous praying, etc.

By saying: “*every one*” he opens the door before all men, whatever is the position, possibilities, age, or social circumstances. God, the Lover of all mankind, wishes to include everyone in this family, extending from Adam to the end of ages.

❖ He who fears God is free of the attacks of great waves, rests in peace in a secure harbor, and reaps the rewards of the true blessing.

That is why the author, by a divine inspiration, disregards all the other things, and only proclaims that he is blessed.

- ❖ Notice that he starts here where he ended in the last psalm; proclaiming that they are blessed and will not be ashamed, for God is their ally. Here he starts, as well, by saying: “*Blessed is every one who fears the Lord*”. Again he puts his remarks to practical application, starting by saying “*Blessed is every one*”; whether you are a slave, master, poor, or crippled; whatever your condition is; Nothing of these circumstances will deny you the blessing referred to<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Many may have true faith, yet their life is corrupt, and they are more miserable than anyone else<sup>2</sup>!
- ❖ “... *walks in His ways*” ... By doing that, he actually can rise up to heaven, acquire the mother city, and see God Himself, as much as man can see Him. These are called the ways of God, for through them, God could be reached.

He did not say “the way”, but “*the ways*”, referring to the fact that they are many and diverse ways. The Lord intended for them to be many, to make our approach to Him easy and through many great ways; ... Namely, some are prominent in virginity, others in exalted married life, others endure widowhood as an adornment, others bare themselves off everything, others off half the things, others live a blameless life, and others are repentant. By so many ways He made travel easy.

Endure all that with thanksgiving, to reap a great reward<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ The Holy Book sums our free desires in different degrees of perfection, according to the state and measure of each mind; as not all are crowned with a unified crown of perfection; for not all have the same virtue, nor the same goal, or zeal. So the divine Word referred in some way, to the different degrees of perfection, and to its diverse measures.

According to this principle, the Holy Book commends them who fear God, saying: “*Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, who*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 128.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 128.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 128.

walks in His ways” (1), promising them a heavenly happiness. Nevertheless, it goes back to say: “*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love*” (1 John 4: 18).

Again, Despite the fact that worshipping God with fear is a great thing, and it is written: “*Serve the Lord with fear*” (Psalm 2: 11), ; and, “*Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes will find him so doing*” (Matthew 24: 46); Yet the Lord said to the apostles: “*No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you*” (John 15: 15); and again He said: “*You are My friends if you do whatever I command you*” (John 15: 14).

So you see that that there are different levels of perfection; and that the Lord exhorts us to seek the more exalted levels, in a way that makes him who became blessed and perfect in the fear of God, walk, as is written, “*from strength to strength*” (Psalm 84: 7); namely, from perfection to perfection. It implies, that he rises by the zeal of the Spirit, from fear to hope, and finally to love, which is the highest level. That is why “*the faithful and wise servant*” (Matthew 24: 45), will reach up to the level of friendship, then to that of the adoption as a son.

Accordingly, our talk could be understood in the following way: We are not saying that the fear of punishment, or the hope for the blessed reward promised to the saints, are things of no value; Yet, although of benefit, motivating those who follow them to make a blessed step; Yet, in love, there is a complete trust and perpetual joy, that would take them away from the fear of the servants, and the hope of the hired hand, to the love of God, make them sons, and move them from perfection to a greater perfection<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Sherimon)**

**St. Augustine**, in his interpretation of the book of psalms, and in particular the psalms of Ascents, often repeats that the psalmist sometimes, uses the plural tense, and other times he uses the singular tense; and in either case he talks about the church that, although it embraces many, yet at the same time is one body of one Head, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cassia, Conferences 11: 12.*

❖ When I talk about the Christians in the pleural tense, I confirm that they are one in the One Christ. You are many, yet you are one. We are many, yet we are one ... Because we attach to the One as His members; and as our Head is in heaven, His members could follow Him.... I wish we all, who are attached to the body of Christ, walk in the ways of the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ As a lamp lightens a dark room, So the fear of God pierces the heart of man to lighten it, teaching it all the virtues and the commandments of God.

**(One of the fathers of the wilderness)**

❖ The fear of God exhorts the soul to keep the commandments, and through keeping them we build the house of the soul.

❖ I wish we fear the Lord, and build a house for ourselves, so that we find a refuge in winter amid the rain and thunder, because without a house in the tough winter, one could face great dangers.

**(Father Dorotheos)**

## **2- A WORKING FAMILY:**

*“When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you” (2)*

In the Septuagint version it came as: *“When you eat the fruits of your labor”*. The word *“labor”* here means man’s works; as *“whatever man sows, that he will also reap”* (Galatians 6: 7).

❖ In the present time we have labors, but the fruits will come later on. And as the labors, themselves, are not without joy, for the sake of the hope about which is said: *“Rejoicing in hope”* (Romans 12: 12); These labors themselves bring us joy now, and make us rejoice with hope ... There is a difference between hope and its realization. If hope is of such sweetness, how much more will be its realization<sup>2</sup>?!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Why does he double the blessing? For he knows its greatness<sup>3</sup>!

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 128 (127).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 128 (127).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 128.

❖ “For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6: 8). He who sows to the flesh: fornication, drunkenness, and lust without control, will reap the fruit of these things: Punishment, scoffing, and destruction ... Whereas the fruits of the Spirit are utterly contradictory to this.

Meditate! ... Have you sown alms? The treasures of heaven and an eternal glory are waiting for you!... Have you sown uprightness? You may expect honor, reward, exultation of the angels, and a crown from the divine Judge<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Meditate in the Orthodox style in the battle, and in the achievements of the spiritual battles;... Meditate in how the Christian warrior, having conquered his rebellious body, and having put it under the soles of his feet, is borne ahead as a victor in the highest. Hence, he does not run as though without surety, but he trusts in his entrance into the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Cassian)

❖ We, to whom the eternal life is granted, do good works; not for the sake of a reward, but for the sake of keeping the purity granted to us<sup>3</sup>.

### 3- A FRUITFUL FAMIY:

*“Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants all around your table”*  
(3)

The psalmist likens the believer in his holy family, to little olive offshoots all around the mother tree. The olive tree gives fruits all along about fifty years; and produces from its root what are like offshoots all around it, to increase its production. In the time of flowering, the mother tree becomes loaded with white flowers, and looks like a white-haired man, with his little offspring all around him – an attractive portrait of the believer, surrounded by his children,

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<sup>1</sup> In Galat., Chapter 6.

<sup>2</sup> القديس يوحنا كاسيان: المؤسسات لنظام الشركة، 5، النهم 18.

<sup>3</sup> للمؤلف/ الفيلوكاليا، 1966، ص 136.

supporting him, working together with him, and helping their parents in their advanced age<sup>1</sup>.

According to **St. Jerome**, we should understand the wife and the children in a spiritual way; lest we would imagine that the angels do not enjoy such blessings, having no wives nor children. Who is the spiritual wife? ... Solomon longed to have the wisdom as his wife (Proverbs 4: 6, 8).

❖ Let us, as well, take the wisdom as our wife, and embrace her (Ecclesiastes 8: 2). ... Let us not let her forsake our bosoms, nor flee away from our arms. ... Let us have children from her ... I mean what he says here: “*Your children like olive plants all around your table*”; ... As he, who takes wisdom as his wife, will have children from her.

Like a vine that carries a multitude of clusters, has one root, and its branches extend wide all around it; ... So is the wisdom, our wife, if we do not let her forsake us; she will produce for us many clusters, namely, many virtues, a strong and holy will, and a multitude of honorable works<sup>2</sup>.

❖ The olive oil naturally preserves food, flares the flame, flourishes the body, renews it after a long and exhaustive journey, and repairs what got corrupt, to restore it to what it used to be<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ “*His wife*” here, concerning Christ, refers to the church, His bride, which is us, “*like a fruitful vine*”<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ In the divine teachings, women are referred to, on a positive aspect as: “*Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine, in the very heart of your house; Your children like olive plants all around your table*” (3); ... While on a negative aspect, it is written: “*The lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood*” (Proverbs 5: 3, 4)<sup>5</sup>.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Boyd's Bible Handbook, 241.homily 42 on Ps.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homily 42 on Ps.*

<sup>3</sup> *Homily 42 on Ps.*

<sup>4</sup> *On Ps. 128 (127).*

<sup>5</sup> *Commentary on Ecclesiastes 227: 7.*

❖ Let us now listen to what the fruitful vine says about its fruits; the vine, put in the very heart of the house of God, said by the prophet to be fruitful (3).

The pure divine life mixes with love: *“My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blooms in the vineyard of En-Gedi”* (Songs 1: 14). Who is this blessed? ... Or rather, Who is he, who so exalts above every blessing, that in his vine, namely, in his inner soul. He sees the Lord of the vine? ... Notice how the bride grew until the fragrance of her Nardine spread around -- the fragrance of her Groom. She made out of it a pure myrrh, put it in a bag, and hid it in her heart, so as not to part with his sweetness, nor lose it forever. So, the bride became a mother of a holy cluster of grapes who gave flowers, flourished at the time of the Lord’s passion, and poured its juice, wine that makes the heart glad; called as the blood of grapes, after the Lord’s passions<sup>1</sup>.

❖ The vine dresser listened to the divine commands, like the woman about whom David says: *Your wife shall be like fruitful vine: (3)*; who, seeing herself away from the destructive force of those beasts, by the power of Him who commanded her; she instantly gave herself up to her care-Giver, who removed the dividing wall of the commandments, so that they would not take away the union between her and the One she desires; While saying: *“My beloved is mine, and I am His; He feeds His flocks among the lilies, until the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, Turn my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the rugged hills”* Songs 2: 16, 17). Namely, she recognized Him face to face, the One who lives from eternity, who, for the sake of my salvation, came in the likeness of man; I dwell in Him and find comfort, for He is the good Shepherd who feeds His flock, not on weeds, but on pure lilies.

Man indeed, does not feed on weeds, the food for irrational animals; Being rational, he should feed on the true Word. If he becomes satisfied with the weeds, as long as he is flesh, he will, himself turn into weeds; according to the words: *“All flesh is grass; and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field”* (Isaiah 40: 6),. But, if he turns to a Spirit, and is born of a Spirit, he will no longer feed on weeds, but on the Spirit, symbolized by the purity of lilies and

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<sup>1</sup>عظة 3 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

its sweet fragrance, and will turn into a pure and fragrant lily; Namely, he will change according to the material on which he feeds... The day in which the Lord sent His rays on the world; And by His light all the shadows of life disappear; Those, who were fed on the weeds, the eyes of whose souls were not lightened by the light of the truth, will hasten after the shadows, assuming that the vain shadows are, as though true, while looking at the truth as though not existent. Those, on the other hand, who were fed on the lilies, namely, those whose souls flourished on pure and fragrant food, have got rid of all the appearances of shadows and deceptions, which men seek during this life; having become the children of light and day; and will recognize the true nature of things<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)**

❖ The field is full of flowers; and of diverse fruits. Plow your field, if you wish to be sent to the kingdom of God. Let your field flower, and give fruits of good rewards, to have a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, and olive plants all around your table (3). To guarantee its fertility, let it be planted by the Word of God, and guarded by the Spiritual divine Farmer. Say to Christ: *“Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field”* (Songs 7: 11); To which He would answer: *“I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh”* (Songs 5: 1). What could be better than plucking the faith, by which the fruit of resurrection is stored, and by which the fountain of the eternal joy flows<sup>2</sup>?!

**(St. Ambrose)**

The newly baptized is anointed by the holy ointment of ‘Meron’. It is not only the right of the infant in the Christian family, to be joined to the body of Christ, the crucified, and to be presented to the whole humanity, but it is the right of the church, as well, to embrace the children in her fellowship in the Lord, as a living and essential part of the congregation; so that the words of the psalmist would be realized, saying: *“Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house; Your children like olive plants around your table”* (3).

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 5 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار .

<sup>2</sup> Exposition of Luke 8: 43.

If we rejoice in their physical birth, and offer the Lord a praise of thanksgiving for the sake of His gift, How much more should the catholic church, and the church of the house, exult on having them as new members through their spiritual birth?!

***“Behold, thus shall the man be blessed, who fears the Lord”***

**(4)**

- ❖ The virtue will live together with the wise man in a legitimate union, to have from her holy offspring; as actually: “Wisdom will give birth to a man of understanding” (Proverbs 10: 23). To the pious and holy man, the Holy Book says: “*Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine; Your children like olive plants all around your table; Behold, thus shall the man be blessed, who fears the Lord*” (3, 4)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Dedymus the blind)**

#### **4- A HEAVENLY CHURCH LIFE:**

***“The Lord blesses you out of Zion; And may you see the good of Jerusalem” (5)***

Experiencing his membership in the heavenly household, the world with all its sorrows and troubles would not be able to take away from the believer, the blessings and goodness of the Lord; but His mercies will endure every morning.

#### **5- AN EXTENDED LIFE, FILLED WITH PEACE:**

***“Yes, may you see your children’s children. Peace be upon Israel” (6)***

- ❖ In case you have learned something from my sermon, I would be taking care of my children; and teaching others as well. Let us pray to the Lord ,to let us have children and grandchildren; and to grant us a multitude of seed. Let us then hasten to give birth to these children; It is a holy union; and what is amazing is that these children are born without a wife<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Genesis 235.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 42 on Ps.

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 128

### YOUR LOVE FOR HUMANITY IS AMAZING

- ❖ Humanity has given you its back;  
And has borne in itself the spirit of animosity toward You;  
Counting Your commandment as a chain;  
And life with You as a deprivation.
- ❖ While we are enemies, You came down, O my Savior, to reconcile us;  
You carried us in You, in an amazing way, to heaven;  
You turned us into an exultant family, practicing the heavenly life;  
Instead of the curse that dwelt on us; by you, we became blessed.
- ❖ You turned the toil of labor into sweetness;  
And presented to us goods from Your treasures, O my God;  
You presented to us the heavenly wisdom as our companion;  
You filled the corners of our house with the amazing fruits of the Spirit.
- ❖ You granted us children, not born of the flesh;  
By the Spirit, they became planted in Your house;  
You granted us children of the children;  
So that the family will extend until the day of Your coming;  
Glory be to You, who set out of the believers a blessed family.

## PSALM 129

# I WAS CRUCIFIED TOGETHER WITH CHRIST

The fourth group of the Songs of Ascents begins; corresponding to the Book of Numbers, when the people of Israel set forth in the wilderness toward the land of Canaan. The camp was committed to march in the form of a cross where the tribes were divided, every three together in the direction to the East, the West, the North, and the South; while Moses, Aaron, and the families of the Levites march in the middle, also in the form of a cross. It is as though there is no crossing over to the promised land without being crucified together with the Lord Christ.

<b>1- The crucified church</b>	<b>1 – 2</b>
<b>2- The crucified Christ</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3- The grass on the housetops</b>	<b>4 – 8</b>

### 1- THE CRUCIFIED CHURCH:

A Song of Ascents

*“Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth’, let Israel now say” (1)*

Since the beginning of the church, she suffered affliction; or more accurately, was granted affliction, without which she would not be able to enjoy the joy of resurrection, and of reaching the eternal glory.

To tell us how the church has endured affliction from her youth, **St. Augustine** presents to us living examples like Abel, Noah, and the people of the old. The prophets saw in the people coming out from the land of Egypt, the church in her youth, as it came in Jeremiah and Ezekiel: *“I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown”* (Jeremiah 2: 2); *“As for your nativity, on the day you were born, your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you, you were not rubbed with salt, nor swathed in swaddling cloths”* (Ezekiel 16: 4-5).

❖ The church talks about those she endured; as though she was asked: ‘Does this happen now?’. The church suffered since she was born in the old days, since she was called; since she was on earth.

In a certain time, the church has been in Abel alone, who was persecuted by his evil lost brother Cain (Genesis 4: 8). And in another time, she has been in Enoch alone, who was no more for God took him, because of his righteousness (Genesis 5: 24). In a certain time, the church has been in the household of Noah alone, who endured all those who perished in the great flood; while he and his household were saved by the arc which floated on water, and landed after the water receded (Genesis 6). Then the church started to exist in the people of Israel, who endured the Pharaoh and the Egyptians. At the end of time, we came to our Lord Jesus Christ, and the gospel was preached in the holy gospel. (Psalm 40)

For this reason, and lest someone may have doubt in the church, he who intends to be a good member in her; let him listen to what the church, his mother, says to him: Do not marvel to hear these things, O my son, *“Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth”*<sup>1</sup>

❖ In the present time, as the church has reached such an advanced age, and is still resisting; I wish she does not fear!

She has reached this advanced age, in spite of the fact that they did not cease to afflict her from her youth. I wish (the new) Israel, itself, has comfort by the old examples<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me” (2)***

If the affliction has accompanied the church from her youth, when she was formed of only one person, or just a few. And in every era, she was expected to be completely destroyed; Yet history confirms the failure of her adversaries despite their great numbers, violence, and possibilities. History remains opening the door of hope before the church, and confirming to her that her victory from the Lord, surpasses all human expectations.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 129 (128).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 129 (128).

As a practical example for that, **St. John Chrysostom** says:[ God allowed for the Babylonian captivity of the people of Israel, which lasted for seventy years. There were no indications whatsoever of any possibility of the return of the people, the rebuilding of the temple, and the restoration of Jerusalem. But the mighty state of Babylon came to an end, and the people of Israel returned home.

Babylon thought that her gods are greater than the living true God; But the Babylonian did not understand that what happened was not because of their power or their military might, but was allowed by God for the chastisement of Israel, who diverted from worshipping the living God].

- ❖ Although the enemies often on the attack, yet they were not strong enough to overcome, and have never achieved an ultimate victory over Israel. They might have won many battles, have taken them captives, and transferred them to far away lands, ... But their conquest was not because of their power at that time, but because of the sin of Israel. They did not prevail up to the end, for they did not actually have the power to wipe out the Jewish race, and destroy the city altogether; but, by God's allowance, they conquered for some time, then were defeated. How were they defeated?! By the return of the people of Israel to their past prosperity<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 2- THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST:

*“They plowed on my back; They made their furrows long”*

(3)

A horrible portrait of the wicked, as they plow on the back of the righteous, and make their furrows long; telling us about the violent practices in scourging the slaves and the criminals, with whips with pieces of iron at their ends, that cause deep and painful wounds on their backs.

The secret of this bitter treatment against the righteous, is that the wicked does not endure to see someone who does not get along with him in his evil; even if he does not cause him any harm; counting his righteousness as a bitter testimony against himself.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 129.

On another aspect, the psalmist uses this analogy, because, although the wicked gets pleasure from afflicting the righteous; yet all the evil

He does against him will be like the furrows made by the plow in the soil, which make it more prepared for producing a better crop. The affliction makes the righteous more perseverant through the grace of God, justifies, and glorifies him. That is why the psalmist precedes to say: “*Yet they have not prevailed against me*” (3). The troubles they do have turned into heavenly glories.

- ❖ The wicked persecutes the righteous because the later does not conform his ways to his evil ways<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ He shows how they, not only charge with violence, but also with persistence; they spend much time, and dedicate themselves to plan their evil plots. Yet this does not benefit them, not for the sake of our own strength, but for that of God<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

If the wicked do not cease to afflict the righteous, Yet, according to Father Gregory (the Great), in his talk about shepherding, [It is befitting of the shepherd to endure the labor of shepherding, to present his back to carry their burdens of his flock, saying: “*They plow on my back*”].

- ❖ It is a test of the perseverance of the shepherd in enduring the troubles of his flock, during his endeavor to reform them. Saying: “*They plow on my back*”, It is as though David wants to say that those whom he fails to reform, he carries as a heavy burden. Yet there are certain hidden things which the shepherd should carefully examine, so that he can discover what goes on in the minds of his flock; and by rebuking in the proper time, he can manage to draw from the seemingly unimportant things, some important issues. That is why it was said to Ezekiel: “*Son of man, dig into the wall, and when I dug into the wall, there was a door. And He said to me: ‘Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there’. So I went in and saw, and there – every sort of creeping*”.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 129 (128).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 129.

*thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel portrayed all around on the walls” (Ezekiel 8: 8-10) <sup>1</sup>.*

**(Father Gregory the Great)**

### **3- THE GRASS ON THE HOUSETOPS:**

***“The Lord is righteous; He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked” (4)***

What does he mean by cutting the cords of the wicked?

1- He may be referring to the cords that bind the oxen to the plow; without which the plow may exert a great effort to move the plow, with no avail. It is as though all the oppositions and afflictions of the wicked will turn back on them.

2- He may be referring to the cords or the stripes of the whip, without which the wicked cannot strike someone who did him no harm.

3- He may be referring to the chains by which the captives were shackled to herd them out of their country to foreign lands.

In the Septuagint version it came as: *“The righteous Lord cuts the neck of the wicked”*. According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist did not say:

“The Lord cuts the hands (or the feet) of the wicked”, but “their neck”; ... Justifying himself before God with pride and haughtiness, God will cut off the arrogant neck of the wicked, to make him follow the example of the tax collector who did not dare to raise his eyes toward heaven (Luke 18: 13), and was justified before God.

❖ The efforts of the enemies go to no avail; whereas the church will flourish<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“Let all those who hate Zion, be put to shame, and turned back” (5)***

Here, the psalmist presents a prayer or a prophecy about those who intend to destroy the church of God, and drive her to shame and disgrace; as all what they do will turn back on them.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pastoral Care, 2: 10.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 129.*

❖ The psalmist ends his advice by a prayer that gives the listener confidence through the story of the past events, and the prayer; and shows that envy and hate are the cause of the animosities. Saying: “*Let all those who hate Zion, be put to shame, and be turned back*”, tells the listener that, they, will not only fail to have victory, but will be put to shame and despise<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Those who enter the church with hypocrisy, hate her; And those who refuse to keep the word of God, hate the church ... What would the church do, but endure carrying the burden till the end<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

According to the scholar Origen, this prayer, presented by the psalmist, is not against the wicked, as much as it is a prayer for the sake of their salvation; As the idol worshippers were known to boast their evils and were not ashamed of their abominations. Now, the psalmist seeks from God to grant them the spirit of repentance, to feel shame for what they do, and to return to God with the spirit of contrition.

❖ Confessing the sins in which we lived, together with our fathers, by our worship of idols, we shall say: [Shame has (eaten up) the labor of our fathers since our youth: their sheep, cows, sons, and daughters]; There must be shame to (eat up) the vain labor and the false works of our fathers; As without shame, these vain and false labors will not come to an end.

Concerning this, let us parade some of the differences among the sinners:

There are sinners who have lost every sense of shame, and have delivered themselves to every abomination. You actually see how the Gentiles sometimes proudly, and with no shame, parade a list of their abominations and fornications, as though they are great conquests and achievements; not calling them sins. And, as long as they have no shame, their sins (will not be eaten up), will not be wiped out. The beginning of reform is to feel shame of doing the things about which we did not feel shame before. I therefore do not

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 129.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 129 (128).

think that the psalmist means to curse, by saying his words: “*Let all those who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back*” (5) <sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

“*Let them be as the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up*” (6)

As the housetops in the Near East are mostly flat, when a thin layer of dirt accumulates on them; with rain or dew, some grass will grow, Which, having no roots, will soon wither before they grow up.

It is a portrait of the ministry of haughty appearances, which, as soon as it flowers, it will wither and be uprooted.

- ❖ That is actually the nature of abundance (prosperity) of those who live in evil; The appeal of the things of this life appear and disappear from time to time; yet they lack the true existence. That is why man is committed not to care for the things that do not last long, but to long for eternal things that will not perish or change<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ These things may probably appear of little value to some, and not worthy of attention; but, if man concentrates the eyes of his mind on them, he will learn what faults he should avoid, and what good ordinance he should care for. Running after honors is something unbecoming of us, on account of that it makes us appear stupid, violent, and haughty; seeking what does not suit us, but suit those greater and more exalted than us.

He, who so does will become hated, and most probably a subject of scoffing, when he would have, against his will, to give back to others, the honor that is not his ... which undeservingly took for himself.

Whereas the meek, and who is worthy of commendation, who, without fear of being blamed, although worthy of sitting among the elite; yet he does not seek that for himself, but leave for others what suits him; Such a man is counted victorious over the vain glory, and will receive the honor that is his right, when he is told: “*Friend, go up higher*” (see Luke 14: 10)..

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<sup>1</sup> عظات للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكلين سمير كوستي 5: 5.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 129.

A humble mind is therefore great, and exceptionally good, saves man from rebuke and blame; and from seeking the vain glory.

If you seek this mortal human glory, you will lose the way to truth, by which you can be truly famous, and gain honor that would crush the competitors! It is written: *“All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass”* (1 Peter 1: 24). And the prophet David, rebuking the lovers of temporal honors, says to them: *“Let them be as the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up”* (Psalm 129: 6). Like the grass that grows on the rooftops has no deep root, will soon wither, So he will be, who cares for worldly honors; who, after being prominent for a short time, will fall and become nothing.

In case someone wishes to go ahead of others, let him do it according to the law of heaven, let him be crowned by the honors granted by God; and let him exalt over others by the testimony of the glorious virtues. The law of virtue is the humble mind that does not seek pride, but humility! That is what the blessed Paul counted as being better than everything; writing to those who wish to walk in holiness, saying: *“have the humbleness of mind”* (Colossians 3: 12). And, commending this, James, the disciple of Christ, says: *“Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because, as a flower of the field he will pass away”* (James 1: 9-10). The humble mind under control, will be exalted by God; *“A broken and a contrite heart, these, O God, You will not despise”* (Psalm 51: 17).

He, who thinks of himself as someone great and exalted, who becomes haughty in his mind, and puffed up, will be despised and under curse; as he walks contrary to Christ who says: *“Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart”* (Matthew 11: 29); and as is written: *“For God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (1 Peter 5: 5). As security dwells upon the humble mind; *“Do not exalt yourself, or you may fall”* (Ben Sirach 1: 30); And the wise Solomon, in a form of analogy, says: *“He who builds a high threshold invites broken bones”* (Proverbs 17: 19). ... Such a man, erring to himself, through unconsciously intending to surpass the limit of his nature, is justly hated by God,

Let me ask you: on what basis does one think of himself as something great?!

I wish everyone looks at himself like Abraham who, realizing his true human nature, wisely called himself: dust and ashes (Genesis 18: 27) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great) <sup>2</sup>

***“With which the reaper does not fill his hand, nor he who binds sheaves, his arms” (7)***

The psalm starts with the ministry of the cross, where the true believers are crucified together with the Lord Christ, endure the sufferings, and the plowing on their backs; to become like a fruitful paradise that bears the fruits of the Spirit. And ends with the ministry of the appearances, that flee away from the cross, and seek the temporal glories, to be like the grass on the housetops that appears for one day and withers before it grows up.

The ministry of the cross may seem a failure; as almost all people have forsaken the Crucified on the day of His Crucifixion; even His disciples fled away; And the voice of those who enjoyed the works of His love was not heard; and some of them might probably be among those who cried out: *“Crucify Him, Crucify Him!”* .... The ministry of appearances, on the other hand is shiny, and seems successful, flourishing, and attractive to souls. ... But let us wait to see the glory of the former ministry, and the collapse of the later!

❖ The grass of the housetops grow on the bricks; although seen upwards, yet are rootless, and it would have been better for it to grow downwards instead; for then it would have flowered and caused great joy.

Having grown upward without deep roots, it was not plucked out, but withered before it grows. ... Without any verdict against it by God, yet it lost its vitality ... . The reapers will come, but they will not fill their arms of its sheaves; ... They will gather the wheat in the threshing floor; and bind the tares together, and cast them in the fire; They will do the same to the grass of the housetop, take it away and cast it in the fire, because it withered before it grows up.... The reapers are the angels as the Lord says (Matthew 13: 39) <sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> *In Luc. Ser 102.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Luc. Ser 102.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 129 (128).*

❖ How grim is the unfruitful season, with a loss in crops ... when the farmers, with heavy hearts, sit beside the grave of their crops, which was initially revived by a light rain, then rooted out by storms; “*with which the reaper does not fill his hand, nor he who binds sheaves his arms*” (7). They do not get the blessing of the passersby. It is depressive indeed to look at a barren land, deprived of its adornment, on which the prophet Joel wails, as a portrait of the immense ruin of the earth and the famine (Joel 1: 10). And comparing its past beauty with its miserable present; another prophet has in mind the wrath of the Lord when He cursed the earth<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory the Nezianzen)**

**“Neither let those who pass by them say: ‘The blessing of the Lord be upon you; We bless you in the name of the Lord’” (8)**

The book of Ruth tells us about a beautiful custom that prevailed at that time; which is, When the owner of the field passes by the reapers working in his field, he greets them by saying: “*The Lord be with you*”, To which they answer: “*The Lord bless you*” (Ruth 2: 4).

❖ In the Jewish nation of the old days, it was not befitting of someone to pass by someone or some people working in a field, vineyard, or reaping, without blessing them ... Who are the passersby? Those who have already passed through this way or this life; namely, the apostles and the prophets.... And who are they whom they bless? Those in whom they saw the roots of love?

**(St. Augustine)**

If it is befitting of people to greet one another by saying that the Lord is among them; It would also be befitting of the believer not be preoccupied with his past sins, lest remembering them would corrupt the purity of his heart.

That is what Father Pavnotius talked about in his debate with **St. John Cassian**.

❖ Concerning what you have already said, that because of a goal set before your eyes, you would rather not remember again your past sins; You surely should not remember them, unless they take you by surprise; in which case, you have to drive them right away; as

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<sup>1</sup> *In His Father's Silence, oration 16: 6.*

remembering them would deprive the spirit of the pure meditation, especially with a solitary monk; They make him trample into the abominations of this world, and drowns him in the filthy sins. ... Even if remembering the things you used to do in your young irresponsible youth; would not anymore give you pleasure, yet their rotten smell would surely corrupt your soul, and wipe out the sweet fragrance of your present good life.

If your past sins come to your memory, flee from them, the way the righteous flee from a whore who happen to confront him on the public road, and compromise his integrity and purity by her talk or action, For if he lingers a little while, even if he rejects her propositions, yet he would be despised by the passersby. ... if you fall in such deadly remembrance, you are committed not to hold fast to them, obeying the advice of Solomon, saying: Do not go there, do not linger, and do not concentrate your eyes on her, lest if the angels who pass by see us preoccupied with abominable thoughts, they would not say to us: *“The blessing of the Lord be on you”* (8). It is not possible for the mind to be preoccupied with good thoughts, if its greatest portion of the heart drowns in its evil earthly ones. He would be realizing the saying of Solomon: *“Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies on the top of the mast, saying: ‘They have struck me, but I was not hurt; They have beaten me, but I did not feel it’* (Proverbs 23: 33-35).

We are committed to forsake, not only the evil thoughts, but those of temporal things as well; raising the longings of our souls up toward the heavenly things, according to the words of our Savior: *“Where I am, there My servant will also be”* (John 12: 26). For it so happens that, even as a way of sympathy, we think of the falls of others or their faults; and be affected by some kind of pleasure or enjoyment, and so fall ourselves in what the others did. It would end up that what we have begun well, will end by perdition; as *“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Proverbs 14: 12)<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Pavnotius – Fr. Pavnotius XL)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Cassia: Conferences, 20: 9.*

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 129

### I WAS CRUCIFIED TOGETHER WITH CHRIST

- ❖ The door is narrow, and the way is difficult;  
But, what I tasted in Your company is sweet and nice;  
Grant me to hide in You;  
To find sweet, everything that dwell on me.
- ❖ You cut in pieces the cords of the wicked;  
All their opposition and afflictions become vain;  
They intend to destroy my life;  
But You are my eternal life;  
Who can destroy my life with You?!
- ❖ The wicked intend to bring me forth into shame and disgrace;  
Expose their evil, and let them become ashamed of what they do;  
That they would return to You, and be sanctified.
- ❖ Grant me to find it sweet to be crucified together with You;  
To carry the labors of others with joy;  
And my soul would be glad by the power of Your resurrection  
working in me;  
I do not seek the quick fruit;  
But I seek to rejoice in Your divine presence in the midst of my  
sufferings.
- ❖ Draw me to You; so as not to be preoccupied with the outer  
appearances;  
So as not to become like the grass on the housetops, seen by many;  
But to be planted by the spirit of humility;  
So as to get the blessing of Your cross.

## PSALM 130

### HOPE IN THE MIDST OF AFFLICTION

In the last psalm, the psalmist presented to us the portrait of the church that bears the cross together with the Lord of glory Jesus Christ; to be like the soil plowed with a plow; although seemingly implying anguish, yet it grants her an increasing fruition. On the contrary are those who seek the wide road, the easy life, and the outer appearances, who become like the grass on the housetops, that appear, then wither before it grows up.

Now, as we are in the journey of the cross, enjoying hope, and our souls anticipating the Lord, and hoping for His divine true promises, we become like the disciples after the crucifixion and the burial of the Lord Christ, anticipating His resurrection on the dawn of Sunday; to have their grief turn into joy, and to taste the power of redemption and the joy of salvation.

<b>1- The cross and the cry out of the depths</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2- The need for forgiveness</b>	<b>3 - 4</b>
<b>3- The hope and the joy of the resurrection</b>	<b>5 - 8</b>

#### 1- THE CROSS AND THE CRY OUT OF THE DEPTHS:

A Song of Ascents

*“Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord” (1)*

The first fruit of the cross, namely, of the anguish, is probably that the prayer of the one suffering, comes from his heart, out of the inner depths, in a language not heard by anyone but God, who alone, responds to the language of the depths.

Jonah raised his prayer up from the depths of the sea, and from the belly of the whale; He even offered a sacrifice of praise, which was well received by God.

The heart of Hanna (mother of the prophet Samuel), cried out to God; Although her supplication was not comprehended by Eli the priest, Yet God inclined His ear and listened to her.

Although the prophet Moses cried out without using his lips; Yet God heard him, and said to him: *“Why do you cry to Me?”* (Exodus 14: 15).

Abel cried while breathing his last; and the Lord heard the cries of his blood shed by the hand of his own brother.

In the midst of his anguish, the believer cries out of the depths of his heart; and his lamentation would turn into a praise filled with joyful hope.

- ❖ Jonah cried out of the depths, out of the belly of the whale (Jonah 2: 2). He was not only underneath the waves, but deep inside the belly of the beast; Yet the waves and the dense body did not keep his prayers from reaching God. The voice of his prayers strongly went through all things, and reached the ears of God; because God's ears were in the heart of him who prayed<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ From where does he cry? Out of the depths; ... Who cries? A sinner; ... With what hope does he cry? Because He who came to forgive sins, gives hope to the sinner, even him who is in the depths<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ “*Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord*” (1). What does “*the depths*” mean? ... Not from the lips, or just from moving the tongue, without any role played by the mind or the heart!

It is a fervent prayer out of the depths of the heart, and from the foundations of the soul. Such prayer goes up straight before God, strongly and intensely, and would never shake or go astray, even if it is daringly and rudely attacked by the devil. Whereas the frail prayer which starts from the mouth and ends by the lips, will never reach God's ears, because the heart does not take part in it. He who so prays, his lips are moving, but his heart is void and his mind is lazy and slothful<sup>3</sup>.

- ❖ *Out of the depths of my heart*”, and with a great zeal from my mind! ... From the souls of the sorrowful, and their whole hearts, they call God with deep regret, That is why He listens to them.

Such a prayer, actually, has a great power, will never weaken nor fall, even if attacked by the devil with his great might! ... Like a strong tree whose roots go down to great depths in the soil, resists the

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 130 (129).*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 130 (129).*

<sup>3</sup> الأب الياس كوتير المخلص: خطيب الكنيسة الأعظم – القديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم، بيروت، 1988، ص 142-143.

impact of the wind; While that which is superficial, falls to the ground with the weakest breath of air; So is the prayer which has deep roots, will stay strong and will never shake nor fall, even if it is attacked by distractions, however strong, or if the devil stir up war against it. Whereas the prayer that comes, just from the mouth or the tongue, and not from the depths, will not be able to ascend up to God, for the heart is empty, and the mind is pathetic<sup>1</sup>.

❖ He says: “*Out of the depths I have cried to you*”; and You listened. Such a fervent prayer accompanied by the tears of regret, has a very great power with God, to let Him be accordant to our requests<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Moses, having been suffering, prayed quietly and humbly; Yet God heard his prayer and said to him: “*Why are you crying to me*

And also Hanna, in the bitterness of her soul, spoke in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard, she got what she prayed for (1 Samuel 1: 13).

And Abel who prayed silently while dying! The cry of his blood was stronger and louder than the sound of a trumpet (Genesis 4: 10).

Are you doing the same? I wish your answer is not in the negative. Following the counsel of the prophet saying: “*Rend your hearts and not your garments*” (Joel 2: 13), you should, as it is written: “cry out of the depths to the Lord”.

Therefore, out of the depths of the heart, make your prayer secret. ... If in the palace of an earthly king, we keep calm and quiet; we should behave with greater reverence when we enter into a far more awesome palace, not on earth, but in heaven; where we join the hosts of angels and archangels, and have fellowship of the Seraphim; who in good order, sing their secret tunes and holy praises to God, King of all. ... Mix, therefore, with all these when you pray, and follow their secret code.

Take into consideration that you are not praying to men, but to God, who is present everywhere; who hears, even before the sound comes out; and knows the secrets of your minds. If you so pray, how great will be your wages; as “*Your Father who sees in secret will*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 130.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 130.

*reward you openly*” (Matthew 6: 6). He does not say: ‘He will give you freely’, but says: “*He will reward you*”; Yes, because, making Himself indebted to you, he gives you great honor. ... Being, Himself, unseen, your prayer should also be as such<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications”* (2)

Crying out of his depths, the suffering casts his hope on the Lord alone; the ears of the Lord would incline and hear his prayer; for because He alone knows the depths of the heart, He would show compassion and mercy.

## **2- THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS:**

*“If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?”* (3)

Crying out of his depths, the one suffering does not complain to the Lord from affliction, nor cast blame on others or on the circumstances around him; but confesses his sins, and feels his helplessness to stand before the Holy One. At the same time he does not see the Lord as marking his iniquities, to punish him on every weakness or sin; but anticipates his salvation.

❖ He reveals, that he cries from underneath heavy burdens and turbulent waves. He does not say: ‘I probably will stand’, but said: “*Who could stand?*”. He saw as though almost the whole human life, on all sides, moan because of their sins; for all consciences are under accusation for the sake of their own thoughts; Not a single pure heart trusts in its self-righteousness!

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*Who could stand?*” ... In other words he says: ‘Being a sinner, full of sins without limit, I cannot approach to pray and call God! ... We so say, not to make souls not caring, but to give comfort to those falling in despair...Just remember: Who could boast and claim that his heart is pure, or that he is free of sins<sup>2</sup>?!’

(St. John Chrysostom)

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<sup>1</sup> عظة ربنا يسوع المسيح على الجبل.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 130.

***“But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared”***

**(4)**

Feeling the weight of his sins, and his inability to justify himself. The psalmist finds no other refuge except in the mercies of God; the Holy feared, yet the Merciful God, the Forgiver of sins, and the Philanthropic (Lover of mankind).

- ❖ It is not for the sake of our good works, but for the sake of Your goodness, we may be spared of the punishment; Namely, the avoidance of judgment depends upon Your compassion; which if we fail to benefit from it, our efforts would not be enough to save us from the wrath to come<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ What is this atonement (forgiveness) but the sacrifice? And what is the sacrifice but that which is offered for our sake? The shedding of the innocent blood takes away the sins of the guilty.

It is a great price that was paid to liberate the captives from the hand of the enemy who captivated them.

*“There is forgiveness with You”*. Otherwise, if You intend to be only a Judge who has no mercy; who knows all our iniquities, and seeks an account for them; Who could stand before that? ... Who could stand before you, and say: “I am innocent!”; ... Who could stand on Your day of judgment<sup>2</sup>?

**(St. Augustine)**

### **3- THE HOPE AND THE JOY OF THE RESURRECTION:**

***“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope” (5)***

Crucifixion together with the Lord Christ does not lead to despair, or to the belittling of the soul, but to hope. The soul waits for God her Savior with joy, and trusts in His faithful words and His true promises.

Our encounter of the crucified reveals the exalted love of God, and motivates us to attach, and lean on His Chest.

The one suffering casts his sins at the feet of the Savior, and his heart dissolves with love for Him, who delivered His life for his

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 130.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 130 (129).

sake; And his soul exults, on account of that, in the midst of the sufferings, she is in the company of that One, amazing in His love.

By the cross, the Word of God, or His law, is no more an opponent to be feared, but by it the reconciliation was made; The Word of God became the secret of sweetness in my depths.

❖ For the sake of Your compassion, and of Your statutes, I await salvation. As, if I wait for my abilities, I would fall into despair ... Anyway, listening to Your statutes, to Your Word, I become filled with true hope... What Word? The Word of compassion!... You notice how He says: “*For as the heavens are higher than the earth; So are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts*” (Isaiah 55: 9); And, “*For as heaven is high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him*”; And, “*As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us*” (Psalm 103: 11-12). In other words, I do not save only the righteous, but I also forgive the sinners; and offer a testimony of my help and care amid your sins<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ “*And in His word I hope*” ... The law was not given to be able to give life (Galatians 3: 23); but to reveal to the sinner, his sins; As the sinner has forgotten himself, and sees himself no more.

The sinner was given the law to see himself. It made him guilty; and the Giver of the law has liberated him, for He is the great One of authority. ... That is why there is the law of God for mercy mercy, the law of God for atonement, the law for fear, and the law of God for love. The law of love grants forgiveness for the sins; It wipes out the past, and warns concerning the future; Yet it does not disregard the company on the way, but man comes to be in the company of the One who guides him on the way.

Yet, you should try to make peace with your adversary, while you are on the way with him (Matthew 5: 25). The word of God is your adversary, but you would make peace with it when you start to have pleasure in keeping the commandment of the word of God. Your adversary, would then be your friend; and once you come to the end of the way, there would be no one to deliver you to the judge<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 130.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 130 (129).

(St. Augustine)

*“My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning; I say, more than those who watch for the morning”*  
(6)

It seems as though the psalmist has spent all night long in the temple, crying out of the depths of his heart; before help came with dawn, and the Lord responded to the cries of his heart.

According to **St. Augustine**, we wait for the Lord in hope for His resurrection, like those who watch the morning; And as He is risen from the dead, we, as well will rise together with Him.

- ❖ Nothing has activity for our salvation like continuous waiting, dependant on hope; For, even if you are disturbed by a multitude of problems that would draw you to despair, ... You are committed to hope in the Lord all the time, all your days, all your life<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption”* (7)

The psalmist calls on the believers to have their hearts filled with joyful hope; Instead of being disturbed by sufferings, they would meditate in God’s mercies and His salvation work.

- ❖ What does it mean: *“For with the Lord there is mercy”*? The fountain of mercy and its treasure is there; unceasingly flowing. Where there is mercy, there is redemption as well; and not just redemption, but complete redemption; a limitless ocean of compassion. Even if we are destroyed because of our sins, we are committed not to cool down, nor to despair. Where there are mercy and compassion, sin is not the subject of doubt; As the Judge looks through His great mercy, and His tendency toward compassion.

Thinking of that, I wish we persist on asking Him unceasingly; whether we get what we asked for, or we did not. As He has the authority to give, and the authority to choose the proper time to give. Therefore, we should persist on asking and supplicating, trusting in His mercy and compassion; And never to despair in our salvation, but contribute in what is ours; then His will would be realized in its

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 130.

perfection; as His mercy is beyond expression, and His compassion is without limits<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

***“And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (8)***

In His love, He redeems the believers from all their iniquities, and lets them bear His righteousness.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 130.

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 130

### MY SOUL EXULTS BY YOU, O CRUCIFIED ONE!

- ❖ My soul praises and thanks You;  
In the midst of my sufferings, my depths cries out to You;  
Your ears are inclined toward me;  
To listen to the cries of my heart;  
You alone knows the language of the heart, and respond to it;  
You have turned Jonah's cries in the depths into a joyful praise.
- ❖ Amid my sufferings, I look at Your cross;  
My soul would be glad to have fellowship in Your Passion;  
And my heart opens up to confess my sins;  
I cannot be justified before You;  
But I hope in Your mercies and forgiveness;
- ❖ When I see You, my soul is filled with hope;  
My heart would flare by zeal;  
To attach to You all the time;  
To hold fast to Your word, in which there is Spirit and life;  
By Your true and faithful promises, I call on all my brethren to  
encounter You;  
To enjoy the glories of redemption

## PSALM 131

# THE JOY IN THE CROSS, GRANTOR OF MATURITY

This is the last psalm of the fourth group of the psalms of Ascents which correspond to the book of Numbers. If the book of Numbers ends with the preparation to enter into the promised land, the psalmist feels that he enjoys the promised land, not for the sake of his righteousness, nor of his capabilities and possibilities, but as a gift presented by God like a Father to his son, the weaned infant.

If the journey in the wilderness represents the crucifixion together with the Lord Christ; and as we saw in psalm 129, a call to be crucified together with the Lord Christ; and in psalm 130, that by the cross, the door of hope is opened up before us, and we enjoy the joy and the power of the resurrection; In the present psalm (131), we see the psalmist realize that by rejoicing in the cross, he will enjoy continuous maturation and growth.

This short psalm reveals the spirit of humility enjoyed by the prophet David to whom God Himself testified, saying: *"I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart"* (Acts 13: 22).

.*"Some believe that this psalm came as a reaction to the words said by 'Michal', David's wife and daughter of king Saul, when she saw David dance before the ark of the Lord, and said: "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself in the eyes of his maidservants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself"* (2 Samuel 6: 20); to which he responded by saying: *"I will even be more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight, But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor"* (2 Samuel 6: 22).

This psalm came to oppose the haughtiness of those of authority. As it was said to the fallen cherub: *"Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground"* (Ezekiel 28: 17); and *"Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; Be assured, they will not go unpunished"* (Proverbs 16: 5).

If Adam and Eve, by the spirit of pride, dared to wish to be like God, the psalmist David, longed to be like a weaned child on the chest of God; And longed for all the people of God, or His church, to be like weaned children who lean upon God, and trust in Him.

### **The occasion of writing this psalm:**

1- David sang this psalm remembering that he lived as a young boy tending sheep; and has never dared to dream to sit on the throne of the kingdom. He was unjustly accused by his older brother Eliab of being proud, when he said to him: *“Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle”* (1 Samuel 17: 28).

2- According to others, he sang it to defend himself, when some of king Saul’s men accused him of wishing and planning to have the crown of the kingdom<sup>1</sup>.

3- Some others think that it was written in the land of captivity, when the Jews proclaimed their submission to those who took them captives to Babylon.

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|---|--------------|
| <b>1- A weaned infant with his mother</b> | <b>1 - 2</b> |
| <b>2- The perpetual hope</b>              | <b>3</b>     |

### **1- A WEANED INFANT WITH HIS MOTHER:**

A song of Ascents. of David

***“Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters. Nor with things too profound for me”*** (1)

The psalmist presents this praise to the Lord, proclaiming the gift of humility, coming up from the depths of his heart, as a gift given to him by God; which he ignited by not lifting his eyes up to look for higher things; nor by attaching himself to great men for a temporal earthly goal; or by seeking things beyond his capabilities or talents.

He presented this praise, not out of pride, but as thanksgiving to the Lord. If temptations have chased him since the days of his youth; though then he enjoyed the spirit of humility. He cherishes the

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<sup>1</sup> Adom Clarke Ps. 131.

cross, allowed by God for him, for the sake of his edification and his spiritual growth.

**St. John Chrysostom** is amazed to see how the psalmist boasts, not before a single person, two, or ten persons, but before the whole world, saying that he is meek, humble, and simple like a weaned infant with his mother (2); when man is sometimes committed to boast, as did the apostle Paul.

❖ *“He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 10: 17; and see Jeremiah 9: 24). He who does not boast in the cross is utterly stupid, and contradicts the law (the Christian law); He who does not boast in the faith is more miserable than all. He who does not boast and publicly talk of these things, will be on his way to destruction. That is why the apostle had trust enough to say: *“But God forbid that I should boast 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).. And in a similar way: *“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; ... Nor let the rich man glory in his riches,. But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me (God)”* (see Jeremiah 9: 23-24).

Now, his rejection of haughtiness, and his hate and avoidance of vain appearances, is not a small achievement. It is a very strong security of virtue, and a great protection of humility<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ The apostle talked about this spirit ... And so did the blessed David, although he was very keen to watch over the treasures of his heart, to the degree that he dared to address God, to whom no secrets of the conscience are concealed, as in psalm 130 (131): 1-2; Psalm 100 (101): 1-2). But, together with all that, having known the difficulty of watching, even for the perfect, he did not lean upon his personal efforts, but prayed to God, asking for His help, to become able to come out triumphant from the strikes of his enemy, saying: *“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”* (Psalm 35: 1, 2). And because he feared and was terrified lest he may fall in what is said about pride, he says: *“God resists the proud, but gives grace*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 131.

to the humble” (James 4: 6; 1 Peter 5: 5); and, as said by Solomon: “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; Be assured they will not go unpunished”(Proverbs 16: 5) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Cassian)

- ❖ “Lord, my heart is not haughty” (1). He offers a sacrifice! ... How could we prove that he offers a sacrifice?... For the humility of heart is a sacrifice!

Where there is no sacrifice, there is no priest. But, if we have a High Priest in heavens who intercedes for us before the Father (Entering into the Holy of Holies beyond the veil), we are secure, having such a Priest. Let us then offer our sacrifice there. But let us take into consideration what kind of sacrifice we are committed to offer; for “God does not delight in burnt offerings”, as is testified by Psalm 51: 16; But “The sacrifices of God are broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart – These, O God, do not despise” (Psalm 51: 17)

(St. Augustine)

*“Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me”*  
(2)

As it was mentioned by the Evangelist **St. Matthew**: “Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them (his disciples), and said: ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will, by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18: 1-3).

The Lord confirms to those who seek the kingdom, their commitment to be converted to become like little children, to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is not a retreat backward, but a growth toward the simplicity and humility of childhood. As man’s ego, through his experiences on earth, becomes too puffed up, to be no more able to enter through the narrow door. Therefore, it is befitting of him to forsake all pride to let his ego become smaller and smaller, and be utterly crucified, to be able to cross over by his crucified Lord through the door of humility, the royal door, and the only entrance into the heavenly kingdom.

The greatest and most beautiful ornament in the sight of God is meekness; which, according to the apostle Peter: “Let it be the

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<sup>1</sup> De institutis caenoborum, Book 12: 6.

*hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3: 4).*

According to **St. Augustine**, It is befitting of the believer to keep his humility; And the more the gifts and talents given to him by God, the less puffed up he should be, and the more humble; and as it is said: *“The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself; so you will find favor in the sight of the Lord”* (Sirach 3: 18).

❖ I am not proud; I do not wish to be known among men for having supernatural powers; I do not seek anything beyond my abilities; by which I would boast among the ignorant; as done by the Simon the sorcerer who was more impressed by the authority of the apostles more than by the righteousness of the Christians<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Let our exaltation be in our humility, and our glory be in our rejection of glory. Let our longing be concentrated on what brings pleasure to God; taking into consideration the wise words: *“The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself, so you will find favor in the sight of the Lord”* (Sirach 3: 18). As the Lord despises the arrogant, and counts the haughty as His enemies; but crowns the meek and the humble in mind by honors<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

❖ Who is this little child, like whom the disciples of Christ should become, except him, about whom the prophet Isaiah said: *“For unto us a child is born; Unto us a son is given”* (Isaiah 9: 6); ... He who said: *“Take up your cross and follow Me”* (Matthew 16: 24); ... He who was distinguished as *“Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten”* (1 Peter 2: 23). ... Here is the perfect virtue in childhood; bearing the old honored things, as the old age bears the innocence of childhood<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 131 (130).

<sup>2</sup> In Luc. Ser. 143.

<sup>3</sup> تفسير او 18 : 15-17.

❖ I chose the virtue, that contradicts the exaggeration; I chose humility, moderation, and regret; the same commandment given by the Lord Christ to His disciples, saying: “*Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will, by no means, enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18: 3); And the words of the psalmist saying: In my relationship with God, I practiced such humility like that of a weaned child on his mother’s chest, away from any haughtiness, in simplicity and innocence. ... I unceasingly attach to Him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

St. Augustine presents to us many views concerning this analogy to a weaned child with his mother, made by the psalmist; among which is that God seeks from us to be humble, not to seek what is beyond our abilities; and to rise and be exalted by being weaned off milk, and feeding on solid food.

{I wish to clarify, O brethren, that God wishes us to know, when to be humble, and when to rise up. ... To be humble is to keep ourselves away from pride; and to rise up toward wisdom. ... To feed on milk to grow; and grow to feed on bread. But once we start eating bread, we should be weaned from milk, and feed on solid food. ... He means to say, we should not be children in mind; but children in evil<sup>2</sup>].

Along the way in the wilderness, the people’s sight, although concentrated on the land of Canaan, yet they often suffered the deprivation from the smell of meat, fish, leeks, onion, and garlic, which they used to have in Egypt (Numbers 11: 5). which, in their sight, was like crucifixion; Not realizing that it was the practical beginning of the way to enjoy the promised land.

## 2- THE PERPETUAL HOPE:

*“O Israel, Hope in the Lord, from this time forth and forever” (3)*

The church (the New Israel) keeps hoping in the Lord until she reaches eternity, where hope comes to an end, as she comes to enjoy the true fact itself.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 131.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 131 (130).

❖ We should lean upon the Lord God, until we reach eternity; For then, there will be no more hope, but the true fact itself will be ours<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Mentioning his own achievements to give comfort to the listener, and to exhorts him to follow suit; the psalmist says: “*O Israel,, Hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever*” (3)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

### **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSAM 131**

#### **WEAN ME OFF THE TEMPORAL PLEASURES BY THE SWEETNESS OF YOUR CROSS**

- ❖ I often was drawn by the pleasures of the world;  
But Your cross has the sweetness of exalted love;  
You cross weans me off the temporal pleasures;  
Bringing me over to the heavenly goods.
- ❖ Embrace me to Your compassionate chest;  
There, my soul will find complete comfort;  
And I become like a little infant who grows by the riches of Your  
grace.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 131 (130).*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 131.*

## **PSALM 132**

### **A UNIQUE FRIENDSHIP**

In the introduction to the psalms of Ascents, we saw that the fifth group (Psalms 132 to 134) correspond to the book of Deuteronomy, where the believer desires to enter into a friendship with God, the way the prophet Moses did. Now, in the present psalm we find a kind of a covenant between God and David. The later, in meekness and humility said, *“he will not go into the chamber of his house, or go up to the comfort of his bed, will not give sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eyelids, until he finds a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the mighty God of Jacob”* (3-5). On God’s side, *“The Lord has sworn in truth to David, ... He will forever set upon his throne, the fruit of his body; if his sons will keep the Lord’s covenant”* (11-12).

This is what the true believer desires, to enter into a friendship with the Lord his God; in which the Lord finds comfort in the believer’s heart as His dwelling place. And on God’s side, His desire is to bring the believer over into the experience of the royal heavenly life.

Some believe that the psalmist David wrote down this psalm, by the Spirit of God, on the occasion of bringing the Ark of the Covenant to the holy city (2 Samuel 6: 14, 15); And they consider it a prophetic Messianic psalm. There is no doubt that those joyful moments lived by David together with all the inhabitants of Jerusalem on that day, will never go away from his memory; and were even a perpetual source of comfort for him in the moments of his affliction. His whole being was shaken, that he danced before the Ark of God like a little child; and the choirs of singers sang holy songs, using every musical instrument known at the time (2 Samuel 6).

While others believe that it was Solomon, who was called by the Lord to build the temple, according to His promise to David his father (2 Samuel 7: 13), who wrote this psalm to reveal his father’s efforts, and his longing to build a house for the Lord. Solomon wanted the people to remember always the promise of the Lord to his father David concerning the building of a dwelling place for Himself.

Still a third group believe that it was written at the end of the Babylonian captivity, when the temple was rebuilt, and the Ark of the Covenant was put in it.

This psalm is one of the psalms of the hour of 'Compline', in which the church proclaims, that she will not have comfort, and enjoy a peaceful sleep, until the Lord dwells in her believers' hearts; and seeks from Him to find in us His sanctuary, the place of His comfort.

It was a praise, sung in a joyful liturgical procession, on the way of the Ark of the Covenant to the temple. Attachment to the Lord make out of Zion a center of divine blessing, fruitful life, joy, and security for those who lean upon the Lord.

In this psalm the psalmist reminds the people of the promises of the Great Lord to his father David, that he will reign in Zion; and of how David vowed to build a house for the Lord (1-5); and in it he proclaims the Lord's promise to David to bless his seed (10-13), and to make Zion His own capital city (14-18).

'Gabelein' says that there is no need to draw attention to the fact that the psalm looks forward to Him who is greater than Solomon; who became the King in Zion -- the Son and the Lord of David<sup>1</sup>.

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|--|----------------|
| <b>1- A longing to build a house for the Lord</b>              | <b>1 - 5</b>   |
| <b>2- The divine Word came down to dwell among us</b>          | <b>6 - 10</b>  |
| <b>3- He will set us up as kings</b>                           | <b>11 - 13</b> |
| <b>4- His resting place is in our comfort and our conquest</b> | <b>14 - 18</b> |

## **1- A LONGING TO BUILD A HOUSE FOR THE LORD:**

Bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem was a proclamation of a true practical longing, and a true warm desire to build a house for the Lord. David vowed to the Lord, the mighty God of Jacob, that he will not find comfort until he realizes his vow. He talked to the prophet Nathan about this issue (2 Samuel 7: 1-2).

If this was how the prophet David longed to establish a building as a house for the Lord, how would be his longing for man to become a dwelling place for the Lord? ... This was realized, not by bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, but by the coming down of the Word of God incarnate to dwell among us.

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<sup>1</sup> Gabelein, p. 464.

- ❖ Here, David says: I do not seek a place for my comfort, save Christ who is to be born of my seed. ... He whom you praise is the fruit of my body<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

A Song of Ascents

**“Lord, Remember David, and all his afflictions” (1)**

According to certain versions: “... *David, and (his meekness or lowliness of heart)*”.

Responding to those who marvel, how could David be described as “*meek and lowly in heart*”, when he was a man of war?! And how could it be said about the prophet Moses that “*he was very humble, more than all men on the face of the earth*” (Numbers 12: 3); despite his stand against Pharaoh concerning the ten plagues, and against the Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew ... He answers that the meekness of both men was demonstrated by refraining from defending themselves, bearing a personal grudge, nor seeking revenge against those who did them wrong.

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that the secret of the meekness of the prophet David, shown by his behavior and dealings with those who did him wrong, was in two things: The first is that he feared God, and the word of God was always before his eyes, and the cause of his piety. The second thing was that, together with his longing to build the temple, and Jerusalem the city of God; he cared for the renewal of the spiritual life; ... With a spirit of meekness and humility, he bound between the outer temple, and that of the inner soul.

- ❖ David, son of Jesse, king of Israel, according to history, and as testified by the Holy Books themselves, was meek, did not pay back evil with evil to his persecutor king Saul, but kept himself before him very humble, addressed him as the king, and counted himself, compared to him, as a dog. He never answered him back with haughtiness or rudeness, although he was stronger than him by the Lord; but always sought to win his favor by humility, and was keen not to stir up his wrath by pride. Saul was delivered under David’s authority by the Lord God, to do with him as he

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps. Homily 44.on Ps. 132 (131).*

found suitable; Yet, having not got a divine command to kill him, he presented to him the mercy given to him by God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ To speak about his meekness, we have to mention how he dealt with Saul, with his own brother, with Jonathan, and how he endured the man who poured on him curses without limits (2 Samuel 16: 5-13); and several other more important things that led him to adopt his main line of thought, and constituted a sensitive point that was clear in (his program) of zeal. ... He did all that for two reasons:

1- God's pleasure in him. As it is written: "*On this one will I look; on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word*" (Isaiah 66: 2).

2- His main motive toward building the temple and the holy city, and reforming the old system of life; things that he cared for<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Oh, how great was that man, and how exalted was his spirit; he whose law sought from him to take "*eye for eye, and tooth for tooth*" (Deuteronomy 19: 21); but he surpassed that level, to a higher one of wisdom.

His wisdom did not stop at refraining from killing Saul, his violent adversary, but he even refrained from uttering an unbecoming word against him. ... We, unfortunately, often utter evil, even against our friends, in their absence.

How compassionate was his spirit! He was truly justified, as it came in his psalm: "*Lord, Remember David and all his meekness*" (1)

Let us follow his lead; ... Let us utter no word against our adversary, nor do him evil, but present to him goodness as much as we can; As by that, we do good to ourselves more than to him; according to the Lord's command to forgive our enemies, so that God will also forgive us (Matthew 6: 14)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ The meek are the gentle, the humble, who do not care for appearances, the simple in faith, and the patient when confronting an insult. Being saturated with the commandments of the gospel,

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 132 (131).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 132 (131).

<sup>3</sup> رسالتك في الحياة للقديس يوحنا الذهبي الفم تعريب القمص يعقوب ملطي.

they follow the example of the Lord who says: “*Learn from Me, for I am gentle, and lowly in heart*” (Matthew 11: 29). Moses found the greatest favor in God’s sight, because “*he was very humble, more than all men on the face of the earth*” (Numbers 12: 3)<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Chromattheus)**

**“How he swore to the Lord, and vowed to the Mighty God of Jacob” (2)**

We did not hear about such a vow by David, concerning building a house for the Lord except in this place. We do hear about his flaring zeal, concerning the collective worship, and his longing to build a house for the Lord, for this worship to settle down.

Sometimes **St. John Chrysostom** assumes that it was David who wrote this psalm, and some other times, that it was Solomon, David’s son, seeking from the Lord to realize what He promised his father.

- ❖ David swore to the Lord, as though it is within his ability; and prayed to God to realize his vow. By his vow he presented dedication, and by his prayer humility. I wish no one would think that he can realize his vow by his own strength; He who exhorts you to vow, will, Himself help you to realize it.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed” (3)**

**“I will not give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids” (4)**

By so saying, he proclaims that not a single day of his life will pass without working diligently and zealously on building the temple of the Lord.

The true believer is keen on being serious to enjoy the dwelling of the Lord in his heart, growing in this living experience every day with no slothfulness or postposition to the morrow.

- ❖ We shall indeed not cease to watch, pray, strive, and work, until the Lord is pleased by our souls, and choose them as His dwelling

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<sup>1</sup> Tractate on Mathew 17: 4: 1-2.

place, saying: *“This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it”* (Psalm 132: 14) <sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Martyrus the Syrian)**

- ❖ God guides all by the work of His grace. Therefore, do not lose heart, but cry to God day and night, to draw His compassion, that He will tell you what you should do.

*“Do not give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids”*, until you present your souls pure burnt offerings, and see God; As, without holiness no one can see God (Hebrew 12: 14) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. (Abba) Anthony the Great)**

- ❖ According to father Cronius: If the prophet Moses did not lead his sheep to Mount Saini, he would not have seen the fire in the burning bush. And when a brother asked him: To what does the burning bush refer?, he said: The burning bush refers to the labor of the body, as it is written: *“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field”* (Matthew 13: 44). And when the brother said to the elder: Man, therefore, will not reach any reward without the affliction of the body; The elder said: Yes indeed, It is written: *“Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Minister of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross”* (Hebrew 12: 2); And the prophet David also said: *“I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go to the comfort of my bed, ... until I find a place for the Lord”* (4).

**(Paradise of the fathers)**

- ❖ When God the Word comes, and the progress of this life comes to an end, He will gather those who *“did not give sleep to their eyes, or slumber to their eyelids”* (4); and who kept the commandments of Him who said: *“Watch ... always”* (Luke 21: 36) <sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

**“... And find a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob”**  
**(5)**

- ❖ Where did he look for a place for the Lord? Being meek, he looked for it inside himself. How would man become a dwelling place for

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<sup>1</sup> *Book of Perfection.*

<sup>2</sup> رسالة 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on Matt., 56.*

the Lord? ... Listen to the prophet, saying: “*Where is the place for my rest?... But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word*” (Isaiah 66: 2). Do you wish to become a dwelling place for the Lord? Be poor, of a contrite spirit, and tremble at the word of God<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ Seek the friendship of Christ without fear; as he wants you to receive Him in your house; Prepare a place for Him! ... How? Do not love yourself, but love Him; For, if you love yourself, you would be shutting the door before Him; but if you love Him, you would be opening it before Him; and once you open it, He will enter, and you will find yourself with the One who loves you<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Man can support himself with” *bars*” when he binds himself with the unity of love.

He can stand on the silver “*bases*” when he is founded on the word of God, the prophetic and apostolic.

He can adorn the “*heads*” of the “*pillars*” by “*crowns*” if his crowns are the faith in Christ, for “*The head of every man is Christ*” (1 Corinthians 11: 3).

And man can set in himself ten houses; by going deep, not in one, two, or three words of the statute, but by enjoying the spiritual meaning of the ten commandments of the law; and by producing the fruits of the Spirit: joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; and in particular when he adds love to these fruits (Galatians 5: 22). ... Let his soul be alert; Let her not “*give sleep to her eyes, or slumber to her eyelids, until she finds a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob*”<sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ Choose for yourself a kind of work in which you abide to the end. Put your hand on the plow, and do not look backward, but concentrate your sight on what is ahead, crying out: “*I shall give no sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob*” (4-5). For he who seeks God will not find rest until God listens to him; as

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 132 (131).

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 132 (131).

<sup>3</sup> Origin: In Exod. Hom 9: 4. (Ronald E. Heine).

it is written: *“This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles”* (Psalm 34: 6).

**(St. Steven of Thebes)**

- ❖ Let us then confront the evil one, armed with undefeatable weapons. ... Let us be alert, and well prepared as though it is daylight. ... Let us stab him by the arrows of the words of the Spirit, and cut all hope off him ... For we have sworn to the Lord, and vowed to the Mighty God of Jacob: *“We shall give no sleep to our eyes or slumber to our eyelids, until we find a place for the Lord, and a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob”*, to let Him dwell inside our hearts. We shall certainly not cease to watch and pray with diligence, until God is pleased with our Spirits and choose them as His dwelling place, saying: *“This is My resting place forever, Here I will dwell for I desired it”* (14) <sup>1</sup>.

**(Sahdona – Martyrius)**

- ❖ Do not seek the rest of the body; but pray with diligence and strife, even after a long day of work. Do not be slothful in praying, but stand aright and say your prayer to its end, for it is your commitment before God: *“I shall give no sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place to the Mighty God of Jacob”*. But if you allow yourself to pray without diligence, and not from your heart, you will not find rest in your prayer, nor after your prayer. If you truly wish to find rest, cleanse your sins with your tears before God, *“All night I make my bed swim, I drench my couch with my tears”* (Psalm 6: 6). Therefore beware not to stretch your body before God, and despise the prayer for the sake of the rest of your body!

**(St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian)**

- ❖ Because You are of his seed; and on account of his zeal, You said that You will establish his seed and kingdom; We now ask You to realize that covenant. .... He did not say: *“until I build the temple”*, but said: *“until I find a place, a dwelling place for the Lord”* (5) ... By that he reminds the Lord that He Himself is the Builder ... Notice his enthusiasm: He did not only say that he will not get into the chamber of his house, or go up to the comfort of his bed; but

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<sup>1</sup> كتاب الكمال، 72.

added that he will not even find comfort in enjoying those necessities of life, until he finds a place, a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob. ... Again, notice his zeal and the contrition of his heart: The king who has authority on everything says: Until I find a place, a dwelling place for the Mighty God of Jacob. ... His goal was not just to build, but to find a place that befits the temple; something that needs diligent search, of which he was aware, and for which he was well-prepared<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 2- THE DIVINE WORD CAME DOWN TO DWELL AMONG US:

*“Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah; We found it in the fields of the woods” (6)*

Those were probably the words of the prophet David and his pious friends who heard of the Ark of the Covenant when they were in Ephrathah or Bethlehem, found it in Kiriath Jearim (1 Samuel 7: 1; 2 Samuel 6: 3-4), and from there they took it up to Zion.

The two verses 6 and 7 actually refer to the Ark which was taken by the Philistines, and remained twenty years in Keriath Jearim.

Some believe that ‘Ephrathah is Bethlehem; but actually, the Ark was never there; Ephrathah was probably the name of the province of Keriath Jearim; a view confirmed by the fact that this place was the portion of Caleb Ephrathah. (1 Chronicles 2: 19).

❖ We can simply take it that Ephrathah refers to Bethlehem, where Christ was born. Truly blessed is the place celebrated by the prophet with this psalm, a long time before His incarnation. Indeed, all the locations where Christ was born, and crucified are holy, yet this particular location had a greater honor. ... Just meditate in the compassion of God! There, a little poor infant was born, and was laid in a manger “*because there was no room for them in the inn*” (Luke 2: 7)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ According to **St. Augustine**, the word ‘Ephrathah’ means a (mirror); We heard of Him in the prophecies of the prophets as

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 132.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Psalms, homily 44.

though in a mirror, but we found Him in the fields of the wood; namely in the Gentiles, who forsook the idol worship and believed in Him. The prophets presented the Lord Christ as though in a mirror, Whereas faith dwelt in the hearts of the Gentiles.

- ❖ He says: “*We heard of Him in Ephrathah*”; Namely we were so told by our fathers, by the hearing of the ear, that there, He wandered in the fields, and finally came to the place of His comfort ... Let that also happen now<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“Let us go into His tabernacle; Let us worship at His footstool” (7)***

The prodigal son coveted to forsake his father’s house, and to dwell in it no more; with the assumption that he would enjoy freedom, and be his own master; but he ended up scattering his wealth. The psalmist, on the contrary, coveted to enter into the dwelling place of his heavenly Father, and to do according to His will.

Worshipping at the Lord’s footstool is a sign of complete submission with joy, to do according to the will of the Savior, and not according to his own will.

- ❖ Don’t you see the greatness of accuracy of the expression he uses concerning the dwelling place of the Lord: “*His footstool*”; referring to the location of the Ark of the Covenant, from which horrifying noises used to come, to solve riddles, and to prophesy events of the future<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ Those who preach the gospel in the whole world, testify to the feet of the lord; about whom the Holy Spirit prophesied in the psalm, saying: “*worship at His footstool*”; namely, where the apostles – His footstool – have reached; as by them, He was preached, and by them, He came to the end of the earth<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Clement of Alexandria)**

In a talk by father John of Damascus about the different kinds of prostration (worship), he distinguishes between prostration to worship, which only concerns God; prostration to honor, as that done

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 132.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 132.

<sup>3</sup> Paedagogus 2: 8.

by Joshua son of Nun, and Daniel, before the angel of God, and by David before the Ark of the Lord “*at His footstool*”; and prostration for respect and thanksgiving, as that done by Abraham before the sons of Heth, when they gave him a plot of earth to bury his wife Sarah.

❖ Prostration, as a way to show righteousness and honor, have different levels: First of all is the prostration presented to God, who, alone is worthy of worship. Then for His sake, to His servants and subjects, as when Joshua and Daniel prostrated before the angel of God; or when David did before God’s sanctuaries, saying: “*Let us go into His tabernacle; Let us worship at His footstool*” (7); Or when the children of Israel presented burnt offerings and worshiped in His tabernacle; or when, by the command of their king, they surrounded the temple in Jerusalem, concentrating their eyes on it from all sides, and worshipping; Or when Jacob prostrated to the ground before his older brother, and before the Pharaoh, the one with authority given to him by the Lord (Genesis 47: 7); Or when Joseph’s brothers fell down before him (Genesis 50: 18); And a prostration as a sign of respect, as when Abraham prostrated before the sons of Heth. ... We therefore, should either cancel prostration altogether, or take it in the way it is meant to be<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John of Damascus)

***“Arise, O Lord, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength” (8)***

This same phrase was used by Solomon when he dedicated the new temple (2 Chronicles 6: 41-42).

And was also used by the Jews on their way back from captivity, longing to rebuild the temple, for the Lord to proclaim His glory there.

And it is, as well, the cry of every believer coming out daily of the depths of his heart, coveting that the Lord would proclaim His glory in it, and finds His resting place in his depths; ... He who proclaimed: “*The Son of Man has no place to lay His head*” (Luke 9 57).

All those things prophetically refer to that great renewal; realized by the true Son of David, the anointed Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> عن الصور المقدسة، الدفاع الأول، 14.

“*Arise, O Lord*”. Was repeated during the celebration of the procession, whenever the ark set out (Numbers 1: 35; Psalm 132: 7)). This military expression echoed as a complete trust in king David, as well as in the holy Ark.

❖ He who slept, And He who is risen, is our Head; And His Ark is His church. He first arose, and so will His church. It was not possible for the body to dare promise itself the resurrection, unless the Head arises first. The body of Christ, taken From St. Mary, is understood by some to be the Holy Ark of the Sanctuary; As though the words mean: “Arise with Your body, so as not to deny those who believe (of the resurrection) <sup>1</sup>.”

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Come, O beloved brethren, let us sing this song that we learned by the inspired harp of David, saying: *Arise, O Lord to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength*” (8). The holy Virgin is indeed an “ark”, coated with gold in and out; having received the perfect Treasure of Holiness.

“*Arise, O Lord, to the place of Your rest*”... Arise from the bosom of the Father (without ever being separated from Him), to lift up the fallen human race (John 16: 28) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Gregory, the wonder-worker)**

❖ By such a way, the Lord testified to the greatness of His strength, once, twice, and several times; as it happened when the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to Ashdod (1 Samuel 5: !-8) ... Now what does it mean by saying: “Arise, O Lord to the place of Your rest”? except to say: Put an end to that wandering, and taking of the ark; Let it settle down for good<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness; And let Your saints shout for Joy” (9)**

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the psalmist’s mind was preoccupied, not with building the house of the Lord, and providing it with befitting precious vessels, etc., as much as it was preoccupied

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 132 (131).

<sup>2</sup> البشارة بالتجسد الإلهي، 2005، تعريب القمص يعقوب ملطي ونادية أمين مرقس، عظة 1.

<sup>3</sup> On Psalm 132.

with the purity of the hearts of the priests and the people; for the priests to be clothed with righteousness, and the people to praise with the spirit of shouts and exultation, coming out of the depths of their hearts.

According to the scholar Origen, the righteousness with which the priests are to be clothed, is the Lord Christ who, for us He became righteousness, by whom we stand before the Father, to be justified; For when Christ dwells by faith in our hearts, our souls become filled with exultation, and our depths shout for joy.

The priests are clothed with the liturgical garments of church service (Zechariah 3: 4-5); but it is befitting of them to be clothed, as well, with righteousness, with personal holiness, which is a divine gift given to the serious faithful, to be worthy to intercede in the realization of the covenant between God and His people; Hence these garments were called “*the garments of salvation*” Isaiah 61: 10).

The priests are clothed with the garments of righteousness; And all – priests and congregation – being the pious or the saints of the Lord, offer the sacrifice of praise, and would not cease spiritual shouting. The whole people take part in the procession of triumph in the Lord.

❖ This phrase is uttered by him who prays, and not by him who seeks to acquire a virtue. The word “righteousness” here, applies to the rite, the priesthood, the worship, the sacrifices, the offerings, and to the type of life associated with all that; as this is a supplication presented for the sake of the priests.

“*and Your saints shout for joy*”, something that actually happened. Notice that he was not preoccupied with building the house, nor with providing it with an abundance of precious vessels, or any other form of luxury; but with the settling down of the ark, the consummation of the number of the priests, the rites, the worship, and the priesthood<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ That is why Moses was instructed that when the priest enters into the tabernacle of meeting, he should have little bells of gold attached to his garment all around, that “*Its sound will be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he*

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 132.

comes out, that he may not die” (Exodus 28: 33, 35), which refers to that the priest should have the talent and the ability to give sermons, and to preach; lest by his silence, he would be worthy of judgment by the Lord who sees from above.

What does clothing of the priest mean, but his good works; as testified by the words: “*Your priests be clothed by righteousness, and Your saints shout of joy*” (9). Those little bells were, therefore, fixed to the hem of the priest’s garment, to proclaim his life, through his good works and words<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Gregory the Great)**

❖ These are the elements by which the tabernacle of meetings was made; and by which the priests and the high priest were clothed.

“*Your priests are clothed with righteousness, and Your saints shout for joy*”; These are the garments of justice and of mercy; as according to the apostle Paul: “*the elect of God... put on tender mercies*” (Colossians 3: 12). And talking about greater and more splendid Garment, he says: “*Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision of the flesh, to fulfill its lusts*” (Romans 13: 14). These are the garments worn by the church<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ The required garment is deep in the heart and not on the body from outside. As we learn from the words: “*Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness*” (9). About which the apostle Paul says: “*If indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked*” (2 Corinthians 5: 3). That was how the man who was unprepared with the proper wedding garment, was exposed by the Lord of the banquet, tried, chained, and cast away. And he is one of many<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“For Your servant David’s sake, do not turn away the face of Your anointed” (10)**

Some believe that it was Solomon who sought from God to listen to his prayer, and not to turn away his face; through the intercession of his father beloved by God.

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<sup>1</sup> Pastoral Core, 2: 4.

<sup>2</sup> In Exod. Hom 9: 3(Ronald E. Heine).

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 90: 4.

And **St. Augustine** believes that the talk here is addressed to God the Father concerning His anointed, the incarnate Word; whom they crucified, and shouted blasphemy against Him; then they believed when they saw the miracles performed in the name of the crucified Jesus. Here, the psalmist refers to the few who believed in the Lord Christ after His resurrection.

❖ He says: Not only for his virtue, nor for his zeal to build the temple; but also for the sake of the covenant with him: *“For Your servant David’s sake, do not turn away the face of Your anointed”*. Whose face is that? Of him who was anointed at that time as a guide and leader of the people<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

### **3- HE WILL SET US UP AS KINGS:**

*“The Lord has sworn in truth to David; he will not turn from it: I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body” (11)*

The King of kings, intending *“to make His people kings and priests to His God and Father”* (Revelation 1: 6); Here, He swears to David to set upon his throne the fruit of his body.

In ‘Kerith Jearim’, David swore to the Lord, not to go to the comfort of his bed until he finds a dwelling place for the Lord among His people

(2). Here, begin the celebrations in Jerusalem, of the Lord’s vow to set up a king of the fruit of David’s body.

In the Holy Book there are three important vows:

1- The Lord swore to Abraham to make his offspring as numerous as the stars in heaven (Genesis 22: 15-18)

2- The Lord swore to Israel to let them possess the land (Exodus 6: 8).

3- The Lord swore to David to set upon his throne the fruit of his body, if they practically keep the divine covenant. Here we remember the long prayer of Solomon the day he dedicated the temple, reminding the Lord of His promise to his father David (1 Kings 8: 25-26); and a confirmation of the enjoyment by the people of the divine blessings: *“when he comes and prays toward this temple”* (1 Kings 8: 42).

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 132.

The Lord swore to David to set upon his throne the fruit of his body; which was realized in setting Solomon a king. And when the Word of God came incarnate from the Virgin St. Mary, the daughter of David, a King on the hearts, and to sit in His kingdom forever; being the Son of David and His God at the same time.

- ❖ What does he mean by “*swore*”? He established His vow by Himself. And what does he mean by “*He will not turn from it*”? He promised not to change what He promised.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ **St. Matthew** left all the other names to mention only Abraham and David (Matthew 1: 1); For, only to them, God has sworn (straightforward) about Christ (Genesis 22: 18; Psalm 132: 11) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ When the Lord asked the Jews: “*What do you think about the Christ?*” (Matthew 22: 42), they answered: “the Son of David”. That they easily knew, having learned it from the prophecies. He was truly the seed of David, yet “*according to the flesh*” from the virgin St. Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph. And when He said to them: “*How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord’, saying: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’*” (Matthew 22: 42). “*If David calls Him ‘Lord’, how is He his Son?*” (Matthew 22: 45). No one was able to answer Him.

This is what we find in the gospel. He did not deny His sonhood to David, even if they could not comprehend His Lordship to him, as well. They comprehended in Christ what came according to the time, but they could not comprehend what it is according to His eternity. Intending to teach them about His divinity, He posed for them a question concerning His manhood; As though He intends to say: You know that Christ is the Son of David. Tell Me, how could He be His Lord as well?. And lest they might say that He is not a Lord of David, He came up with the testimony by David himself. What does David say? He says the truth; As you find David say in his psalm: “*I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body*” (Psalm 132: 11). Therefore, He is the Son of David; Then, How could the Son of David be His Lord as well? “*The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at*

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<sup>1</sup> In Matt. 1: 2.

*my right hand*” (Psalm 110: 1). How could you marvel that the Son of David is his God, when you see Mary the mother of her God? ... He is the Lord of David, being a God, being the God of all; And He is the Son of David, as the Son of Man is a Lord and a Son at the same time. He is the Lord of David “*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*” (Philippians 2: 7); And the Son of David, having “*made Himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant*” (Philippians 2: 7) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The bride of the song charges the daughters of the heavenly Jerusalem (in the form of a vow) that love could double and continuously increase until His will is consummated, he who “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2: 4). The text says: “*I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, Do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases*” (Song 8: 4). The vow is what is uttered, together with a guarantee of its truth. It is done in two ways: Either to tell the one who vows to confirm the truth to the listener; or to commit him not to tell lies. According to the psalm, “*The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: ‘I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body’*” (11). In this case, the promise is confirmed by a vow <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)**

❖ Having been granted a prior knowledge by a higher enlightenment, the prophet presented a clear prophecy of what is going to happen. It was said to the blessed David by the Lord of all: “*I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body*” (11). And having knowledge of everything, God planted in the saintly prophets a prior knowledge of what is going to happen, proclaiming through them that the secret, testified to on all sides, is to be believed as an actual fact. He says: “*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of the roots*” (Isaiah 11: 1) <sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

❖ We know that the Lord is to be born by a virgin. whose (familial background) is revealed by the following prophesies: “*The Lord*

<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 1: 20.

<sup>2</sup> عظة 4 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار .

<sup>3</sup> Is 2: 4 PG 70: 309 C-D.

*has sworn in truth to David, He will not turn from it: 'I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body'. And, "Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David; his seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; It will be established forever like the moon"; And, "His seed also, I will make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven" (Psalm 89: 29; 35) <sup>1</sup>.*

***"If your sons will keep My covenant, and My testimony which I shall teach them; Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore" (12)***

David got a special covenant that his reign shall endure in his time and that of his sons; Yet, it was a conditional covenant; Namely, if his sons will keep the covenant and the testimonies that God will teach them.

***"For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation" (13)***

There is a great difference between hearing that the ark of the covenant was moved from one place to another; and hearing that *"The Lord has chosen Zion, He has desired it for His habitation"*. He, the Creator of heaven and earth, has chosen it by Himself and desired it for his habitation.... What is Zion but a symbol of the church of the living God, *"the pillar and the ground of truth"* (1 Timothy 3: 15).

How amazing is the exalted love of God; He desires to set of every soul a city for Himself, where He dwells and which He desires; makes it His kingdom, and proclaims His glory in it.

Therefore, it is befitting of every believer to look at every soul of his brethren with reverence and respect, for the Lord seeks it as His habitation where He dwells.

#### **4- HIS RESTING PLACE IS IN OUR COMFORT AND OUR CONQUEST:**

***"This is My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it" (14)***

If God desires to set His people kings, While granting this free gift, He find His pleasure, as a Father to rejoice in the joy of His children, and to find rest in their comfort. That is how God proclaims

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 12 : 23.

His desire to dwell among His people, granting them satisfaction, glory, exultation, strength, enlightenment, and conquest.

This psalm begins with the moaning of David, who was in affliction (1); But he gets a divine promise with a vow in His Son; not Solomon, but the Messiah the Son of David, the good news of whose birth was given by the angel Gabriel to the virgin St. Mary, as such: *“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus ... and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end”* (Luke 1: 32-33). By this promise the psalm ends with exultations and glories on a heavenly level.

We often talk of the greatness of the Mighty God, and also of His justice and love; but we do not dare to talk of His humility. What humility is more than His talk about His dwelling inside us, saying: *“Here I will dwell, for I have desired it”*. We do not hear of His desire to dwell in any of the pure heavenly hosts, who are very beloved by Him; but He desires to set out of us a dwelling place for Himself.

- ❖ These are God’s words: *“This is My resting place”*; How great is God’s love for us, O brethren! Wherever we find rest, He says that He finds rest as well. ... He is not like us, sometimes get disturbed, then finds rest; but says that, there He finds rest, for we find our rest in Him; *“Here I will dwell, for I have desired it”*<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread”* (15)**

When God dwells in the soul of the believer, it becomes like a paradise filled with the fruits of the Spirit, Blessing will dwell, and the heavenly creatures will rejoice. There will be no more poor, as in it will flow rivers of divine grace.

- ❖ Look, how prosperity will dwell on all sides together; There will be no lack of necessities (bread); the priests will live in security, the people in happiness, and the king in power (*with a lamp*) (17). And the best form of prosperity is to be bound to this; *“the enemies*

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 132 (131).

*will be clothed with shame; but upon Himself His crown shall flourish” (18) <sup>1</sup>*

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ *“I will satisfy her poor with bread”*. What does this mean, O brethren? ... Let us be poor, for then, we shall be satisfied. ... There are many who trust in the world, while proud. They are Christians, worship Christ, yet they are not satisfied, for they are satisfied with their pride, and have plenty of it ... They worship Christ, revere Him, and pray to Him, yet they are not satisfied with His wisdom and righteousness. Why? For they are not poor! The poor. Namely, the humble in heart, whenever they are hungry, they eat; And once they wash their hands of this world, they become more hungry for Christ.

The Lord Himself is their Bread. The Bread came down to earth to become milk for us. He says to His own: *“I am the bread which came down from heaven”* (John 6: 41) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ When will the church be considered a widow? If Christ her Groom departs from her. About whom the apostle says: *“For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11: 2). *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church”* (Ephesians 5: 25).

And when will the church be considered poor? If she put all her hope in the honor and riches of this world, and not in the Lord God alone. Hence we read: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5: 3).

And when will the church be likened to orphans? About that our Lord and Savior Himself says: *“Do not call anyone on earth your father; For One is your Father, He who is in heaven”* (Matthew 23: 9). ... I wish those who have no father, appear humble<sup>3</sup>!

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

***“I will also clothe her priests with salvation; And her saints shall shout aloud for joy” (16)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 132.

<sup>2</sup> On Psalm 132 (131).

<sup>3</sup> Sermons 49: 1.

A joyful portrait of the church of the New Covenant which became a dwelling place for God, where He finds His resting place, flows His grace, satisfy her poor with bread, clothe her priests with salvation; where the baptized are clothed and covered with Christ; and their language will become that of joy and unceasing exultation.

- ❖ Who is our Salvation but our Christ?... What does it mean then, that “*her priests I will clothe with salvation?*” ... “*For as many of you, as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ*” (Galatians 3: 27) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“*There I will make the horn of David grow; I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed*” (17)**

The horn refers to power. ... And how did David’s power grow?, By the incarnation of the Word of God, who came from the seed of David according to the flesh. He who gave light to the whole world by the light of His cross, proclaiming His practical love for the world

His coming was not sudden without preparation; As He, along the generations, sent men of God and prophets to testify for Him; and finally, sent **St. John** the Baptist to prepare the way for Him, and to testify publicly for Him; -- “*the lamp*” who directly preceded the coming of the Lord Christ, and testified to Him, saying: “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1: 29) <sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ John was not only called ‘an angel’ for Christ, but was rather called “*a lamp*” who shined before Christ; according to David’s prophecy: “*I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed*” <sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Tertullian)**

- ❖ The law was symbolized, as well, by ‘a lamp’, commanded to stay perpetually aflame. John was “*a lamp*” who preceded Christ for those who were under the law, dwelling in Judea, about whom God said: “*I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed*” (17). ... Yet the Jews were pleased with it for some time, hastened to be baptized by him, and were impressed by his way of life; but they soon killed him, doing their best to quench that burning lamp forever.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalm 132 (131).

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Luke.

<sup>3</sup> An answer to the Jews, 9.

Hence the Savior describes him as “*a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light*” (John 5: 35)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril the Great)**

❖ When Christ came, the Jews rejected Him, while the demons confessed Him (Mark 1: 34)

David, His grandfather, was aware of Him, when he said: “*I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed*” (17); the lamp, interpreted by some as “the Splendor of Sonhood” (2 Peter 1: 19); And by others as the Body taken from the virgin Mary.

The prophet Amos was not ignorant of the issue of the Christ, when he said: “*He was proclaimed among men by His Anointed*”

**(The Septuagint version).**

Moses knew Him, as well as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the prophet; He was even known by the demons, whom He .

The high priest did not recognize Him, while the Samaritan woman proclaimed Him, saying: “*Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?*” (John 4: 29) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

❖ “*What woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweeps the house, and seek diligently until she finds it?*” (Luke 15: 8). ... Who is the woman? She is the body of Christ. ... And who is “*the lamp*” in “*I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed*” (17). ... That is why we were sought for until we were found; ... I wish we do not boast with pride; having been lost before, and would have stayed lost, if we were not sought for<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon Himself, His crown shall flourish” (18)**

In some versions it came as “*Upon Himself, My holiness will flourish*”

The psalmist ends the psalm in a joyful way. If the devil does not cease to oppose and to persecute the church of God; It is for his cup of evil to get filled, and for him to be clothed eternally with

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<sup>1</sup> *Comm.. on Luc. Ch1.*

<sup>2</sup> مقال 10 :15.

<sup>3</sup> *On Luc.12: 8-10.*

shame; ... And for the children of God to be justified and flourish with the crown of holiness through the divine grace.

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 132

### COME, O LORD, AND DWELL IN ME

- ❖ O Lord, You are my life, comfort, and peace;  
Dwell, O Lord in my depths, that by You, my soul will find rest;  
With every morning, I call on You to proclaim Yourself in my depths;  
And all the day long, my heart and mind are preoccupied with You.  
No day passes without having a new experience with You.
- ❖ My soul will not find rest except in Your bosom;  
My body may find sleep, but my soul stays awake talking to You;  
Let me find rest in Your bosom;  
And may You accept to find Your rest in my depths;  
Arise. O Lord, in my depths, to Your resting place;  
You and the ark of Your strength.
- ❖ Grant me every day a new experience;  
When Your grace works in me;  
I will not cease to strive;  
To have You transfigure in me;  
To live diligently, and with no slothfulness;  
So that not a single day of my life will be lost.  
For my days are few;  
Like vapor that will soon vanishes.
- ❖ Adorn Your temple in me with Your righteousness, to be clothed with it;  
And grant me Your fear, to live with the spirit of piety;  
Your dwelling fills my depths with gladness and spiritual beauty;  
Your dwelling lights my depths with Your splendor.
- ❖ The devil will never cease his opposition;  
But how could he stand before You?  
By his opposition he will be clothed with shame;  
And You will be glorified in Your children.

## PSALM 133

# THE DIVINE FRIENDSHIP AND THE BROTHERLY LOVE

In the last psalm, the psalmist revealed the friendship with God, choosing to dwell in us; finds rest when we find rest in Him. In the present psalm, the psalmist reveals that this friendship would not be realized unless we bear the spirit of love, and the true friendship with one another. The believer will not taste the sweetness of the divine love, unless his heart becomes wide by love for his brethren. And as much as God desires to dwell in our hearts, it is befitting of us to desire to dwell with the spirit of love with our brethren. The secret of unity is not in mere physical encounter, as much as it is to encounter with them in God, through the purity of heart and the pure life sanctified in Him.

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>1- The pleasantness of dwelling together</b> | <b>1</b> |
| <b>2- The unity in Christ</b>                   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>3- The unity and the eternal life</b>        | <b>3</b> |

This psalm is mostly called “a psalm of wisdom”, not that it teaches us wisdom, but it proclaims, by the spirit of praise, what we have reached by the blessing of the Lord, and by His exalted grace on us<sup>1</sup>. Now, as we come to the psalm before the last of the psalms of Ascents, he talks about the brotherly love that bears the sweet fragrance of Christ, in peace and tranquility, “*like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion*”.

❖ Love is the gate through which we get into heaven itself<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 1- THE PLEASANTNESS OF DWELLING TOGETHER:

A Song of ascents. Of David

***“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (1)***

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, 1989, Ps. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 133*.

Some believe that this psalm used to be sung by the priests and the Levites when they got together to serve in the house of the Lord. As God is pleased by His encounter with the believer on a personal level, in a relationship of hidden and secret love, He is pleased, as well, by the encounter of all in the unity of love to praise together.

How would be the encounter of all believers, from Adam to the end of time, on the clouds with the Lord Christ, be pleasant even to the heavenly creatures, who have for long waited for that amazing day.

- ❖ There are many good things, yet they may lack the joy (the beauty). And on another aspect, there are things that grant satisfaction, yet they may lack the goodness. ... It is not easy for both to get together ... Notice that he does not refer to mere dwelling, or living together in one place, but to dwell together in unity; namely, in harmony and love; which make the people of one spirit<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ The sure and permanent unity of friendship is the one between those alike in goodness alone ... By it, love will be genuine between those of the same goal and mind, to have or to reject the same things together.

In case you wish to keep that unbreakable love, you should be keen first on ridding yourselves of your faults, and to put your lusts to death, with mutual zeal and unified goal, striving to realize what makes him glad, who says: “*How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*” (1). For, what could reveal the unity of the spirit like dwelling together in one place. ... Although those who are different in personality and goal, would try in vain to live together in one place; Yet the distance does not hinder the unity between those who have equal goodness; for union is consummated by God, and not by the place ... And no abiding peace could holdfast when there is a difference in will between men<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Joseph)**

- ❖ The apostle wrote: “*He who has begun a good work in you, will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Philippians 1: 6). And

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 16: 3.

our Lord Himself says: *“If anyone comes to Me and does not forsake all his wealth (and his own family); and does not hate ... even himself, cannot be my disciple”* (see Luke 14: 33). ... God can realize in us the saying: *“How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”* (1). And I even pray that you could reach the measure of what is written in the Book of Acts: *“All who were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the apostles’ feet”* (Acts 4: 34-35).

**(St. Augustine)**

## **2- THE UNITY IN CHRIST:**

*“It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments”* (2)

The joyful union could not be realized except by the unity of all together in the Heavenly High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, as members in His body, who bear His sweet fragrance.

❖ *“like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments”* (2).

Whom does he mean by Aaron? ... A priest! ... And who is He, but that High Priest alone (the Lord Christ), who entered into the Holy of Holies?

Who is that priest, but Him who is the Sacrifice, and the Priest at the same time? He who, having not found a pure thing in the whole world to offer, He offered Himself?!

The precious oil is upon His head; For the Lord Christ is One, with whom the church unite; But the precious oil come down from the head, Our Head is Christ, crucified, buried, risen, and ascended to heaven. And the Holy Spirit came from the Head.

Where to, did it run down? To the beard, which refers to the courageous, mature, zealous, and active. ... When we refer to such people, we say that they are with a beard.

The precious oil also ran down upon the apostles; ran down on those who were the first to endure the opposition of the world.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ After this you go up to the Priest (the Lord Christ). Notice what follows. Is it not what David means by saying: “*Like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron*”? The same oil spoken of by Solomon: “*Your name is ointment poured forth, Therefore the virgins love you; Lead me away*” (Songs 1: 3-4). How many souls are renewed today, and loved You, O Lord Jesus, while saying: *Lead me away! We will run after You*; ... after the fragrance of Your garments; the fragrance of Your resurrection.

Meditate now in why this happens; Because “*The wise man’s eyes are in his head*” (Ecclesiastes 2: 14); the oil runs down to the beard; that we, as well, would become an elect race, priesthood, well-appreciated on account of that we are anointed by the spiritual grace, to have fellowship in the kingdom of God, and in the (general) priesthood<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ As much as the moth-eaten garment is no more of market value, or of any value whatsoever; And the same with the termite-infested wood, would be unfit for use in construction, but only to be consumed by fire; So it will be with the soul that becomes a victim to continuous fits of destructive depression, it will become unfit for the priesthood garment, which, according to the prophecy of the righteous David is the precious ointment of the Holy Spirit coming down from heaven: “*running down to the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garment*” (2)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Cassian)**

❖ It is not possible for an impure soul – however great is her longing for reading – to acquire spiritual knowledge; For no one can pour precious oil or good honey or any valuable fluid in a dirty vessel of filthy odor, For such a vessel will corrupt what is put in it, more than it is affected by the good thing put in it. For the effect of the corrupt will be quicker than that of the pure. ... Unless the vessel of our soul is purified from the corruption of sin, it will not be worthy to receive the precious oil about which the prophet says: “*Like the precious oil on the head, running down to the beard, the*

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<sup>1</sup> *On the Mysteries* 6: 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> *De institutes caenoborum*, Book 9: 3.

*beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garment” (2). “For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? (2 Corinthians 6: 14-15)<sup>1</sup>.*

**(Father Nestor)**

- ❖ The oils of the anointment are different, each with its spiritual symbolic meaning ... As nothing would be sanctified except by anointment, the virgins of the Song of Solomon say: “*Your name is ointment poured forth; ... Lead us away, We will run after you*” (Song 1: 3-4)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ He compares love with the precious ointment and the dew; By the later he reveals the good fragrance, and by the former the tranquility and the joyful appearance<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ To God, nothing is better than brotherly love; and getting together in harmony; according to what is written: “*Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*” (1)<sup>4</sup>.

**(Father Chromatis)**

### **3- THE UNITY AND THE ETERNAL LIFE:**

*“It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forevermore” (3)*

Wherever there is love, harmony, and unity, there will be the blessing of the Lord, and the eternal life.

The mountain of Zion here is not that in Jerusalem, but in Hermon, known for dense dew that gives it fertility. It is befitting of our union together to be fruitful by good works through the divine grace,

- ❖ Some commend the joy of love by the words: Love between brethren; Agreement between brethren; and A husband and wife who live together in harmony (See Sirach 25: 1). While others

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences 14: 14*.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. Hom. 45 (Ps, 132)*.

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 133*.

<sup>4</sup> *Chromatius: Tractate on Matt. 59: 1*.

refer to its strength by the word: *“If two lie down together, they will keep warm; ... And a threefold cord is not quickly broken”* (Ecclesiastes 4: 11, 12). Here he confirm both joy and strength ... And also: *“A brother who helps his brother is like a strong city”* (Ecclesiastes 18: 19); And the Lord Christ said: *“Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them”*( Matthew 18: 20).

Now, that is required by nature itself; ... That is why at the beginning of the creation of mankind, God said: *“It is not good that the man should be alone”* (Genesis 2: 18).

*“Life forevermore”* (3). It is good that he added that; As wherever there is love, there is great security, and a great grace from God; It is the mother of all goods, its origin, and fountain; the end of wars; and the disappearance of animosity. To refer to that, he added: *“life forevermore”*. Contention and animosity end in death, premature death; whereas love and agreement will cause peace and harmony; whenever there is peace and harmony, life will be practiced in security and perfect surety. And why would we refer to the present; when love, above all, is the queen of virtues which will prepare us for heaven and indescribable goodness; Let us, therefore, care for it, and diligently go after it, to enjoy goodness, both the present, and that to come<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ In the house of God; In the church of Christ, men dwell together with one mind, and go on living in harmony and simplicity<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyprian)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Treat. 1: 8.

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 133**

### **IN YOU, WE GATHER TOGETHER WITH THE SPIRIT OF LOVE**

- ❖ Attaching to You, we gather together; and You embrace us by Your Holy Spirit;  
You set out of us members in Your holy body;  
Then, we shall have Your sweet fragrance.
- ❖ I wander when will You come; And Your whole church will gather together on the clouds;  
Will gather together from Adam to the end of time; And heaven will shake for joy for the heavenly bride;  
And the heavenly creatures will bring us in, in an amazing procession.
- ❖ Yes, Grant us the heart, wide open by love for all;  
Grant us Your grace, that we bear the fruit of the Spirit;  
Let Your grace work in us, to prepare us for Your encounter.

## **PSALM 134**

### **ENTRANCE INTO THE DIVINE SANCTUARIES**

Now, that we have reached the top of the ladder, namely, the last of the psalms of Accents, our heart is lifted up, as though to heaven itself, to enter to the bosom of the Father, and share with the heavenly hosts their perpetual praise with joy and exultation. All what preoccupies us will be the glorification for the sake of the Lord's blessing dwelling upon us. As though we practice the exulting heavenly life, in the eternal house of the Lord.

It could be said that this psalm is a liturgical church praise, presented by the believers in heaven itself, as a praise of thanksgiving for reaching the divine sanctuaries. Some believe that as those coming to the temple for the feast at the end of the day; With the beginning of the evening service; the high priest sing, seeking from the priests and the Levites to praise the Lord, together with the whole congregation (1-2).

If the priests and the Levites whose main duty is to guard the temple against any disturbance of order; that no one would approach any place where he is not allowed to be; to watch over the fire of the altar, together with the lamps of the lampstand, etc., lest they might be quenched; Yet they, together with the people, are requested to praise and glorify the Lord, who opened before them His house, to enter into it, and to enjoy the divine presence.

A Song of Ascents

***“Behold, Praise the Lord, All you servants of the Lord, who by night stand in the house of the Lord!” (1)***

- ❖ By getting to the top of the ladder, he presents these magnificent final words: his praise and blessing. Now he requests from the servants of the Lord, not only to keep His commandments, but to live according to them; Hence he adds: “... *who stand in the house of the Lord*”. As it is not befitting of anyone unclean or defiled to enter into the holy sanctuaries. He who is worthy to enter would also be worthy of the blessing. The house of the Lord is like

heaven; And the way the adversary hosts are not allowed to enter into heaven, It is the same way concerning the house of the Lord.

Now, how could you show this purity? If you keep away any evil thought, or the works of the devil, from entering into your minds; If you adorn your minds, as it is befitting of the holy temple. ... Above all that, If, in the Jewish temple, not all places are wide open before everyone; but there are a place for the proselytes, another for the Jews from the beginning; another for the priests and the Levites; and another for the high priest alone, not all the time, but only once a year – Then, you should put into your consideration the degree of reverence, required from him, who gets what is greater than the symbol, and greater than the Holy of Holiness in that time! For whom, it is not the cherubim, but the Lord of the cherubim, Himself, dwelling inside him; ... It is not the vessel of Manna, or the two stone tablets, or the rod of Aaron, but the body and blood of the Lord; ... the Spirit instead of the letter, and the grace that surpasses the human mind; ... an indescribable gift!

Now, as you, seemingly, are more worthy of the great symbols and the awesome secrets; you are required to prove a greater holiness; And you will, as well, get a more serious punishment in case you break the commandments<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord”***

**(2)**

Lifting up the hands refer to lifting up the heart and the mind to God who dwells in heaven. And as the hands refer to the work; the believers, together with meditating in God’s love, grace, and care, should practice what is befitting of them; so that their life would be in harmony with their meditations, prayers, and praises. As. According to the apostle Paul: *“I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting”* (1 Timothy 2: 8).

❖ *“By night,... Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord”* (2). Why does he say: *“By night”*? To teach us that we should not spend the whole night sleeping, as then, prayers are more pure, when the mind is more pure, and the time is more free and convenient. ... Now, if it has been necessary to go to the

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 134.

sanctuary by night to pray, Just think, what would be the excuse for someone not to pray at that time at his own home? ... I mean to say, that, while the inspired author of the psalms used to get up from his bed, and walks to the temple to spend the night praying, you do not pray while having comfort at home<sup>1</sup>!

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ I wish the Groom (the Lord Christ) finds every bride (the human soul) weaving the precious threads of virtue; lifting up her hands by night in prayer, doing her work, adorning her habits, and longingly waiting for her Groom to come<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

*“The Lord who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion” (3)*

Some believe that this verse is the response of the priests and the Levites to the exhortation of the high priest to bless the Lord by night.

While others believe it to be their response, seeking his blessing on the whole congregation; according to what came in the book of Numbers: *“Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace’”* (Numbers 6: 23-26).

According to **St. Augustine**, the blessing of the Lord upon the multitude, is presented in the singular tense; namely, is addressed to one; as he who is attached to his brethren, to become one with them, will enjoy the Lord’s blessing.

- ❖ After giving this advice as a necessary thing, he ends his words with a prayer; something that designates an exalted teacher, who reforms his listeners by advise, and revives them by prayer.... What does he mean by saying *“from Zion”*? Because this name was dear to them, and all their rites were performed there; That is why he requests from them to forsake their past way of life, to be preoccupied by the rite, and to enjoy that blessing. ... Then, to lift them up toward the higher teachings, he tells them that God, even

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 134.

<sup>2</sup> In Luc. 16: 16-18.

though is everywhere; yet, because of their limitations, and while giving them instructions to build the temple, He commits them to seek Him everywhere; Hence he adds: “*Who made heaven and earth*”.

We, on the contrary, we are committed to seek Him everywhere: at home, in the market, on board a ship, in the wilderness, and everywhere we are in. Practicing the prayer could not be limited by location, on condition that it has to be fit for praying. In this case God in response, will make every difficult thing easy and simple for us, and will make us glad by the good things to come<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 134**

### **GRANT ME THE DEPOSIT OF HEAVEN**

- ❖ Your promises are true and faithful;  
You came down to our earth to grant us the deposit of Your heavens;  
Grant us the heavenly heart, filled with love;  
So that our depths would praise You, and glorify Your name.
- ❖ Let us lift up our hands day and night.  
To thank You by day when we are at ease; And by night, while we are in affliction.  
To praise You for the sake of all Your works with us;  
As You are the Love, the whole Wisdom;  
Glory be to You, O Lover of mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 134.*

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## ***Psalm 135***

# **YOUR AMAZING PERSON AND WORKS MOTIVATE US TO PRAISE YOU**

Psalms 135 and 136 are considered psalms of praise which the Jews used in the morning services of the Sabbath day, as well as in the feast of Passover, both called '*The great Hallil*'.

This psalm is a call to praise the great name of God, perpetually working to the account of His people, in contradiction with the lifeless idols.

According to some, this psalm, although not one of the psalms of Ascents, like the one before it (Psalm 134), yet there are mutual thoughts, and even mutual phrases between them; and both exhort us to praise God. But psalm 134 does not present causes for this call, while psalm 135 refers to particular works of God that motivate us to do.

Psalm 134 is directed to the Levites alone; whereas psalm 135 is addressed to the priests the Levites, the whole congregation, as well as to all those who fear God (20).

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### **1- A CALL TO PRAISE GOD:**

God seeks from His people to praise Him; not that He is in need of it, nor that He seeks glory for Himself; but because, by praise, He grants gladness to His people, and makes them like angels. In 2 Chronicles 5: 13, it came that, when the building of the temple was consummated, and the arc of the covenant was brought into it, the Lord responded to the praise of His people by His glorious presence, bringing true gladness to them.

This praise, is the work of both the Levites and the congregation.

The psalmist starts it by calling the people to praise and exultation four times (1 - 3); and ends it by a call to bless the Lord four times (19 - 20); presenting to us the following causes to praise God:

a- **For the sake of His goodness:** There is no tongue in this world, nor in the eternal life, that can express the goodness of God. We can only get in touch with His goodness in our life, as a fact we enjoy; which motivate us to praise Him by our hearts, by our words, by our worship, and by our whole life. Perceiving His goodness would turn our life into a harp, on which God's Holy Spirit unceasingly plays.

b- **He has chosen us as His own people** (4). By His exalted love, God cherishes man, as well as the whole humanity. He counts everyone, and the whole congregation, His treasure, although He is in no need of us in anything.

c- **He is the Almighty God of creation** (5 – 7). He cares for the whole creation to our account, and moves it to fulfill our needs. He deals even with the winds and tempests that stir-up against us, to turn their violence for our edification.

d- **He is God of history** (8 – 14). The events of history do not happen haphazardly, but to fulfill His salvation plan for our sake.

e- **He is the God of eternal gladness** (15 – 18). He turns humanity into the likeness of heavenly beings, that know nothing except heavenly gladness and exultation.

***“Praise the name of the Lord; Praise Him, O you servants of the Lord”*** (1)

Some believe that the reference to the name of the Lord here, means praising the infinite Essence of God; who, although imperceptible, yet, with His holiness and goodness, and, being the Truth, He is worthy of every praise.

❖ Saying ***“Praise the Lord”***, the prophet instructs the Jews that the Lord is not pleased with the sacrifice of animals, as much as He is pleased with the sacrifice of praise. As to saying: ***“the name of the Lord”***, it refers to the fact that the Essence of God, being imperceptible, the name of the Lord is praised, by which great things are achieved.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

According to **St. Augustine**, Being servants, we are committed to praise our God, for the sake of His love for us, and His uncountable gifts to us. How much more would it be befitting of us to praise Him, when He has granted us to enjoy sonhood to Him, and to enter into His bosoms?

- ❖ Being the servants of God, you are not doing much by praising Him; How much more would it be befitting of you to praise Him, to acquire the privilege of becoming His children<sup>1</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

*You who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God” (2)*

Some believe that this phrase concerns the priests and the Levites; although the house of the Lord used to embrace, as well, a multitude of people, coming to it every day. Almost the whole people used to stand there during the annual feasts. The two verses 19 and 20 call on the house of Israel, as well as those who fear the Lord, namely, the pious, to bless the Lord.

Saying: “*You who stand*”, and, “*in the courts of the house of our God*”, the psalmist instructs the Jews not to do anything concerning their worship to God outside the house or the courts, designated by the Lord.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, confined praising the name of the Lord to those standing in the house of the Lord, on account of that the

Jews, being unpredictable, he is attempting to keep them away from offering their sacrifices and praise in the idol temples; or having any form of fellowship with the idol-worshippers, who used to worship underneath any green tree, on the mountains, hills, and high places. That is why he confined the collective worship of God, and offering the sacrifices to the temple and courts of God.

And according to **St. Augustine**, God grants us the blessing of praise wherever we are; How much more would His blessing be when He brings us into His house, to praise Him, together with His angels?

- ❖ Again, he exhorts them to offer such a sacrifice of praise to God. He also says: “*I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord, better than an ox or bull, which has horns and hooves*” (Psalm 69: 30-31).

Now, he definitely refers to the house and the courts, confining the congregation to a certain place, forbidding them from wandering anywhere outside.

You can see that, from the very beginning, God, by His command to build the tabernacle of meeting, He intended to keep his

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 135. (134).

people from being influenced by the surrounding uncleanness of idol-worship, and from wildly wandering everywhere, turning the gardens, springs, hills, and high places, to places where they would offer sacrifices; He even condemned those who did to death, saying: “Whoever man of the house of Israel kills an ox or lamb or goat outside the camp, and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer an offering to the Lord, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man” (Leviticus 17: 3, 4)<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Be thankful, O you who were outside, and now are inside. Is it something little to you, to praise Him who granted you, who were outside, the blessing to stand in His house to know and praise Him?! You would be denying God if you so think<sup>2</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

***“Praise the Lord, For the Lord is good, Sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant” (3)***

God is goodness itself; On one aspect, He grants life to the good who attach themselves to Him; and turns even the evil things that may dwell upon His pious to their good and edification. God, Himself, is the source of sweetness and gladness to the creation attached to Him whether angels or men.

It is befitting of us to praise God, not only for His dealings with us, but for His dealings with the others as well. And we should also praise Him for the sake of His Person, for He is sweet, and the source of every true sweetness, and eternal happiness for all those who get attached to Him. Whenever we faithfully praise Him, the more we shall enjoy His sweetness, and experience the true happiness. The psalmist says: “Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good. Sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant” (3); and, “praise is beautiful (befitting)” (Psalm 147: 1); and, “At Your hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16: 11).

He starts by exhorting on praising God for the sake of benefit; as God is good, merciful, and compassionate; Praise purifies the soul, lifts the mind up, and presents to us good teaching, concerning sound concepts about the present life and worship. And praise with a beautiful tune, will lead the soul to a holy life. And on another aspect, through

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 135.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 135. (134).

praise, we get in touch with the sweetness and pleasantness of the name of God<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ Singing praise bring pleasure to the listener, joy to the hearts, and submission to the souls; if it is done with piety, good order, and without crying out aloud.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

If we count the food of the body to be sweet, and give thanks to whom has made it, or presented it; How much more would we rather give thanks to Him who presents the heavenly food of the angels to be eaten by man (Psalm 78: 25); And how much more would be the sweetness and pleasantness of God Himself, and the sweetness of praising and thanksgiving to Him?

He presents to us the motive to praise God, that “*The Lord is Good*”. According to St. Augustine, the word “*good*” that concerns God, is completely different from the same word concerning the creation. If God, when He consummated the creation, said that “*It is very good*”;

How much more would be the Creator Himself?

- ❖ How far can we talk about His goodness?

Who, in his heart or mind, can perceive how God could be good?

Let us turn into ourselves and inside us, to recognize God, and to praise the Creator on His work; in the hope that we could meditate in Him, once our heart is purified by faith, then rejoice in the truth.

If we truly meditate in His works, we shall keep on praising Him<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

## **2- MOTIVES TO PRAISE GOD:**

The psalmist starts these motives by choosing us to be God’s own people, before talking about God, as the Creator, the Controller of the universe, and God of history. As the goal of creation, history, and God’s exalted care, is the divine love, by which the creation feels that she belongs to God, and that God is hers. This is the feeling of every true believer, who could say: “*I am my Beloved’s, and my Beloved is mine*” (Songs 6: 3).

**a- He has chosen us as His own people:**

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. John Chrysostom: *On Psalm 135*.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 135 (134)*.

***“For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure” (4)***

In His amazing love for humanity, God intends to set out of them His own; refers Himself to them, counts Himself the God of Israel; God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob; saying: *“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth”* (Deuteronomy 7: 6); And, *“If you indeed obey My voice, and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation”* (Exodus 19: 5, 6).

The Holy Book often refers to God’s choice of the Jews as His own people in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 7; Exodus 33; Amos 3: 2).

In the Septuagint version, the words *“special treasures”* came as *“His inheritance”*. He cherishes His believers, and counts them as His special treasure; as a valuable pearl, of high price; and His body members.

He who longs to get attached to God, feels a kind of relationship, and may stand in awe, wondering: ‘Why has He chosen me?’ Such a joyful feeling will definitely motivate man to worship God with fear, together with an amazing joy.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, that praising God brings Him pleasure, not because of the multitude of those who so do, but rather for their virtues.

❖ Now, what is the meaning of *“His special treasure”*? as an abundance of goods for Himself; He considers them as His own wealth, taking into consideration, not their number, but their virtue, toward which He meant to lead them to choose it<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

### **3- HE IS THE ALMIGHTY GOD OF CREATION:**

We praise God as the Creator, who created the world for the sake of man, His beloved creature. Being Almighty, God moves nature for the sake of the edification of man, and for fulfilling his material, spiritual, and mental needs.

***“For I know that the Lord is great, and our Lord is above all gods” (5)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 135.

Every nation cherishes her god or gods, despite their lifeless status and helpless to work. The true God, on the other hand, is above all, and there could be no point of comparison between Him and them.

Some wonder how could the psalmist say that God is great, then compare Him to the gods of the nations, and say that He is above all of them! **St. John Chrysostom** says, that, although there is no point of comparison, yet the psalmist so says for the sake of the weakness of the minds of his listeners, who have for so long been connected to idol-worship, and even used to revere them. That is why, by such a comparison, he attempts to rescue those lost souls.

Our God is great in His love, humility, and care for us in both the great and the little things. Appreciating His exalted love for us, we sing, saying: “How great You are, O our Savior!”.

God is above all kings, rulers, and leaders. “*He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS*” (Revelation 19: 16).

***“Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places” (6)***

The Almighty God, by His will, He realizes everything; He says, and it will be. No will is ever above the will of God; the will that works for the good of His creation, which receives His work in her.

He is the King of heaven and earth; He sits on the throne of the whole universe; the Almighty who directs everything; and who does everything according to His pleasure.

- ❖ God is Almighty; What He intends to do, He will do. Human will would not be able to keep Him from realizing what He intends to do<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ Do not you know that His bare will is enough to realize, not only what concern things on earth, but also what concern things in heaven<sup>2</sup>?
- ❖ Do not you see the source of life; the irresistible might? the incomparable exaltation? the undisputable authority? That all things are simple for Him? Not only in heaven, but also on earth, in the seas, and in all depths<sup>3</sup>?

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 214: 6.

<sup>2</sup> On The Uncemprehensible Nature of God, homily 2: 30.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 135.

- ❖ He intended for all things to be created, and they were. He intended for the world to be established, and it did<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John of Damascus)

With His good will, He did not let us in need of anything; His gifts were indescribable; and His care every morning was new.

- ❖ Therefore, being unable to perceive all the works of God in heaven, as well as on earth, we are committed to receive them with faith, and with no dispute<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ I wish, O brethren, we do not receive lightly the evil thoughts; we do not get angry with our neighbors; as all that are the work of the devil. We should always put before our eyes the verse saying: *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life”* (James 1: 12).

I wrote this, not that you need to be taught; for if you searched the Holy Book, you will have knowledge and wisdom more than what I have. I am weak and miserable, has only just a name, but with ignorance; But, out of my love for God and for you, *“Out of much affliction and anguish of heart, I wrote to you with many tears”* (2 Corinthians 2: 4).

I wish God hold your heart fast in His fear, *“He who created the heavens and stretched them out”* (Isaiah 42: 5 – Septuagint). I wish He sets your building on a steady rock, *“He who established the earth on the waters”* (Psalm 135: 6 – the Septuagint). I wish He rebukes the temptations, *“He who rebuked the wind and the sea”* (Matthew 8: 26). I wish He keeps away from you the forgetfulness of His commandments, *“He who removed the East from the West”* (Psalm 103: 12). I wish, *“As the father pities his children”* (Psalm 103: 13), so the Lord will pity you. I wish He enlighten your heart, *“He who has shone His light on the darkness”* (2 Corinthians 4: 6).

(St. Parsnovius)

*“He causes the vapor to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures”*  
(7)

If it is God who has set all the laws of nature, to work according to His will; It would not be fitting for us to disregard that all creation is

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<sup>1</sup> *Orthodox Faith*, 2: 29.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 135 (134)*.

in His hands, to move them as He chooses, whether according to the law as He set for them, or contrary to them.

Everything work by God's ordinance; even for a single drop of rain. God's power is not outside Him, it bears His limitless, eternal, and irresistible features; unperceivable by our human mind<sup>1</sup>.

The clouds often refer to the souls holy to God, for they enjoy getting rid of the burden of sins, to become as light as the clouds, soars up in heavens; Whereas the wicked , because of the heavy weight of their sins, would become like lead that sink in deep water.

The lightning refer to the spirit of enlightenment, granted to us by the Holy Spirit of God.

And the wind refers to the Spirit.

We should give God thanks and praise Him, for He sets out of us, we who live on the earth, holy cloud that enjoy the deposit of heaven, and opens up our insight, to recognize His secrets. He grants us, as well, His Holy Spirit working in us, as though out of His divine treasures. That would be the subject of our praise to Him, that He takes away from us our sins; grants us His righteousness; sets us as His lighted angels; and makes us a temple for Him and His Holy Spirit, dwelling in us

❖ It is said that the apostles are clouds; on account of that, by the heat of the Sun of Righteousness, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ, they were lifted up from the earthlies to the heavenlies; as said by the Lord of Glory Himself: *"You are not of the world; but I have chosen you from the world"*.

As to the lightning, they are their teachings that gave light to the world, and brought on us the mercy of God like rain.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Here, the psalmist marvels at God's care for man; for whom He allows the water to evaporate in far away places in the oceans, to become clouds that go in the air as though on a journey, until they reach its destination, where they drops its rain. It is as though the psalmist intends to say that God sustains man with water He brings to Him, to his cities, and to his fields from far away places<sup>2</sup>.

❖ The psalmist also sees God brings out wind from His treasures for the sake of man<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> W. Macdonald: *Believers Bible Commentary, Thomas, 1917, Ps. 135.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 135.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 135.*

❖ Let us now leave the earth and the earthlies, and soar up in the air on the wings of the brain. Let me carry you higher and higher up to heavenly issues. Heaven and what is beyond heaven. Words would hesitate to approach what is beyond heaven; and yet we shall dare to try to approach them as far as words can express.

Who made air with such great abundance, and distributed it, not according to the rank of men, their wealth, or their age; but it is distributed the way he Manna and the quails were distributed in the old age, equally, and with portions enough for everyone (Exodus 16: 14-16).

He let all the creature with wings ride on the air, and make it their throne. He gives fixed times to the seasons of the year; He gives the animals life, and keeps it inside their bodies. Our own bodies live in the air; our words are carried on it; light, and what it reveals are in the air. Let us look beyond the air: How about the treasures of the wind (Psalm 135: 7); and the treasury of snow (hail)? (Job 38: 22). “*Who has begotten the drops of dew?*” (Job 38: 28); “*From whose womb comes the ice?*” (Job 38: 29); “*Who binds up the water in His thick clouds?*” (Job 26: 8).

The miracle is that He binds up by His word, something that naturally flow; and yet he drops some of it on the face of the earth for all to enjoy (Matthew 5: 45) in due time. He does not let all the water stored at one time; as the purification that happened in the time of Noah was enough; And God would never forget His promise not to repeat the great flood (Genesis 9: 8-17). But, at the same time, He does not utterly keep the water from dropping; so as not to need anymore the intervention of the prophet Elijah to end the draught (See 1 Kings 17: 1-18; 45). ... If He shuts the heaven up, Who can open it? (Job 12: 14; 2 Chronicles 7: 13); And if He opens them up, who can shut them? (Malachi 3: 10). Who can endure the burden of draught or of the flood, if it is not for the Mighty God who controls the whole universe by His measures? (job 28: 25)

O Philosopher; You roar like thunder; although you do not possess the shine given by few sparks of the truth. How can you interpret the lightning and the thunder<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. Gregory the Nezianzen)**

❖ “*Has the rain a father? Or who has begotten the drops of dew?*” (Job 38: 28).

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<sup>1</sup> العظة اللاهوتية الأولى: عظة رقم 27 عظة تمهيدية ضد أتباع يونيموس، 28.

Who treasured the air in the clouds, and bound them up to carry the water of rain, to come, golden in color (Job 37: 22) from the south in different forms and shape?

“Who can number the clouds by wisdom?” (Job 38: 37); Or  
“Who knows the balance of clouds?” (Job 37: 16 LXX)

يوجد صفحات ناقصة

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 135

### HOW SWEET IS YOUR PRAISE, O MY AMAZING SAVIOR!

- ❖ Thanks be to You, O my amazing Creator;  
My soul plunges deep in the works of Your love;  
You have not left me in need of any of the works of Your honor;  
My soul is always exultant in her amazing Creator and Shepherd;  
In being Your servant, my soul exults;  
How would it be, when You grant me the spirit of adoption?  
When You bear me in Your bosom as Your son?
- ❖ Standing at the thresholds of Your house, my soul is filled with gladness;  
How would it be, when You bring me forth into Your heavenly sanctuary?  
In Your eternal dwelling places, my depths praise You together with Your hosts;  
In Your dwelling places, I concentrate my eyes on the splendor of Your glory;  
In Your dwelling places, I enjoy what no eyes have seen;  
And what no ears have heard;  
Neither have come upon the heart of man;  
You are indeed, good, and sweet, O Lord.
- ❖ My soul praises You, for You have chosen me as Your own;  
You are mine, And I am Yours, O my beloved;  
I dissolve in Your amazing love;  
In Your bosom, I seek nothing else;
- ❖ My soul praises You, O Mighty and wise Father;  
Anything You choose, You do;  
What would be Your will, except to save my soul?  
And to let me enjoy the fellowship of Your heavenly glories?

How mighty are You in Your works, wise in Your ordinances; and  
sweet in Your fatherhood!

What more can I ask for?

- ❖ For my sake, You bring the clouds forth from the end of the world;  
And make lightening for the rain;  
And bring the winds out of Your treasures;  
You alone, can set out of those made of dust, holy clouds;  
By Your Spirit, You shine in me, to let me behold the light of Your  
glory;  
You open up the treasures of Your love;  
Your Holy Spirit works in men;  
Praise be to You, for the sake of Your daily works with us;  
Praise be to You, for the sake of the glories You prepare for us;  
Glory be to You, forever and ever;  
We glorify You, for setting us as Your children;  
Glory be to You, for leading us forth, to be together with Your angels  
in Your heavens.

## ***PSALM 136***

# **A PRAISE TO THE COMPASSIONATE LOVE OF GOD**

This psalm is a marvelous song of praise which revives the soul and enflames it by the fire of God's love and compassion toward the whole creation, particularly mankind. The Jews call it 'the great thanksgiving', or 'the great Hallil', on account of its unique joyful and exultant nature, among the whole book of psalms.

It opens up the door of hope before the believer, to take away any doubt in his heart of the mercies of God, and to let him feel that salvation is close at hand.

There is nothing we can offer to the glory of God, for taking away from us the despair that may destroy the human soul, other than the perpetual thanksgiving for His eternal mercies. If we are committed to pray to God, as long as we are still breathing, the perpetual thanksgiving will give a touch of heavenly joy to our prayer<sup>1</sup>.

This praise used to be a part of the daily Jewish worship, and was used as well in the worship of the new year's feast; And because it refers to the Exodus, it was also used in the worship commemorating the Jewish Passover,

Two groups of singers used to sing this praise: one group sings the first part of each verse, and the other group responds by singing its second part, saying: "*for His mercy endures forever*". This is not the vain repetition against which the Lord Christ warned us in Matthew 6: 7; for it is rather motivated by a feeling of an utter helplessness to express the truth of the mercy of the Lord of Lords, and to enter into its depths. According to **St. John Chrysostom**, in this repetition, the soul is like the soil which is in need of continuous watering, to bring forth the fruits of righteousness and holiness, which is done here by the water of continuous praise. It is not a boring repetition, as much as it is a call for the recognition of God's mercies, that should perpetually be before our eyes. The repetition of singing it is not burdensome, as God's compassion, faithfulness, and mercies, are consistent, and would never get cold.

According to the Telmud scholars, the repetition of the phrase "*for His mercy endures forever*", 26 times, conforms with the 26

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<sup>1</sup> *Believer's Bible Commentary, Ps. 136.*

generations between the creation, and receiving the law on the Mount of Sinai<sup>1</sup>.

This psalm was sung by the early Christian church; and is still sung by the contemporary church in the daily vesper. In the life history of Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic, it came that, adversary hosts of soldiers happened attacked the church while the congregation were spending the night in prayer and praise, under the guidance of their Pope. While singing this psalm with voice like thunder, saying: “*for His mercy endures forever*” 26 times; the Pope remained sitting on his throne until the congregation departed; then disappeared in the darkness, and, safely, went in peace to his exile.

God’s mercy is apparent in the following:

a- He is the unique amazing God (1 – 3).

b- He created everything for the sake of man (4 – 9)

c- He cares for His believers with a strong hand and an outstretched arm (10 – 24). While being in heaven, He is preoccupied with us, who are on earth; granting us the conquest on the hosts of darkness.

d- His care embraces both heaven and earth (25 – 26); and His love covers His whole creation, particularly the rational creation.

1- The good Lord of Lords1 - 3

2- The unique Creator4 – 9

3- The Rescuer10 - 15

4- The Leader16

5- The Warrior17 - 22

6- The Helper23

7- The Savior24

8- Our Care-Giver25

9- The God of Heaven26

## **Title:**

Thanksgiving to God for His enduring mercy.

## **1- THE GOOD LORD OF LORDS:**

***“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever” (1)***

The psalmist starts this praise by showing that the Subject of praise and thanksgiving is God Himself, for being Good, and His goodness is unique and absolute; He is Jehovah, present among His

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<sup>1</sup> *Rabbai Avrohom Chaim Feueur, Tehillim. Psalms- A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Mesorrah Publications Ltd, 1985, p. 1607.3*

people; Keeper of His covenant; the true Leader, greater and mightier than all human leaders, and than those of all the heavenly hosts.

As a good Creator, He created us from nothing, and created everything for our sake.

As a good Savior; If any harm or corruption come over us because of our sins, Being Good, He reforms what we have corrupted.

As a good Leader, He sends us leaders; He even intends to set out of every man a leader; but remains the Supreme Leader, capable of bringing us into His bosom.

As a good Warrior, He is the Support of the weak and the oppressed, and of those with no one to support.

As a good Helper, He takes care of His creation, cares for every great and little thing in our life, even for the little crumb of bread we need.

As a good Heavenly One; although dwelling in heaven, not to separate Himself from the earthly creatures, but wishes to make out of them what is like a heavenly host; prepares places for them in heaven, to come and take them, and grants them heavenly glories.

Commenting on the expression: “*For His mercy endures forever*”, **St. Augustine** says that God grants His mercy to His saints and believers. Saying “*forever*”, does not mean that they will be miserable here on earth, then He will bring them forth to an eternal happiness; but it means that, by His mercy, He will turn them, while still here on earth, from misery to happiness; their happiness here will never cease nor end, but will endure forever; by becoming pious after being wicked; sound after being corrupt; living after being dead; and happy after being miserable. All that, thanks to His mercy.

❖ Being Good, He does not grant us temporary goodness, but His mercy endures forever; meaning that the benefit He presents to you, by His mercy, He gives forever<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ Now, by saying “*forever*”, he means that God does not practice His compassion and mercy sometimes, and ceases some other times; as is done by humans, who are governed by temper, hindered by meanness, or preoccupations. ... No, God, although applies His mercy in many ways, yet He is always merciful, and will never cease to be compassionate upon His creatures<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Op Ps. 136 (135)*.

<sup>2</sup> *Op Ps. 136*.

(St. John Chrysostom)

The believer, faithful in his relationship with God, wherever he looks: whether into his own depths; at the creation around him; at his relationship with his fellow men; or in his looking forward to eternity; his soul would sing praise to the exalted goodness of God, and would get in touch with Him in true and perpetual sweetness, with deep spiritual exultation.

*“Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy endures forever” (2)*

According to **St. Augustine**, the Holy Book often uses the term “god” or “lord” for some creatures, like man; the same way the idol-worshippers use them for their idols. That is why the psalmist distinguishes the true God, as being “**The God of gods**”, and “**The Lord of lords**”.

The term “**God**” to designate Him, being Almighty, of absolute authority; and the term “**Lord**”. To designate Him, being perpetually present among His people, embraces them as His children, and pours the abundance of His love in them for their edification forever.

❖ The righteous and the justified are described as ‘gods’, on account of that they are ‘gods’ through adoption and enjoyment; Whereas the true “God” is the One God by nature, the Creator of all gods.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ If the righteous man accuses himself, once he starts talking; how much more would the sinner do?!

*“Give thanks to the God of gods”*. By “gods” here, the prophet refers to those about whom is said: *“I said, ‘you are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High’”* (Psalm 82: 6) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever” (3)*

❖ The heavenly angelic hosts are said to be ‘lords’; But the true Lord is the ‘Lord of lords’.

❖ You may wonder, who are those gods and lords, about whom the true God is said to be their God and their Lord. In another psalm we find that even men are called ‘gods’ (Psalm 82: 1; 6: 7). The Lord Himself quoted this testimony in the gospel, saying: *“Is it not written in your*

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Psalms, Homily 47 on Ps. 135 (136).*

law: 'I said, you are gods?'"(John 10: 34) ... Not that they all are good, but because the word of God came to them.

The angels are also called 'gods'<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## 2- THE UNIQUE CREATOR:

*"To Him who alone does great wonders! For His mercy endures forever" (4)*

Here the Holy Book confirms that God "alone" is the Creator of heaven and earth, being the marvelous God, whose wisdom, might, and divine care, the creation reveals.

In the following verses, the psalmist reveals those great wonders done by God "alone": the creation of heaven and earth; His care for His creation, particularly for man; together with His longsuffering, he chastises and humiliates the proud, supports the weak, and the oppressed; He even cares for providing every man with bread; and ordains the affairs of the heavenlies.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist gives God thanks for the wonders done by Him "alone", being the Creator, and for those He did through His angels and men, like striking Egypt and its firstborn (10), and what followed that.

❖ He does not say: "*did great wonders*", but says: "*does great wonders*", confirming that he unceasingly gives gifts, and does wonders; not only through His authority, but through His compassion, as well<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*"To Him who by wisdom made the heavens! For His mercy endures forever" (5)*

How miserable is man who magnifies himself, and criticizes the work of God.

According to **St. Augustine**, the words "*by wisdom*" means, either that God made the heavens for us to perceive as much as we can; or that God, by His wisdom and understanding, made the heavens, as it came in psalm 104: 24.

He also says, that although the psalmist mentioned these words "*by wisdom*" only here; yet, they apply to all the other things that God made.

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<sup>1</sup> Op Ps. 136 (135).

<sup>2</sup> Op Ps. 136.

❖ Those are “*the heavens that declare the glory of God*” (Psalm 19: 1); And those who “*bear, not the image of the man of dust, but the image of the heavenly man*” (1 Corinthians 15: 49) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ These things (heaven, earth, lights, etc.) reveal the authority, power, and wisdom of God; and proclaim His great compassion. ... Being strong beautiful, and perpetual; they reveal His power and wisdom. And on account of that He created them for our sake to use, it proclaims His compassion and goodness. ... Don't you see that His mercy endures forever?! He did not create those things for ten, twenty, hundred, or a thousand years, but created them to stay all the years of our life.

What is also amazing indeed, is that He created them at the beginning; and when humans rebelled against Him, He did not deprive them of those things. What He created before they sin, He left for them even when they did; and did not stop them as a punishment on their sins.

He did not create just one heaven, but another and another; revealing from the beginning that He is not forsaking us on earth, but intends to take us up there, where He prepared dwelling places for us. Having perceived all that, and feeling His compassion, the psalmist added to every verse, the phrase: “*For His mercy endures forever*” <sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“To Him who laid down the earth above the waters! For His mercy endures forever” (6)**

Some atheists claim that the whole earth was never covered with water at any time in its entire history. But the Holy Book, and the sound scientific research, both confirm that their claim is false; and that there would be no earth for man to live on, without the intervention of God's mercy<sup>3</sup>.

One of the great wonders of God's mercy was that earth appeared, and water was confined to the seas and the oceans.

According to **St. Augustine**, the expression of “*the earth laid down above the waters*”, refers to the continents surrounded by the oceans in the world; like saying about an island, surrounded by water on all sides, that it is laid down above the waters; on account of that it is on

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Psalms, Homily 47 on Ps. 135 (136).*

<sup>2</sup> *Op Ps. 136.*

<sup>3</sup> *W. s. Plumer, P. 1150.*

a higher level or elevation than the water around it; and not like a ship floating on water!

**St. Jerome**, however believes that this phrase refers to baptism.

❖ The way “He who established the earth above the waters” (Psalm 136: 6) He established our (earth) in baptism. He did not however say that He lifted our (earth) up, nor said that He let it ascend to heaven. As, although baptism forgives sin, the way it liberates the soul from prison, yet it cannot grant the kingdom of heaven. Unless man receives faith, and do good works, he cannot be sure of salvation<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ “He who established the earth above the waters”. Through His compassion, He did not forsake us on earth, prone to death, and in great need, but granted us a convenient temporary place; and provided it with all those amazing facilities for living<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

*“To Him who made great lights! For His mercy endures forever” (7)*

Those great lights are the sun, the moon, and the stars, which were worshipped by many nations; here, the psalmist reveals as great creations by God, granted to us through His mercy.

*“The sun to rule by day! For His mercy endures forever” (8)*

*“The moon and the stars to rule by night! For His mercy endures forever” (9)*

❖ The sun rules by day, on account of that, once it rises above the horizon, it puts an end to the darkness, and brings forth the morning.... And the moon, completing its travel 12 times, it consummates a full year. Although it needed some calibration to control the calculation of seasons, as was done by the Jews and the Greeks in the old days<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

### **3- THE RESCUER:**

The amazing Creator, did not create everything, then forsook us, but He, as well is the Almighty Rescuer.

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 47 on Ps. 135 (136).

<sup>2</sup> Op Ps. 136.

<sup>3</sup> Hexameron., 6: 8.

To rescue His people from the bondage of Pharaoh, He used every way possible; ending up by allowing for the destruction of the firstborn. Then He brought His people out by a strong hand, leading them to freedom. He split the sea, and made a dry ground on its bottom, for them to cross over; whereas the soldiers of Pharaoh drowned when the water got back to its natural status.

That event shook the world for a long time. ... On the other hand, the salvation He granted us through the liberation from the bondage of the devil, to cross over to paradise, has shaken the heaven and the earth; and will remain forever the subject of our praise, and that of the heavenly hosts who love us..

***“He who struck Egypt in their firstborn! For His mercy endures forever” (10)***

The Holy Book oftentimes, refers to the plagues that came upon Egypt for the liberation of the people of God from servitude; and to their crossing over to the promised land, to confirm God’s care for the human issues in due time, and by an exalted divine wisdom; beside what those events have borne, of a symbol of the salvation work of the Lord Christ, and of letting us cross over to the heavenly Canaan.

❖ He kept reminding them again and again of the miracle that happened in Egypt, because of their denial and forgetfulness of it. That act of mercy was not a little thing, for it liberated them from the servitude and captivity; and provided them with solid foundations of God’s knowledge of future events<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ The Red Sea that received the Israelites who did not fear it; and saved them from the evil things plotted against them by the Egyptians who followed them; has been, together with the whole history of the exodus, a symbol of the salvation that was consummated in baptism.

‘Egypt’, is actually a symbol of the world, in which we go through our miserable and evil life that we live; The ‘people’ of those who are enlightened (baptized); The ‘water’, as the means of salvation for the people, representing baptism; and ‘Pharaoh and his soldiers; are symbols of the devil and his followers<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Dedymus, the blind)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Op Ps. 136.*

<sup>2</sup> *De: Triantate 2: 14 PG 39: 697 A.*

❖ The rod by which the sea was struck and split, for the people of God to cross over; symbolizes the cross.

Who could split the sea by his rod, except Moses, who bore the secret of the Son of God?

By splitting the sea, He proved how the Son of God splits the gates of Hades.

The crossing over of the Hebrews portrayed the great crossing over, by which the Son draws and brings men forth to His Father.

The Egyptians sank, and became a symbol of the legion of demons whom the Son made to sink in the sea of Galilee.

Pharaoh who was as proud as Leviathan, symbolized the enemy struck by His cross.

He ascended from the sea, led the flock whose wolf was killed; and portrayed the shepherd who got his flock back from the captors<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)**

***“And brought out Israel from among them! For Your mercy endures forever” (11)***

Liberating the children of Israel from the bondage of Pharaoh, was not realized by natural means, but by the intervention of the amazing hand of God, and His exalted mercies.

***“With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, for His mercy endures forever” (12)***

The “hand of God” is said about His work; and “His arm” about His divine might.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“To Him who divided the red Sea in two! For His mercy endures forever” (13)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as ***“To Him who divided the Red sea in divisions”***.

According to **St. John Chrysostom, and to father Onesimus** of Jerusalem, God opened, not just one way, but twelve ways; And has provided the people with courage to walk along them; while the water became like high walls around them.

The fathers believe that what happened in the old with the children of Israel, happens now in baptism.

❖ Also with wisdom He divided baptism; As the same baptism is life for some, and death for others... He brings His renewed people forth

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<sup>1</sup> الميمر 79 على البرقع الذي على وجه موسى (خر 34: 33-35) (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

through the font of baptism; and, like He did with Pharaoh and his soldiers, He destroys in it, His people's sins and transgressions<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ When God got His people out of Egypt; and let them flee from the bondage of Pharaoh, by crossing through the Red Sea; Its water destroyed the king and his soldiers. What could be more clear as a symbol of baptism?!... Peoples get saved in this world through water; forsaking Satan, who prevailed against them, to perish in the water<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Tertullian)**

❖ Pharaoh and his soldiers still intend to reach you; but getting down into the water (of baptism), you get out of it sound and perfect; for in it, you are cleansed from the defilement of sin, to emerge a new man, ready to sing the new song of praise (see Isaiah 42: 10)<sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

***“And made Israel pass through the midst of it! For Your mercy endures forever” (14)***

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, through the mercy of God, He opened a way, or ways, in the sea; which shows His greatness and authority. But, of His mercy, as well, that He granted them the confidence to pass through without confusion or fear that the water might return to its original status while they are passing through that unusual and strange way. They definitely needed an extraordinary and exalted spirit to consummate that crossing.

***“But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea! For His mercy endures forever” (15)***

If God, for the sake of His mercy intended to liberate His people from the humiliation of bondage; and allowed for a series of plagues that grew more firm and intense; When Pharaoh and his men did not forsake their violence, God allowed for them to drown in the same Red Sea, which was, itself, the way for the salvation of His people.

This chastisement, although it reached the limit of death, yet the Lord remains anticipating the world would take a lesson, so as not to fall into what Pharaoh and his men have fallen. For God does not wish for the sinners to die, but wishes them to return to Him and live.

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<sup>1</sup> *Op Ps. 136 (135).*

<sup>2</sup> *De Baptismo 9.*

<sup>3</sup> *In Exod., hom 5: 5.*

- ❖ Pharaoh’s army, partaking of the sinners of their leader, and chasing the Israelites, they were worthy of punishment and recompense<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### 4- THE LEADER:

*“To Him who led His people through the wilderness! For His mercy endures forever” (16)*

The journey in the wilderness that extended nearly forty years, has been unique and astonishing. If God sent Moses to lead his people, together with Aaron, yet, it was God who actually led the people through the wilderness for a duration of forty years, along unpaved ways, without maps, shades against the heat of the sun, nor food to prepare for eating. For them, God has been everything, and beside Him they were in need of nothing.

Our journey to heaven, passing through this life, is likewise, the subject of His exalted care; to carry us out of the valley of tears, and bring us forth into the eternal bosoms.

- ❖ He who *“led His people through the wilderness”*, leads us, as well, through the barrenness of this world, to keep us from perdition<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Leading them through the wilderness for forty years, was not less miraculous than letting them cross the Red Sea. There were a multitude of probable troubles that could easily swallow them, and bring them forth to death: hunger, thirst, intense heat, wild beasts, and absence of the necessities of life in that horrifying wilderness<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### 5- THE WARRIOR:

As a Leader, God led them in battle, to bring them forth into the promised land, and to present it to them as an inheritance.

He, as well, lead us all along the days of our sojourn; and, on our behalf, He fights the devil, and destroys all his plans, to crown us, and to grant us heaven as an eternal inheritance, where we live together with and by Him, and to enjoy the fellowship of the heavenly hosts, as though one of their own, to have pleasure with them, and they with us.

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<sup>1</sup> *Op Ps. 136.*

<sup>2</sup> *Op Ps. 136 (135).*

<sup>3</sup> *Op Ps. 136.*

*“To Him who struck down great kings! For His mercy endures forever” (17)*<sup>1</sup>

*“And slew famous kings! For His mercy endures forever” (18)*<sup>2</sup>

*“Sihon, king of the Amorites! For His mercy endures forever” (19)*

*“And og, king of Bashan! For His mercy endures forever” (20)*

He first struck down Pharaoh, together with his army, a symbol of the devil and his deadly hosts, for our sake. Then He struck down great kings, like Sihon and Og, famous for their strong armies and fortified cities; whom some believe, are a reference to the evil adversaries that attack the believers.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist chose those two kings: Sihon and Og, because they bear symbols that reveal God’s protection for us.

“**Sihon**” refers to the arrows aimed by the devil, that will not reach us, as long as we take refuge under the wings of God. And refers, as well, to the bitterness he intends to pour upon our souls, which God will turn into the sweetness of conquest.

And “**Og**”, whose name means (accumulation); While “Bashan” means (confusion), refer to the devil’s work, to accumulate on us heaps of confusion, that God takes away from the hearts of His children.

❖ “**Sihon**”, means (the fiery arrows that will go astray); king of the Ammorites, meaning (those who cause bitterness)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

*“And gave their land as a heritage! For His mercy endures forever” (21)*

*“A heritage to Israel His servant! For His mercy endures forever” (22)*

❖ He gives those on whom the devil reigned, a heritage to the seed of Abraham; Namely, to Christ.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ It was a double enjoyment: a conquest over the enemy, and having procession of their lands; Yet, to show that it was not because of their worthiness, but only of the goodness of God, he added: “*Who*

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<sup>1</sup> On Psalms, homily 47 on Ps. 135 (136).

<sup>2</sup> Op Ps. 136 (135).

<sup>3</sup> Op Ps. 136 (135).

*remembered us in our lowly state” (23), to make it clear that it was not because of good works on our part, nor our great achievements, but rather because of our lowly state<sup>1</sup>.*

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

## **6- THE HELPER:**

*“Who remembered us in our lowly state! For His mercy endures forever” (23)*

Here, the psalmist presents a portrait of God, our Helper in the midst of affliction; He who remembered His people, when they were few in number, helpless to fend for themselves, and with no experience.

That people oftentimes came to forget God and attach themselves to evil; and consequently, lost their peace, freedom, and fell into the humiliation of servitude. But, returning to God with repentance, they find Him anticipating, to save them by His mercy. The book of Judges presents to us a living portrait of that situation, that happened again and again.

❖ *“Who remembered us in our lowly state”*. The psalmist did not say that God remembered us in our wisdom, in our riches, nor in our learning; , but He remembered us in our humility. Although He grants sources of strength to the elites, yet, unless man acquire humility, he will not be acceptable to God; For *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (James 4: 6) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Let my heart, now, abide in the Lord; For He humiliates our adversaries, alleviates our lowly state, and puts to shame our enemies, who prevailed upon us for no cause<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Saba)**

## **7- THE SAVIOR:**

*“And rescued us from our enemies! For His mercy endures forever” (24)*

As long as we are still in the body, the devil will not cease fighting us in several ways; For, in his nature that he has corrupted, bears enmity and jealousy toward man, whom he intends to partake of his eternal destiny, namely, perdition. But the Lord will never forsake His beloved creature, He will deliver His own life for his salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Op Ps. 136 (135).*

<sup>2</sup> *Op Ps. 136.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Psalms, homily 47 on Ps. 135 (136).*

God does not wish for man to be lowly; But man, in his foolishness and slothfulness, attaches himself to evil, and consequently, puts himself under a multitude of pressures, and, and be prevailed by enemies inside and outside. Yet, God keeps seeking a chance to save him from these enemies.

❖ By the same rod, by which Moses shepherded the sheep of his father-in-law, God let him strike down Pharaoh and all the Egyptians, adversary to His people.. It refers to the humility (our lowly state), by which we can prevail against the devil our enemy, and all his hosts.

For the opposite is always overcome by its opposite: The cold is overcome by the heat, its opposite; and heat is overcome by the cold. And. On account that the devil is haughty, he would be overcome by humility. So the Lord, who came clothed in the image of a servant, overcame him. By humility, we, likewise, can prevail on him and his hosts; according to the words of the prophet David: “*God remembered us in our lowly state; and rescued us from our enemies*” (23-24); and in another psalm he says: “*The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me*” (Psalm 116: 6). Namely, he who becomes humble, and makes himself like a child, who does not know how to discern good from evil, and who seeks counsel in everything he does, will be saved from the tricks of the evil one<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ephram the Syrian)

## 8- OUR CARE-GIVER:

*“Who gives food to all flesh! For His mercy endures forever!”*

(25)

God, who cares for the young ravens, the birds of the sky, and the beasts of the wilderness, also cares to give man his daily bread.

Here, the psalmist shows that God is impartial, He loves all mankind; and cares to provide every man with bread; according to the words of the psalmist: “*The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works*” (Psalm 145: 9).

According to **St. Jerome**, the psalmist here, praises God, for He grants man today, the bread coming down from heaven; the bread of the morrow; Namely, lets man experience the deposit of the spiritual satisfaction, which we shall get in perfection, tomorrow, namely, in the eternal life<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> الرسالة السابعة عشر: 1 (ترجمة الرب سليم دكايش اليسوعي).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. on Psalms, homily 47 on Ps. 135 (136).

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: **“He who gives food to all flesh”**. Here, according to **Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle**, the psalmist refers, not only to mankind, but to all flesh, whether men, beasts, or birds. He also comments on feeding even those with spiritual flesh. Like the angels, and the demons. Each of whom has special food.

❖ **“Who gives food to all flesh”**. If every creature seeks its food, So will the spiritual creatures, seek their own food! ... What are these spiritual creatures; but those to which we have already referred; namely the devil and his hosts. What kind of food do they seek, but those who are slothful, lukewarm, blood-thirsty, the proud, the lusty, and the greedy. These are truly the food of such spiritual ferocious beasts; because, through their wicked works, they make up for the loss by the devil of his own soul. The way the life of saints gives pleasure to Christ; the works of the wicked, likewise, feed the evil one.

Why would the spiritual ferocious beasts seek food for themselves from God?!... For when Adam sinned, it was said to him: **“Dust you are, and to dust you shall return”**. And it was said to the devil (the serpent), as well: **“You shall eat dust”** . ... Now, brethren, Does the devil feed on the earth on which we walk?. No, but men of earthly, lusty, and haughty mind; those who love the earth, who put all their iniquities in it; those who labor with their whole energy for the sake of physical profit, and even for physical pleasures; and rarely think about the salvation of their souls; For such people, the devil search<sup>1</sup>!

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

❖ **“He who gives food to all flesh”**; Namely, to all mankind; not only to Israel, but to the Gentiles as well. About such food, it is said: **“My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed”** (John 6: 55) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

## **9- THE GOD OF HEAVEN:**

**“Oh, give thanks to the God of heavens! For His mercy endures forever” (26)**

His amazing works, paraded by the psalmist, preoccupy the mind of the God of Heavens, who loves the man of earth, to lift him up to His heavens.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 136: 7.

<sup>2</sup> Op Ps. 136 (135).

In the beginning of the psalm, the psalmist calls God “*God of gods*”, and “*Lord of lords*”; Now he calls Him, “*God of Heavens*”. He refers

Himself to His true believers, who walk by the spirit; sometimes calling them “*gods*”, and other times, “*lords*”, and a third time, he calls them “*heavens*”.

According to some, this final phrase of the psalm, is considered an adequate, and a magnificent summary of the whole psalm; which expresses its spirit and program.

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 136**

### **HOW SWEET ARE YOUR ETERNAL MERCIES!**

- ❖ With every morning, Your mercies are new, O my Beloved God;  
“My portion is the Lord”;  
Said my soul, attached to Your mercies;
- ❖ Your Person, O my God, draws all my depths;  
My heart, mind, emotions, and my whole being, praise You;  
Good, You are, O Lord, in all Your works and dealings with me;
- ❖ You are “The God of gods”, and “the Lord of lords”.  
Absolute in Your might, wisdom, and love;  
You created me from nothing, to bear Your image;  
Although You are up in Your heavens, taking care of me;  
Yet, when I get in touch with You, I found You very close to me;
- ❖ By Your wisdom, You created the sun to give me light;  
To be able to behold Your amazing works;  
You are the Sun of Righteousness, that shines in me;  
To set out of my heart, a new heaven;  
Your Holy Spirit hovers on my heart;  
To set out of my wilderness, a heavenly paradise
- ❖ You open for me a way in the midst of the sea;  
To walk on, a though on dry land;  
You surround me like a Wall, to keep the devil away from me;  
You protect me from my enemies, both the hidden and the manifest

- ❖ You lead me in the wilderness of this world, all the days of my sojourn;  
You satisfy all my needs;  
I need no signs on the way;  
Nor maps to guide me;  
Nor shades to protect me against the heat of the sun;  
Nor light to reveal the way for me;  
You are the true way, that leads me to unite with You;  
You are my food, my drink, and my provision along the way;  
You are my stronghold, You shade me with Your cross against the sun of temptations;  
You are the true Light;  
That darkness has no place on my way.
- ❖ The devil and his hosts will never cease to oppose;  
In his envy, he cannot stand to see me become an icon of You;  
But, who will defend me but You?  
You, the Mighty One, who destroys the hosts of darkness;  
You are the Leader of the battle; and the Grantor of conquest;  
You prepare crowns for me;  
My salvation and glory give You pleasure;
- ❖ Oh my God! What can I say about Your daily mercies?  
You perpetually guide me to enjoy eternity;  
You prepare a place to come and take me with You;  
My heart, mind, and all my energies cry out to You;  
Come! Oh the Beloved Merciful;  
I have no one to preoccupy my heart, but You.

## PSALM 137

### IF I FORGET YOU, O JERUSALEM!

The psalmist tells us about the feelings of those who were in captivity, especially those who used to lead the singing of praise in the temple at Jerusalem, when they were asked to sing one of their songs. It was not possible for them while deprived of enjoying the temple to sing with joy and exultation in the land of captivity. On another aspect, how could they practice what they used to do in the holy temple of the Lord in a place defiled by idol-worship! That is why this psalm came to present a climax of feeling bitterness. The key of this psalm is concentrated in two words: “remember” and “praise”.

According to some, this psalm was written by the prophet David, prophesying what will happen to his people when they will be taken into the Babylonian captivity. Whereas others believe that it was written, shortly after the return from captivity, by one of the captives there. ... It is rather, a cry-out of every believer when he believes that the devil has captivated him by sins, and caused him to lose the enjoyment of the divine sanctuaries. The believer laments his condition, and seeks from the Lord to liberate His children from the captivation of sin.

1- Weeping by the rivers of Babylon	1 - 3
2- Love from the heart for Jerusalem	4 - 6
3- “ <i>Babylon, to be destroyed</i> ”	7 - 9

#### The title:

Longing for Zion in a foreign land.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “*Of David and Jeremiah*”, or “*Of David for Jeremiah*”.

❖ On account of that this psalm is very similar to the lamentations of Jeremiah; or of that the word “Jeremiah” could be interpreted as (cast in captivity); some believe that this psalm was written by the prophet Jeremiah, while being in captivity in Babylon; or was rather written to be perpetually read by Jeremiah all along the days of captivity.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

#### 1- WEEPING BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON:

“*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion*” (1)

“*By the rivers of Babylon*”, the psalmist means the multitudes of canals that draw their water out of the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates, to be

used for irrigation and drinking. The Jew captives used to gather together by those canals to have some rest (Ezekiel 1: 1; 3: 15); or on the Sabbath days, to practice their washing rites before their worship.

The psalm reveals the bitterness that dwelt upon the Israelites who were deprived of their home country, and became captives in Babylon.

They remembered the temple and the freedom they lost, and the spiritual joy which they once had, and now appreciate. Even if they could practice praying, it was rather difficult, and even impossible, to play on their harps to sing their psalms and songs of praise, in such a land defiled by idol-worship. Whenever they looked at the waters of the rivers of Babylon, they saw an image of the rivers of their tears, and the bitterness of their souls; As though they were reciting the lamentation of the prophet Jeremiah, who says: *“My eyes overflow with rivers of water, for the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes flow and do not cease, without interruption, Till the Lord from heaven looks down and sees, my eyes bring suffering to my soul, because of all the daughters of my city”* (Lamentations 3: 48-51).; and who also says: *“Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes are fountains of tears, that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people”* (Jeremiah 9: 1).

If the word “Babylon” or “Babel” means (confusion), he who is confused by the preoccupations of this world, no joy will ever enter into his depths, nor will he be able to praise God in his depths.

According to **the scholar Origen**, the rivers of Babylon refer to the life of licentiousness, where streams of pleasure flow, and we bathe among the waves of non-chasteness. In such an atmosphere, we are unable to stand aright, but remain seated in slothfulness, until we get to remember ‘Zion’, namely, ‘the church’, with its law of God, and the mountains of the Holy Book; then, we start to weep, and lament our misery<sup>1</sup>.

In such a scene, where the captives sat down by the rivers of Babylon, **St. Augustine** sees a symbolic portrait of those captivated by the love of this world and its pleasures, and weep over what they have reached of humiliation. He discerns between those who sit by the rivers of Babylon, and those who plunge in the depths of their waters. The former weep with grief on what they have reached because of the captivity of sin; While the later, plunging in the depths of its water, and drowning in pleasures, they will never get happiness, and, at the same

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<sup>1</sup> In Lev. 15.

time, they do not seek to be liberated from their lusts. About them, he says that, while weeping on their deprivation of happiness, yet they still enjoy the pleasures of Babylon; namely, the pleasantries and lusts of the evil world.

❖ “*the (waters) of the rivers of Babylon*”, refer to all the enjoyable things of this world, which, being of temporary nature, they will eventually come to an end. ... Notice how the diverse lusts of men, and their natural desires, draw them over here and there, and cast them in the sea.... Notice how they sat down by the rivers of Babylon, weeping, for the sake of those who were drawn afar by their lusts; or for their own sake, having qualified themselves to be cast, to sit by the rivers of Babylon in humiliation.

Oh, holy Zion, where all stand steadfast, and do not flow like water!

How were we foolishly cast away by those rivers?

How did you forsake Him, by whom you were established (God); and your holy congregation?!

Let us sit by the rivers of Babylon, and not plunge into, and be swallowed by their waters<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

❖ Even though we have fallen down from our paradise through our sins; Yet we shall remember, and will never forget our previous happiness<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion*”. Although it is great to long for return, yet, while they still had the goods in their hands, they kept on practicing their transgressions; but once they lost them, they now long to re-acquire them.

God allowed for their humiliation, to lead them to that feeling of longing; This is mostly His way of work: when we get corrupt, and do not appreciate His goods, He brings us down to be deprived of them, and through this deprivation, we get back to reason, and seek to acquire them again.

Now, the reason why they sat down by the rivers, was that, being captives, they had to dwell out of the cities, within the limits of certain locations of their own<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 137 (136).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. Homily 48 on Ps. 136 (137).

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Now, as Satan; that tyrant over the whole world, is slain, we do not approach a mortal feast, O brethren, but a heavenly everlasting one; We do not recognize the feast (of Resurrection of the Lord) through shadows, but we truly come to it.

Having satisfied themselves from the meat of a dumb lamb, the children of Israel consummated the feast; And by painting their lintels and doorposts with blood, they sought help against the angel of destruction. But now, as we eat the Word of the Father, and the (doorsteps) of our hearts are sealed by the blood of the covenant, He said: “*Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy*” (Luke 10: 19); Death will no more have authority over us; but from now on, instead of death, there will be life; according to the words of our Lord: “*I am the life*” (John 14: 6); There will be joy and gladness in everything; for it is written: “*The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice*” (Psalm 97: 1).

While death reigned, “*we wept, as we sat down by the rivers of Babylon*” (Psalm 37: 1); We mourned when we felt the bitterness of captivity (death). But now, as death, and the kingdom of evil are no more, everything is filled with joy and gladness.

We should then approach this feast, not in filthy garments, but we should be clothed with pure garments (minds), being clothed by our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 13: 14); to be able to celebrate the feast together with him<sup>2</sup>.

**(St, Athanasius the apostolic)**

❖ It is also written “*Go forth from Babylon*” (Isaiah 48: 20). The Hebrew s were so warned by the words of the prophet, not to go forth from the land of Babylon, but from its abominations. Having so done, and appeared by their behavior as though they have “gone forth” from that land, the psalmist said that “*they sat down by the rivers of Babylon*” (1).

Although they were still dwelling in Babylon, yet they kept themselves far from its abominations. In the midst of those controversies, they wept and mourned, for they have fallen down from the arc of faith, the pious worship, the virtue and worthiness of their

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Paschal Letters, 4.

fathers. The soul that “goes forth”, walks according to His word (namely in obedience to it) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

**“We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it” (2)**

In case someone has no intention to use his musical instrument for an extended time, he most probably keep it in a a case, and put it on a high shelf. So did the people of God; having lost hope to return soon, they hung their harps upon the high willows; having lost their hope of joyful singing, they fell into utter despair.

According to **St; Jerome**, that kind of willow trees upon which they hung their harps, being barren and fruitless by nature. carry, therefore, a symbolic portrait, that it is befitting of man to use his body, with its diverse senses, as a musical instrument, on which to play a song to praise God. In case his senses are barren, he would be as though, hung his body on that kind of tree. It is also claimed that if a branch of this tree is cut and planted close to water, it instantly grows. So will the wicked man, if he falls close to the waters of the Holy Scriptures, and listened attentively to the word of God from the mouth of a saint, his soul would instantly be revived to repentance.

And according to **father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, wherever there is no fruit of the spirit, it is not possible to practice singing praise. ; it is claimed that if the seeds of this kind of willow trees are crushed or drank for several days, they take away the sexual desire, and make the drinker temporarily barren. It is as though, he who intends to become an instrument to praise God, is committed to control his lusts.

❖ Let us understand that the citizens of Babylon who feed upon the pleasures of mortal things, and satisfy their thirst from the water of the rivers of Babylon, are like their trees, growing on abominations of their rivers<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ **“We hung our harps upon the willows”**. Why did they take with them their musical instruments when they went into captivity, when they had no intention of using them? That was through the ordinance of God, to let them, whenever they see the tools of their sacred liturgy<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> إسحق أو النفس، 6: 54.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 137 (136).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 137.

Always remember their past life, mourn their present misery, and to make their hearts enflamed by longing to return home through repentance.

❖ He says “*we hung our harps*”. for they could not use those instruments to sing praise to God; So are we, although we have mouths and tongues, we cannot talk boldly, if we stay slaves to sin, which is more cruel than any tyrant<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For there, those who carried us away captives, required of us a song; and those who plundered us required of us mirth, saying: ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion’”* (3)

The captives, hung their harps upon the willows, and wept for not listening to the words of God through the prophets. Those who carried them away, required from them to sing one of the songs of Zion, either in ridicule of them and their God, or in a kind of curiosity. No wonder they would require that from the captives, for they could not feel the bitterness dwelling in their souls.

**St. John Chrysostom** marvels at those captives, who, when they were back home, they used to scoff at the prophets; Now, in captivity, they were weeping, and refusing to break the statutes of God, by singing praise in a foreign land. He marvels how they gathered together to mourn and lament their miserable condition; as though they say to their enemies: [Although you managed to captivate our bodies, yet you have no authority upon our souls and minds]. **St. John Chrysostom** further comments, saying: [Do you notice how the affliction exalted their souls, and revived such spirit of sound measures<sup>2</sup>!].

❖ “*Those who carried us away captives, required of us a song*”. The evil spirits that deceived us and led us captives, now ridicule us, saying: “*Sing us one of the songs of Zion*”, the way you used to do in Jerusalem<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

## 2- LOVE FROM THE HEART FOR JERUSALEM:

*“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”* (4)

The Jews counted it unbecoming to sing praise to God in the land of captivity. They counted it ridiculous of those who carried them away

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on Rom. Hom 7.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 137.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. Homily 48 on Ps. 136 (137).

to require that from them. On one aspect, how could they sing the song they used to do in the divine sanctuaries, in a defiled land? And on another aspect, how could they do that as though they have forgotten their home land?!

God probably allowed for that to happen to let them remember how they, themselves, have defiled the temple of God while they were back home. Now, they are carried away, against their will, to a land defiled by idols.

Their real need is not to return to the earthly Jerusalem, but to return by their hearts to the Lord of Jerusalem, who is capable of setting out of their hearts a sanctuary, where He may dwell, and fill with the joy of the Spirit.

According to **St. Gregory the Nezianzen**, it is befitting of us to think of God, and to be preoccupied with Him, even more than we do with ourselves. Yet, we are committed to know the proper time, and the befitting limits for every work<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Jerome** writes for us his feelings, as he was committed to depart from Rome to the East; as though he was departing from a foreign land --although Rome was his home land – to set forth to his city in the East. He felt as though it was difficult for him to praise God in a foreign land.

❖ I am writing to you in a hurry, O dear lady ‘Asella’, as I am about to go sailing. Although I am swallowed by grief and tears, yet I thank God for counting me worthy of being hated by the world. Pray for me, to see Jerusalem again after having been in Babylon ... It was foolish of me to sing God’s praise in a foreign land; to forsake Mount Sinai, and seek help from Egypt. I forgot that the gospel warns us that he who goes down from Jerusalem will fall among thieves, be stripped of his clothing, wounded, and left half dead (Luke 10: 30-35)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ How could we sing God’s praise in a foreign land, we who attached ourselves to sins, and fell from Jerusalem down to Babylon? Man cannot praise God if he is unfaithful. It is befitting of the sinner to grieve on his sins, rather than to praise God<sup>3</sup>!

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<sup>1</sup> *Against the Eunomians, Theological Oration 1 (27) 5.*

<sup>2</sup> *Letter 45 to Asella., 6.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. Homily 48 on Ps. 136 (137).*

❖ If you wish to perpetually remember the Lord, you have to practice the works of the right hand (the holy works).

***“Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not exalt Jerusalem”***; Let me, O Lord, utterly lose the ability to talk, and to work, if your remembrance is not perpetually in my heart<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Anyway, it is befitting of us to seek the true contrition of heart, which aims toward virtue, and longing for the kingdom of heaven; not just toward the remembrance of the deadly evil. As man would surely suffocate if he kept breathing the abhorrent smell of sinks, as long as he chooses to sit close to them<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Penovius)**

❖ He who slothfully lives in sin, should not have communion in the Holy Sacraments; as, according to the psalmist David: ***“We hung our harps upon the willows; ... How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”*** (2, 4). As long as the body still opposes the mind, and refuses to submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is still in a foreign land; As long as it is not submitting to the strife of the planter, it will never produce the fruits of love, longsuffering, and peace ... If repentance is not working in you, it would be better for you not to approach the Holy Sacraments, lest you would need to repent your non-working repentance; but you would be in need to listen to the words, saying: ***“Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation”*** (7).

David commiserate with such a miserable soul, saying: ***“O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction”*** (8); Yes indeed, she is doomed to destruction, on account of that she is the daughter of Babylon, having rejected her sonhood to Jerusalem, namely, heaven; and held fast to sin. Nevertheless he prays for her healing, saying: ***“Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock”*** (8, 9); Namely, they, who buries her corrupt thoughts against Christ.... If it was said to Moses: ***“Take your sandals off your feet”*** (Exodus 3: 5); how much more we are committed to take off from our spiritual feet, the bonds of the flesh, and to cleanse our steps of all the filth of the world<sup>3</sup>?

**(St. Ambrose)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Homily 48 on Ps. 136 (137).

<sup>2</sup> Cassia: Conferences, 20: 10.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning Repentance 2: 104-107.

❖ Surely, O friends and brethren, I still call you brethren, despite your feelings and position, which is far from being brotherly! ... Surely, we cannot accept such a point of view! ... We should not be like wild horses that throw their riders, off to the ground; and spit the bridle out of their mouths ... We should not cast our minds away, and spit out the discernment which reins and control us for our benefit; and run wildly away from our path.

Let our debates be within our limits, ... let them not carry us to Egypt, or drag us to Assyria; ... let us beware not to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land (Psalm 137: 4); ... let us not debate our issues before any kind of listeners; Christians or heathens; friends or enemies; As all those are watching, lying in wait, and hoping for any little spark of difference between us, to make it develop into a great fire, and fan it to grow more intense. Without us, being aware of it, they feed the flame of the burning fiery furnace to rise up high to heaven (Daniel 3: 20). And having no strength in their own teachings, they search for it in our weakness! ... Like flies that settle on the wounds, they settle down upon our faults.

Let us no more disregard our deed; Let us not be slothful to follow the befitting way to deal with such things. If we are not able to put an end to our differences, completely and on the spot, let us, at least, agree to deal with the spiritual issues with befitting reverence, to discuss the holy subjects in a holy way, and to keep from those who ridicule us, anything that they ought not to hear!

Let us not be less respectful and reverent, than those who worship the demons, who are ready to shed their own blood, before uttering particular words before those against their beliefs. Let us perceive, that as there are certain proper measures for clothing, feeding. Laughing, and appearance; that applies, as well to talking and keeping silent; particularly, as far as revering "the Word of God", which is one of the titles and features of God. Our controversies should always be governed by proper measures<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory, the Nezianzen)**

❖ As long as man is still in Babylon, he cannot be saved, even if he happen to remember Jerusalem, when he would only moan and sigh, saying: "***How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?***" (4). ... As long as we are still in Babylon, we cannot praise the Lord, because the musical instruments used to bring our tunes up to the

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<sup>1</sup> العظة اللاهوتية الأولى: عظة رقم 27 عظة تمهيدية ضد أتباع يونيموس، 5.

Lord, are hung up without use; hence the psalmist says: “*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept when we remembered Zion; we hung our harps upon the willows*” (1, 2). ...

As long as we are still in Babylon, our harps will remain hung upon the willows; but once we come back to Jerusalem, where ‘the vision of peace’ is, , our harps that were hung without use, will be again in our hands, and we shall play on them, unceasingly, praising God.

As we previously said, the soul is always there, in the place carrying its name. As the soul of the sinners is in Babylon, that of the righteous will be in Judea. Yet still, it will be in different places within Judea, according to its life and the extent of its faith. It could be in ‘Dan’ on the outskirts of Judea, or in better places in regions close to Jerusalem; and the more fortunate will be in the center of Jerusalem itself.

On another aspect, the soul of the sinner, who committed the most horrible crimes, will be in Babylon; while the one who committed less horrible crimes will be in Egypt<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ Look at the matters which you despise; what would be more despicable than the colorful hair of goats; Are the blue, scarlet, and red, not just colors?!

Look at the work of man’s hand in the image of the cherubim, and the tabernacle of meeting, about which God said to Moses: “*See to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain*” (Exodus 25: 40). Although it was all images, yet, all the people stood around it and worshipped!

Were the Cherubim not put in such a place where the whole congregation could see them? Haven’t the people looked at the ark of the covenant, the lampstand, the table, the golden pot, and the rod of Aaron, and fell on their knees in worship?!

I do not worship the matter, but I worship its Creator, who Himself, became matter for my sake; made His dwelling place in the matter, and consummated my salvation through it; “*The word became flesh, and dwelt among us*”... It is obvious for everyone that the flesh is a created matter. ... I honor the matter, and approach it with reverence; and worship Him who came for my salvation through it; ... I honor it, not the way I honor God; but on account of that it is filled with grace and divine power... If you reject the images, according to the law; why

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<sup>1</sup>عظاات للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكولين سمير كوستي، L. 11: 1.

then, do you not keep the Sabbath, and practice circumcision, which are required by the law?!... You should perceive that even if you keep the law, “*Christ will profit you nothing*” (Galatians 5: 2). ... It is high time for you to marry your brother’s widow, that your brother’s name shall not be blotted out of Israel (Deuteronomy 25: 5); and “*not to sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land*” (Psalm 137: 4). ... Yet, enough of all that! “*You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace*” (Galatians 5: 4) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. John of Damascus)

❖ How could we be but serpents, when we disobey God, when we live in the disobedience that came into us by the serpent?... . I do not know how to weep and grief on my miserable condition, as is befitting of me; and I do not know how to cry out loudly before God, who alone, can take away from me this wrongdoing, planted in me; “*How shall I sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?!*” <sup>2</sup>

(St. Maccari, the Great)

“*If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill*” (5)

This psalm bears a kind of rebuke to those whose feelings got lukewarm, and decided to settle down in the land of captivity for personal material interests.

The captives felt that, if they forget Jerusalem, their right hand will be paralyzed, unable to play the harp; so will be their tongue, to become mute, unable to sing praise to the Lord.

That is how he who forgets his heavenly home will be; unable to enjoy the true joy; his right hand will be paralyzed, unable to perform the work befitting of him as a son to God; and his tongue will be unable to talk, or to enter into a debate with his Savior, and will lose the pleasure of the spiritual work – the sweetness of praise.

According to **St. Augustine**, it is not enough of us to remember the heavenly Jerusalem, but our heart should be enflamed by longing for her in true love. As the wicked also remember Jerusalem, namely the church or the believers; yet, feeling that they are spiritually overcome by them, they intensely hate them, and wish to get rid of them, without cause!

❖ How could you live among them, O people of God, the body of Christ? ... Your home is not here, but somewhere else (in heaven);

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<sup>1</sup> عن الصورة المقدسة، الدفاع الثاني، 14.

<sup>2</sup> عظة 6: 25.

lest you may end up loving them, hasten to be friendly with the hosts of darkness, and fear you may offend them; ... lest the pleasures of Babylon may crawl into you, and you may end up forgetting Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>!

❖ **“Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth”**, and become mute, If I do not remember Jerusalem. For what word or voice would come from him who do not utter the songs of Jerusalem? ... For the main task of our tongue is to sing the songs of Jerusalem!

The songs of the love of the world are a foreign tongue, a barbarian tongue, which we have learned in captivity!

He who forgets Jerusalem will be mute to God!

It would not be enough to remember her, as her enemies remember her as well, yet wishing to cast her away!

Now, the captives have overcome those who captivated them, the later say: What kind of city is she? Who are the Christians? What kind of men are they? We wish they are not Christians! They wish to kill them, for they see them living as foreigners among them!

It is therefore, not enough to remember her, but you should care to know how to do so; as we may remember some things with love, and other things with hate<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

❖ Notice the great change here! How those who used to hear, day after day, that they may eventually end up being captivated from Jerusalem, and did not care! Now, they are pouring curses on their own heads, if they happen to forget Jerusalem!

What does it mean to **“Let my right hand be paralyzed”**. He means: let my strength, and my authority be no more; and let me be mute, because of the great burden of my evil<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ **Another question from a brother to the elder: I beg you, O teacher, tell me how to deal with the brother dwelling next to me.**

To this, St. Parsnovius answered: [It is written, O brother: *“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be paralyzed”* (Psalm 137: 5). That is concerning the remembrance; but, as far as how to deal with one’s neighbor, he who wishes to win the favor of God, should disregard his own will for the sake of his neighbor; and put before his eyes the

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 137 (136).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 137 (136).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 137.

words of the Lord Himself: “*The kingdom of heaven , suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*” (Matthew 11: 12). You should, therefore, know how to comfort your neighbor, and do accordingly; and you yourself will find comfort from God by our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory, forever, Amen.

(St. Parnovius)

*“let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy” (6)*

❖ Let us all listen to this and learn; how those who were removed from Jerusalem, are now searching for her!

For many of us will eventually have a like experience on that awesome day, when they will be kept away from the higher Jerusalem. Those who were removed from the earthly Jerusalem, had hope to eventually return to her; But those who will be kept away from the higher Jerusalem, will never be able to return to her. We should, therefore, be very careful, as far as our behavior in the present life is concerned, so that we would not become captives, exiled, or kept away from that city, our mother<sup>1</sup>!

(St. John Chrysostom)

### 3- “BABYLON, WHO IS TO BE DESTROYED”:

*“Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem, who said: ‘Tear it down, tear it down, to its foundation’” (7)*

The book of Obediah reveals to us, how Edom gloated, and even joined forces with the Babylonians, when they caught the fleeing Jews, and delivered them to their enemies.

The believer, not able to destroy the plan of the devil in the spiritual battle; cries out to the Savior, who, alone, is able to confront that enemy.

According to **St. Jerome**, the speaker here is Adam, who, by the envy of the devil, was expelled from paradise; and Edom, being a symbol of the bloody devil, Adam asks God to punish him on his envy, and for dragging him to Babylon among the Assyrians!

❖ Those who seek the temporal things persecute those who seek the eternal things.

Again, the psalmist looks toward Jerusalem, and seeks from God to save her from captivity.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 137.

He says: *Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom*"; Save us from those who, like Esau -- although the firstborn -- yet the others exalted above them; on account of that the body lusts caused the former to fall, whereas, through despising them, the later were lifted up high.

The former envy, and persecute!

*"The day of Jerusalem"*. Is it the day of her temptation, the day of her captivity? Or is it the day of her liberation from captivity; the day when her goal is realized; when she enjoys the fellowship in eternity?

He says: *"Those who said: 'Tear it down, tear it down, to its foundation'"*. It is therefore the day of the temptation of Jerusalem, when its enemies intended to tear it down.

Oh, how severe are the persecutions against the church! ... Who are the sons of Edom? They are those who live according to the flesh; the followers of the devil and his angels!

Those who follow the body lusts say: Tear the Christians down; destroy them! Let no one of them live! Tear them down to their foundation! ... Saying so, it is the persecutors who will be destroyed; and the martyrs who will be crowned<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Their desire, therefore, as you see, was to tear even the foundation of the holy city; those were the sons of Edom who joined forces with the Babylonians, whom the inspired Scripture described of being more violent than the enemies, despite their being close relatives of the Jews<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

*"O daughter of Babylon, (the abominable) who are to be destroyed, happy shall he be who repays you as you have served us"*  
(8)

Even though Babylon has been the tool that God used to chastise His people, yet, having been extremely violent, destructive, haughty, even against God Himself, the Lord addresses her, saying in Isaiah: *"I was angry with My people; I have profaned My inheritance, and given them into your hand. You showed them no mercy. On the elderly you laid your yoke very heavily"* (Isaiah 47: 6); And in Zechariah He says: *"I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; for I was a little angry, and they helped – but with evil intent. Therefore thus says the Lord: 'I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it', says*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 137 (136).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 137.

*the Lord of hosts, and a surveyor's line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem*" (Zechariah 1: 15 – 16).

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the psalmist, as it came in psalm 7: 9, proclaims that they will get what they deserve according to their deeds; they will fall under that firm verdict.

Remembering that what came in the Old Testament should be interpreted symbolically, the 'daughter of Babylon' is (the kingdom of the devil). The way the 'daughter of Zion' or 'Jerusalem' is a symbol of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, the 'daughter of Babylon', on contradiction, is the city, called in the book of Revelation '*The mother of harlots*' (Revelations 17: 5).

❖ "***O (the abominable) daughter of Babylon***". The abominable 'daughter of Babylon' is the soul which would never find comfort, but is perpetually confused, unsettled, filled with shortcomings and sins. She is abominable indeed<sup>1</sup>.

***"Happy shall be he who repays you as you have served us"***.

Having drawn me away from paradise; By fasting, I shall bring her back to her original location.

Having entangled me in adultery; By purity I shall bring her back to Jerusalem; Namely, from iniquity, I shall bring her back to virtue.

I shall not deal with her as an enemy, but as a friend<sup>2</sup>!

**(St. Jerome)**

***"Happy shall he be who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock" (9)***

Some believe that this request is not the heart-desire of the psalmist, as much as it is a prophecy of what is actually going to happen; As, according to what came in Isaiah: "*Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered; and their wives ravished*" (Isaiah 13: 16).

That is beside what "*the little ones*" have of symbolic meanings, as we shall see in the writings of the fathers.

❖ Who are the little ones of Babylon? The evil desires at their birth, whose roots should be fought before they gain strength. When they are still infants, do not, by any mean, leave them until they develop into grown-up evil habit; Destroy them!

And lest they do not die while destroying them; "*dash them against the Rock*" (9); "*and the Rock is Christ*" (1 Corinthians 10: 4).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 137 (136).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. Homily 48 on Ps. 136 (137).

Build yourselves on this Rock.

If you wish to be armed against the temptations in this world, let your longing to the eternal Jerusalem grow, and let your hearts get stronger. By that, your captivation will come to an end; you will regain your happiness, submit your enemy; and, by your King, you will overcome, and will not die<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“Happy shall he be who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock”* (9). The little ones are the evil thoughts; as for example if you look at a woman to lust her. If you do not cut this desire off on the spot, and dash it instantly against the rock, it would be too late; The same way the little smoky flame would become a raging fire. Happy shall he be who dashes the sinful lust against the Rock, that is now *“the Lord Christ”* (1 Corinthians 10: 4) <sup>2</sup>.

❖ You should rather kill the seductions of iniquity, while still mere thoughts! ... You should dash the little ones of Babylon against the Rock, *“on which the serpent leaves no trace”*. ... Be alert, and vow to the Lord: *“Let the (presumptuous sins) not have dominion over me; then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression”* (Psalm 19: 13).

The Holy Book also testifies: *“The Lord ... will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation”* (Numbers 14: 18); Meaning that God will not punish us on the spot on our thoughts; but will let the recompense be on their broods, namely on the evil deeds and the sinful habits emerging from them; according to what He says on the mouth of the prophet Amos: *“For three transgressions of (this city), and for four, I will not turn away its punishment”* (Amos 1: 3) <sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ As “Babylon” or “Babel” means (confusion), the “daughter of Babylon” would mean (animosity). It starts by the soul being put in a condition of confusion; then, it will produce sin.

The psalmist call sin “abominable”; as it has no existence, nor being, by itself, but its existence is set upon our slothfulness. Through our goodness, sin will be destroyed, and will lose its existence.

(Father Doritheos of Gaza)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 137 (136).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. Homily 48 on Ps. 136 (137).

<sup>3</sup> Letter 130 to Demetrius, 8.

- ❖ The prophet prophesies what will dwell over Babylon, when king Cyrus will invade it, and do to it what is worse than what the Assyrians have done to the Jews; when he killed its people, and dashed its little ones against the rock.

The daughter of Babylon is, as well, the congregations of the gentiles, whose little ones, the blessed apostles dashed against the Rock – our Lord Jesus Christ -- and made them obedient to Him in faith.

Every sinful soul is said to be the daughter of Babylon; and her little ones are her lusts. Happy shall be he who dash them, and submit them to Christ, God, and the firm Rock<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ By the little ones of Babylon, he means the evil thoughts ... Those who, even though they may seem little in the beginning, yet we should cut them off, and dash them against the Rock – namely, Christ (1 Corinthians 10: 4). We should kill them according to the command of the Lord, and leave in them no breath to breathe in us<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ The symbolism here, is that the true blessed evangelic person should uproot the lusts, and the bodily pleasures, emerging from the human weakness; he should do that instantly, once they begin to attack us, and before they have the chance to grow; by faith in Christ, who is described as the Rock (1 Corinthians 10: 4) <sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Khromatius)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Cutting off Passionate desires.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Josh 15: 3.*

<sup>3</sup> *Tractate on Matt hem 23: 1: 6-7.*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 137**  
**MAKE SIN BITTER IN MY MOUTH**

- ❖ How sweet You are, O my God!  
You are the joy of my heart, and the exultation of my soul;  
Foolishly, I was drawn to the pleasures of sin;  
I thought that the world is able to satisfy my soul;  
I was thirsty for the water of sin;  
I thought that it would quench my thirst;  
But its salinity corrupted my depths;  
Let me return to You; O the Fountain of living water!
- ❖ Together with the captives, I sit by the rivers of Babylon;  
Weeping and mourning, because my sins have shackled me with their chains;  
And its pleasures drew my heart as though into captivity;  
Now, with bitterness, I perceive that I am truly miserable;  
I hung the harps of joy upon the barren willows;  
How can I play a heavenly joyful tune with my barren depths?!  
My sins have denied me the fruits of Your Holy Spirit;  
My sins isolated me, and drew me away from my heavenly home;  
Who can loosen my captivity, but You?!  
Who can set me free from my sorrow, but the riches of Your grace?!
- ❖ By Your Holy Spirit, rebuke me on my sins;  
Let Your Holy Spirit carry me to Calvary, to look at Your life-giving cross!  
Let my soul be filled with Your salvation;  
Let my tongue utter the joyful songs of praise;  
Let my depths be filled with the gladness of salvation.
- ❖ Let Your Holy Spirit bear me, as though to the deposit of heaven;  
Let Him set out of my heart a holy temple for You;
- ❖ The pleasures of sin corrupted my heart;  
They made it an abominable Babylon;  
Instead of the fruit of the Spirit, my heart produced thorns and thistles;  
Let Your fiery Spirit burn the thorns of sins;  
And turn my wilderness into a joyful paradise.
- ❖ By Your grace I will dash the little ones of Babylon against the rock;  
You are the Rock that destroys every corruption;

You are the secret of my conquest, and my crown;  
Make every sin bitter in my mouth;  
To taste the sweetness of Your righteousness, and experience the  
sweetness of Your fellowship;  
Set my soul free from the Babylonian captivity;  
And let me enjoy the High Jerusalem inside me.

## ***PSALM 138***

# **SINGING PRAISE TO GOD IN THE TIME OF AFFLICTION**

The previous psalm portrayed for us the captives sitting by the rivers of Babylon, heavy-hearted and sad; hanging their harps upon the barren willow trees; as there was not befitting of them to sing praise as long as they were in captivity, denied the enjoyment of Jerusalem, the city of God, and the temple of God. ... Now, in the present psalm, the psalmist presents to us a joyful portrait of someone feeling the divine presence, and being carried upon the eternal arm in the time of affliction.

Man often assumes that affliction would take away the spirit of praise; Yet the experience of the men of God in the old and the new covenants, is against such an assumption. Although affliction is usually associated with some kind of anxiety, fear, or sorrow; yet once the believer concentrates his eyes on His Savior, and on His faithful promises, his eyes would soon open upon the love of God; his depths would be filled with the divine comforts; and the affliction will no more stand against singing praise to God.

Some wonder, according to the title of this psalm, how could David be its author in a time the temple of Solomon was not yet built. Yet, the term 'temple' could also apply to the tabernacle of meeting, before the building of the temple.

The psalmist provides us with a living practical portrait of the blessing of affliction in the believer's life:

1- **The affliction motivates us to pray and sing praise to God** (1 -3).

2- **The affliction would not keep us from testifying to our Savior** (4 – 6). The prophet David, while praising with this psalm, might have been among heathen kings and elites; and was keen on letting them partake of praising God.

3- **Affliction is the way to enjoy the gospel** (7); when the believer would experience the life in Christ, and the conquest on the devil.

4- **Affliction opens our eyes on the mercies of God** (8), to see Him as our Advocate, and our refuge.

Some scholars believe that this psalm, bearing the tune of thanksgiving and gratitude to God, might have been written by the psalmist after being healed from some health crisis, or passed through a

personal anguish (3, 7). And some others believe that the author, representing the whole congregation, might have been either a king, or a high priest.

**1- A thanksgiving and praise for the sake of a divine salvation**

**1 - 5**

**2- God, the Judge, is the Savior of His believers**

**6 – 8**

**The title:**

The Lord's goodness to the faithful.

A psalm of David.

1- A thanksgiving and praise for the sake of a divine salvation..

2- God, the divine Judge, is the Savior of His believers.

**1- A THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE FOR THE SAKE OF A DIVINE SALVATION;**

*“I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the gods I will sing praises to you” (1)*

A prominent feature of the personality of David, is that he was perpetually giving thanks to God; not just when God listens to his prayer, but even in the time of affliction. He always mixed his prayer with praise; and always felt that felt being under the protection of his Savior.

His fiery heart knew nothing but thanksgiving and praise; as though he dedicated all his energies to that heavenly task.

Here, the psalmist sings praise in the name of the whole church, that worship God in a unity and harmony, as though one person. The speaker here, is the church, embracing both the earthly believers and the heavenly angels.

Some believe that by the “gods” here, the psalmist means the kings, and the elite leaders, before whom he was not ashamed to thank God and praise Him.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “I confess to You, O Lord, with my whole heart; on account of that You listened to all the words of my mouth. Before the angels I sing praise to You; and worship before Your holy temple”.

And some translate it as: “Before the angels I sing psalms to You”. It is not hidden from us that the angels surround the elect of God; rejoice and exult to find them singing praise to Him, the way they themselves do.

As the believers practice their work, being members of the body of the Lord, risen from the dead; they would enjoy the company of angels; the way they surrounded the body of the Lord in His tomb.

According to **St. Augustine**, it is befitting of us to confess to God with the words of praise by our inner mouth; namely, by our hearts; As God hears the words that men cannot hear.

❖ What mouth but my heart? It produces a voice heard only by God, and not by men.

We have a mouth within, and from it we ask. If there, we prepare a dwelling place for God; from it we talk, and there He listens. *“He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17: 27, 28). Nothing would make you far from Him, except sin alone.

*“Before the angels I sing Your praise”*; and not before men!

My song expresses my joy. ... My joy for lowly things is before men; but my joy for high things, is before the angels.

The wicked do not know the joy of the righteous. *“There is no peace (joy), says the Lord, for the wicked”* (See Isaiah 48: 22; 57: 21).

The wicked rejoice in his wine house; and the martyr in his chains<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The psalmist means to say: In my confession, O Lord, I pour my whole heart; I confess all my sins and faults. Although I committed many sins against You, and not just one; Yet, in compassion You listen to me.

*“Before the angels I sing Your praise”*... After such a confession and repentance, this repentant is qualified to praise together with angels<sup>2</sup>.

He who praises, will no longer feel remorse, but will give thanks and bless<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ By saying: *“Before the angels I sing Your praise”*, the psalmist means “before the priests and in their presence”; For, according to the prophecy of the prophet Malachi, the priests are called ‘angels’ by the Lord, who says about the priest: *“The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 138 (137).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps., homily 49 on Ps. 137 (138).

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 49 on Ps. 137 (138).

*and equity; and turned many away from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 2: 6, 7). The priests begin, and we sing to the Lord in their presence.*

It also means, we should diligently sing to you as the angels do.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

**“Before the angels I sing Your praise”** When the church gather together to praise God, the angels partake of this heavenly task. Those who were exultant in the holy tomb when the Lord was risen, become as exultant when they see the church enjoy the resurrection. That is why the apostle sought from the women to cover their heads in the church, as a sign of reverence to the angels partaking of the worship (See 1 Corinthians 11: 10).

❖ In the interpretation of the Holy Books: I break bread for you if you are hungry to receive it; For your hearts sing the perfection of praise<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ **“Before the angels I sing Your praise”**. On one aspect, If he is referring to the angels in heaven, he would mean: Even though there is difference in nature between the angels and myself, I, with all my strength, and with all zeal, will strive to connect with the chorus of the high hosts, and to stand and sing Your praise in their company.

On another aspect, if we understand it according to the other interpretation, it seems to me that he is talking about the priests; as the Holy Book used to call the priest, an angel or even a god (See Exodus 22: 28 LXX; Malachi LXX)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your loving kindness and Your faithfulness; For You have magnified Your word above everything” (2)**

Some believe that, by the *“temple”* here, he means the holy tabernacle of meeting, as the temple was not yet built.

And by **“Your Word”**, he means (Your divine promises); As, for the sake of His mercies, His truth, or His faithfulness, He realizes all His divine promises. As to saying, **“You have magnified Your word”**, It means that God, not only realizes the promises He uttered, but gives more than he promises.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons on N.T. Lessons 45: 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 138.*

Some others believe that by “*Your word*” here, he means the divine Word, who although, humbly incarnated, yet the Father magnifies and glorifies Him, by revealing the glories He has hidden by the divine incarnation.

According to **St. Augustine**, there is a church high up, where the angels are, and another church down here, where the believers are. The Word of God came down to serve us, together with the angels, when we became the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3: 16). It is befitting of us, therefore, when we worship God, to concentrate our eyes on our depths, which our Lord Jesus Christ sets as His kingdom.

❖ “*I will worship toward Your holy temple*”; not the temple made by man, but that which You made for Yourself<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ “*I will worship toward Your holy temple*” ... For the psalmist , the temple is the holy heavenly Jerusalem.

“*For Your loving kindness and Your truth*”. I wish the sinner concentrates on the words “*Your loving kindness*”; and the proud on the words “*Your faithfulness*”<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ “*I will worship toward Your holy temple*”. This is also a virtue of value, to be able to ascend up to the temple, and to worship with a pure conscience. What is required before anything else, is not just to bend the knee and enter, but to do that with a fiery and exalted spirit; ... not to be present just by the body, but also by the mind; ... as it is not a little thing to worship God as is befitting!

If the earthly kings should be so honored, how would it be for the King of kings?!

“*And praise Your name for Your loving kindness and Your faithfulness*”. This means, I give you thanks for my enjoyment of Your great care; For it is not for the sake of any good works on my part, that I returned to acquire my home land, and to see the temple, bur for the sake of Your loving kindness and faithfulness.

For this I worship You, and praise You. Although I am worthy of punishment and recompense, I truly, perpetually beseech from You, while in a foreign land, to grant me a swift return home.

“*For You have magnified Your name above everything*”. By this he means: I praise you , not only for Your good gifts, but for Your

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 138 (137).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps., homily 49 on Ps. 137 (138).

unutterable glory, for Your limitless greatness, and for Your indescribable nature.

You have magnified Your name above the angels, the archangels, the demons, even the irrational elements, like rocks, seeds, sun, moon, earth, ocean, fish, birds, lakes, fountains, or rivers!

Instead of: *“You have magnified Your holy name above everything”*; In another version, it came as: *“You have magnified Your Word above everything”*; and still in another:... *Your utterances”*<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Saying: *“For Your loving kindness”*; means, for You had mercy on me, a sinner and worthy of punishment; You listened to my request, qualified me to return to my home land, liberated me from servitude, and made me worthy to enter into Your temple to worship You.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul”* (3)

Here, the psalmist proclaims the secret why his heart is enflamed with praise and thanksgiving to God; that in his own daily experience, whenever he is in any affliction, he hastens to call and to cry out to God. His response is so instantly realized, that He feels as though a divine strength is poured in the depths of his soul, to take fear away from him, and to give him the possibility to confront any danger with boldness and courage.

❖ Grant me to ask for what I should ask ... *“Grant my soul a multitude of virtue”*<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Although my soul is burdened with heavy troubles, Yet “You made me bold with strength in my soul<sup>3</sup>”

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ *“In the day I called You, You answered me quickly”*. That is actually what God promised in the words: *“Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am’”* (See Isaiah 58: 9). The psalmist says that the suffering souls always hopes to find a quick response from God.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 138.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 138 (137).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps., homily 49 on Ps. 137 (138).

*“You made me bold with strength in my soul”*. By Your strength, You lift me up and help me. .. That is what happened to the apostles, when *“they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”* (Acts 5: 41); rejoicing that their souls have become more exalted (more spacious).

That is a kind of work, specific for the strength of God, proclaiming His might, and keeps the troubles from dragging the soul down<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ God will respond to the cry-outs of the believers, if they are raised with piety and persistence; and if what is requested leads to the salvation of the soul.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord, when they hear the words of Your mouth”* (4)

God’s faithfulness to realize His promises to the psalmist, became a strong testimony before the kings of the earth, who knew what the Lord had promised, and how His divine promises were realized.

The psalmist proclaims that all the kings of the earth sing praise to God.... Who are the kings of the earth, but true believers, who are granted the royalty and the authority to tread upon the hosts of darkness and all evils?!

The kings and the elites of the earth, who lack no authority, and are in need of nothing; when they hear the words of the Lord, they find in them such exalted sweetness, that their souls rejoice exultingly in Him.

- ❖ Do not allow them, O Lord, while confessing to You, and praising You, to request earthly things from You<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ The kings of the earth are those who have authority upon sin, and present thanksgiving to God..... I do not think that the psalmist refers to the kings of the this world; ... as it is written: *“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord”* (Proverbs 21: 1).

Can you, for one moment, believe that the heart of Julian, the denier, is in the hand of God? ... Far from it!

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 138.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 138 (137).

Or believe that the heart of Neron, Maximian, Dacius, and the rest of the persecutors of the believers, are in the hand of God? ... Far from it!

He rather talks about those who have overcome the iniquities of their souls, and have, consequently, overcome sin; those who, “*hear the words of Your mouth*”, and keep Your commandments<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ `Royalty cannot profit them, the way hearing Your words do; That is their faithfulness, strength, adornment, reward, splendor, and authority<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ This saying (4 – 5) is a prophecy, that the kings of the earth, will eventually hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the holy gospel, confess His deity, believe in Him, glorify and praise His gifts and His ordinances for our salvation,

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, For great is the glory of the Lord*” (5)

What are the ways of the Lord, but His divine mercy and truth; in which the true kings walk with the spirit of joy and humility.

❖ Do not let the kings of the earth be proud, but let them be humble. I wish they sing the ways of the Lord; ... If they love, they will sing. We know that travelers sing to alleviate the boredom of their journey. There are evil songs, of the old man; while the new man has got a new kind of song. I wish the kings of the earth walk along Your ways; I wish they walk along them singing! What would they sing? “*Great is the glory of the Lord*”, and not the glory of the kings”<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*They shall sing of the ways of the Lord*”. The Philosophers of this generation did not sing of the ways of the Lord; But we do sing of the ways of Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah; and through their ways we reach that of the one who says: “*I am the Way*” (John 14: 6)<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps., homily 49 on Ps. 137 (138).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 138.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 138 (137).

<sup>4</sup> On Ps., homily 49 on Ps. 137 (138).

❖ “*They shall sing of the ways of the Lord*”; namely, of His laws, and His commandments<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 2- GOD, THE DIVINE JUDGE, IS THE SAVIOR OF HIS BELIEVERS:

“*Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly, but the proud He knows from afar*” (6)

The prophet David believes that the kings of the earth glorify the Lord, for He regards the lowly, namely, David, and keeps away from the proud, namely, from David’s enemies.

❖ Notice how the psalmist wishes to see the kings of the earth sing along their ways, humbly bearing the ways of the Lord, and not exalting themselves against the Lord; Lest, if they exalt themselves, they will realize that, “*Though the Lord is on high, yet He (honors) the lowly*”. If the kings wish to be honored, they have to become lowly!

“*The proud He knows from afar*”. Do not assume that you are safe, on account that you could not be clearly seen from afar: For “*He knows you from afar*”; ... He can perfectly see you, yet He will not be with you<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Although the Lord is on high, yet, His exaltation is unperceivable. He regards the lowly, and nothing escapes His attention. He regards the lowly, namely, He cares for the despised and the humiliated; He loves the lowly, and keeps away from the proud.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ “*The Lord is on high*”, high in His nature, and high in His being<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*The Lord is on high*”. If you exalt yourself, He will keep away from you. But If you become lowly, He will come down to you. He regards the lowly to lift him up; Whereas he knows the proud from afar, to bring him down<sup>4</sup>.

(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 138.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 138 (137).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 138.

<sup>4</sup> Sermon 210: 2.

❖ Let the lowly listen to the voice of the royal Truth, saying: *“Everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Luke 18: 14).

Let the lowly know that, *“Before honor is humility”* (Proverbs 15: 33); and let the proud know that, *“Pride goes before destruction”* (Proverbs 16: 18).

Let the lowly know that, *“On this one will I look, on him who is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My words”* (Isaiah 66: 2). And let the proud remember the words, *“How can dust and ashes be proud?!”* (Sirach 10: 9).

Let the lowly know that *“The Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly, but the proud He knows from afar”* (6) <sup>1</sup>.

Let the lowly know that *“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve”* (Matthew 20: 28); and let the proud know that *“The beginning of pride is sin, and the one who clings to it pours out abominations”* (Sirach 10: 13).

Let the lowly know that our Savior *“humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2: 8); and let the proud know what is written about their ruler, that *“when he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid; for he is king over all the children of pride”* (Job 41: 25, 34) <sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Gregory the Great)**

❖ When you sit in your cell, do not let your heart or the thought of your mind get magnified, nor commend yourself, for God hates those who commend themselves, and “listens to the prayers of the lowly”.

**(St. Paul of Timoa – to the monks)**

*“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me”* (7)

Here the psalmist presents to us his own practical experience, that God is the Light of the world, whom we discover in due time when we become surrounded by darkness, and attacked by despair. In the right moment He shines His light on us, proclaiming that, even though He is longsuffering, and may allow for us to fall into affliction, but He proclaims His work for our salvation, and He will not perpetually be hidden.

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<sup>1</sup> Pastoral Care, 3: 17.

<sup>2</sup> Pastoral Care, 3: 17.

God's care, particularly in the time of affliction, reveals His glory, being Mighty and Loving at the same time.

The hand of the Father refers to His Son who incarnated to consummate salvation. The psalmist was surrounded by afflictions, suffered troubles from the devil and his hosts; yet the incarnate Word of God, our Lord Jesus, saves Him from every anguish, and grants him conquest upon the devil and his hosts.

❖ *“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me”*. Yes indeed, whatever the trouble you are in, confess, call Him; He will liberate and revive you.

If you love the life to come, you will find out that the present life is nothing but anguish. Even though you may be living in prosperity, and abundant happiness; yet, perceiving that it is not perpetually secure, and that you are not free of temptations, your present life is counted as an anguish.

Let my enemies stir up; ... What can they do? They can take my wealth away, rob me, throw me in exile, pour on me every possible sorrow and torment, and if allows, let them even kill me. Can they do more?!

You stretch out Your hand to cover me; Whatever my enemies do to me, they cannot separate me from You!

The more You delay, the more You will avenge me; ... You will never let me despair; For it follows that *“Your right hand will save me”*<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me”*. He does not say, “You will save me from the trouble”, but You will give me life, while remaining in the midst of the same troubles. ; ... When harm presses, and surrounds someone to disturb him, he would feel secure<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ *“The hand of God”* here, refers to His recompense and revenge against the oppressors; while *“His right hand”* refers to His help and protection of His pious. According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the right hand of God is our Lord Jesus, who revived, saved, and rewarded us, we, the weak.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 138 (137).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 138.

***“The Lord will perfect that which concerns me, Your mercy, O Lord endures forever; Do not forsake the work of Your hands” (8)***

With the spirit of faith in the Lord his Savior, the psalmist proclaims that He defends him. With the same spirit the apostle Paul says: *“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you, will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1: 6).

Being the Head of the body, He defends us, members of His body. *“When those who received the temple tax came to collect it,... He said to Peter: ‘Go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes out first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money, take that and give it to them for Me and you”* (Matthew 17: 24-26).

According to **St. Augustine**, throughout the four gospels, the Lord defended us, paid our debts by His cross.

❖ I do not “repay” on my own behalf; Let my enemies stir up as much as they wish; for You “repay” with what I cannot myself do. According to the apostle: *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written: ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay’, says the Lord”* (Romans 12: 19) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ He pay our debts; He does not forsake the work of His hands; and His mercy endures forever.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ When I have to repay a debt, He, with His loving kindness, waive it by making a deposit for me; That is what the Lord Christ did when He delivered Himself for our sake<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 138 (137).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 138.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 138  
WITH YOUR LOVINGKINDNESS, YOU SHINE YOUR LIGHT  
ON ME**

- ❖ In the midst of my trouble, I discover my sins and faults;  
I perceive that I commit so many sins;  
However, You anticipate my repentance and my return to You;  
When I discover how intense is the darkness that surrounds me,  
I take refuge in You, O Sun of Righteousness;  
You shine on me, and scatter my darkness;  
You reflect the splendor of Your light on me;  
With the cry-outs and moaning of my heart;  
My depths give you thanks, O whole in love.
- ❖ When I confess my sins to You;  
You cleanse the defilement of my soul;  
And qualify me to praise You together with Your saints and angels;  
It is as though You allow trouble to come over me;  
Not to make me feel my weakness in humiliation;  
But to set me up from the humiliation;  
To praise You together with the elect of Your creation.
- ❖ In trouble, my depths cry out before my tongue does;  
You hear the language of the heart;  
And respond to its hidden words.
- ❖ In trouble, I unite with my brethren;  
I feel my need for their prayers;  
As I feel committed to pray for them;  
Perceiving my weakness, I seek their spiritual support;  
And feel my commitment to them, despite my unworthiness;  
With them, and for them, we pray together as members of the one  
body.
- ❖ In my trouble, I do not seek being relieved of my suffering;  
But I rather seek Your strength to support me;  
Then I would be exalted by Your strength, and be clothed by Your  
righteousness.
- ❖ In my trouble, You hear my voice, and I hear Yours;  
I find Your words sweet, and become swallowed in Your heavenly  
joy;  
I discover Your amazing promises;

And I bear authority from You;  
You set me a king among Your royal children;  
To proclaim Your glory in us, O King of kings!

❖ How much blessings are there in trouble;  
When I discover my weakness, I cry out to You;  
I see You close to me, regarding me;  
I see You in me, setting Your kingdom;  
Your right hand saves me, and fills my depths with Your strength;  
You frighten the devil and all the hosts of darkness;  
They will never find a place in me;  
You surround me like a fiery wall;  
You keep me against all the plots of the devil;  
Glory be to You, who will never forsake the work of Your hands.

## ***PSALM 139***

# **GOD, EXTREMELY AMAZING IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ME**

This psalm reveals the exalted attributes of God, experienced by him, who is faithful in His relationship with God. But he, who attempts to keep away from Him, will discover that he is entering into a losing battle. Our faithfulness is set upon our perception that He is the Holy One, of unlimited knowledge (**Omniscient**), even of our hidden secrets; of unlimited presence (**Omnipresent**); and of unlimited capacity (**Omnipotent**).

These attributes concerning God are not just mental issues of faith, which we are committed to believe, but they are rather, an enjoyable experience lived by the believer in His fellowship with God. That is why 'Aben Ezra', a prominent Jewish scholar calls this psalm "the crown of all psalms". It is also said about it, that nowhere else, the great attributes of God are introduced with such magnificent way.

This psalm is unique in talking about God's care for man; He embraces him all around, loves him, works for his glory, His Spirit never forsake him, and all His possibilities are given to him. Because without God's support, man cannot make a single step, He is preoccupied with him, and works in him since the moment of his conception in his mother's womb. That is why abortion is considered as a crime against the divine Creator Himself.

The following are the different aspects of knowledge experienced by the believers:

**1- God knows our works** (1 – 6). More than we know ourselves. It is therefore, befitting of us to be open up on Him, faithful, so as to becomfortable in His love (1 John 4: 18). His knowledge is not set upon His Might alone, but also upon His love for us; Because His eye is always on us to care for us, there is no point for fear.

**2- God knows where we intend to go** (7 – 12); not only because He is everywhere, and knows everything, but, in His love, He seeks our company all the time, in our ascent and our descent, in our travel east, west, north or south; namely in our setting forth toward Him, or in our attempts to flee away from Him; in our spiritual growth, and even in the moments of our fall; As long as we still have a single breath,

He anticipates our repentance, and our return to Him. If the wicked attempt to flee away from God, as our early parents have

done after their fall, it is befitting of us to flee toward Him, even after our own fall,

**3- God knows who we are** (13 – 16); for He is our Creator; made a plan for us; granted us our life to realize our mission; knows what is good for us, and grants us the reason to receive His work in and by us.

**4- God knows what goes on in our minds** (17 – 18). Being preoccupied with us, He seeks from us to have Him, the subject of our Thoughts; So it is befitting of us to meditate in Him, and enjoy His divine secrets (Philippians 4 – 8).

**5- God knows what we like** (19 – 22). So it is befitting of us to love Him in His Person, and hate evil (Psalm 79: 10); and there should be No place for the world in us (1 John 2: 15 – 17).

**6- God knows our longings** (23 – 24). We should confess that we are ignorant, even of our own depths (Jeremiah 17: 9-10). So it is befitting of us to deliver our hearts to Him, to kindle them by the holy longings; and to perceive that He is the true Way, along which we should walk.

### **The title:**

God's perfect knowledge of man.

For the Chief Musician. A psalm of David.

**1- God, the OMNISCIENT (of unlimited knowledge) 1 - 6**

**2- God, the OMNIPRESENT (who is everywhere) 7- 12**

**3- God, our Maker in the womb 13-18.**

**4- God, our Protector from the wicked 19 - 22**

**5- Search me, O Lord 23 – 24**

### **1- GOD, THE OMNISCIENT (OF UNLIMITED KNOWLEDGE):**

*“O Lord, You have searched me and known me” (1)*

The psalm starts by talking about God of unlimited knowledge. Having such kind of knowledge is not a bare doctrine, but an experience lived by the psalmist in his life; who has experienced God's care for the details of all stages of his life; an experience that turned his life into one of inner joy, exultation, and praise.

If God knows even our hidden thoughts, emotions, lusts, and all the works of the old man in us, It is in His authority to change them, to renew them, and to sanctify everything inside us. His knowledge gives us the right to seek His divine work in us, for the sake of our edification, and preparing us for the eternal glory.

Knowing every man on earth, and everything about him, God provides us with what is for our edification, together with sanctifying our free will, not committing us to do anything against our will.

Saying “*Search me, O Lord*”, does not imply the He did not know me before searching me; far from it! He knows everything; This knowledge is not a perception of something He did not know beforehand, but, according to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>1</sup>, it is a knowledge of being attached to Him.

According to **St. Augustine**, the Talker here is our Lord Jesus Christ, who partook of what we already have, having incarnated and become man, Speaking in our name, to let us enjoy the fellowship of His divine nature; namely, to take what is His, and by His grace, bear the new life, befitting of us as members of His body.

❖ The word “*searched me*”, concerning God, does not imply that He knows things only after searching them; far from it! But it means that like man who knows the truth of things by searching; You, as well, O God, knows without searching, the truth of things

(**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**)

*“You know my sitting down, and my rising up; You understand my thoughts afar off” (2)*

He knows us as we sit down for rest; and knows us as we rise up to practice our diverse activities; He knows what we think, and what we shall think.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the expression “*my sitting down and my rising up*” refers to life as a whole. God knows the details of our life; And lest man would foolishly assume that God’s knowledge of man came by searching him, without prior knowledge, he adds the phrase: “*You understand my thoughts afar off*”. He who knows the hidden thoughts in man’s mind, does not need to search him to get to know his apparent works.

God knew the righteous ‘Job’ before allowing Satan to tempt him; and described him as “*there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God, and shuns evil*” (Job 2: 3). Yet He allowed for his temptation to reward him on his steadfastness, to let the others follow his lead, and to confirm the evil of Satan.

God, likewise knew beforehand, that the people of Nineveh were not worthy of perdition, for they were going to reform their position through repentance; yet He intended to prove it by practical experience.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139.

❖ What does the psalmist mean here by saying: “*my sitting down and my rising up*”? He who sits brings himself down. Christ sat in His passion, and rose up in His resurrection.

He says that You know that, namely, You approve it and is pleased with it; and I do it according to Your will.

If you wish to apply these words concerning the Head (Christ) to the body (the church); Man sits down when he humiliates himself by remorse, and rises up when his sins are forgiven, and soars up high by his hope in the eternal life.

Do not rise yourselves up, unless you first humiliate yourselves; As many are those who intend to rise up before sitting down; intend to appear righteous before confessing that they are sinners<sup>1</sup>.

❖ “*You understand my thoughts afar off*”. What does he mean by saying: “*afar off*”? Before I reach my true homeland, You knew my thoughts. ... The younger son went to a far off country; and there, having labored and suffered need and anguish, he thought about his father, and intended to return; saying: “Now I rise up and return to my father”. He said “I rise up” because he was “sitting down”<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Saying “*my sitting down and my rising up*” mean all the works I practice, sitting, standing; in my comfort, and in my tribulation. Saying “*You understand my thoughts afar off*” means, before I even have them in my heart.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways*” (3)

He sees us whether we walk or sit; namely, His eyes are always on us; nothing is hidden from Him.

He says “*my going out*”, implying that it is done in an evil way; the way along which the prodigal son went forsaking his father<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ He says: You know, not only my Thoughts, and my deeds, but everything I do, and am going to do<sup>4</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 139.

***“For there is not a word is on my tongue, But behold O Lord You know it altogether” (4)***

He knows what we shall utter, even before we open our mouths; He knows the future, as well as the past, and present; Everything is exposed before Him.

What is the word on my tongue? The prodigal son, having chosen the evil way, and went to a far off country, once he intended to go back to his father, he said within himself what he said, confessing that what he did was wrong.

His father knew that what he said to him was the truth uttered by the tongue of the inner heart. He knew that his prodigal son faithfully intends to forsake his evil way, and go according to his father’s good ways.

❖ I confess to you that choosing my own way, I stayed away of yours.

I departed from you, who knows what is good for me, and thought that it is better for me to forsake you<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“You have hedged me behind and before ; and laid Your hand upon me” (5)***

According to the Septuagint, and the Coptic versions, it came as: You, O Lord, have known the firsts and the lasts; You created me, and laid Your hand upon me.

Everything is exposed and bare before Him; He, before whom we are committed to give account of our deeds (Hebrew 4: 13). Perceiving everything about us, He can protect us from behind and before. His hand is always upon us to protect us.

❖ You know my last deeds when I was feeding the pigs; and You know my early deeds when I sought my portion in the inheritance.

My early deeds were the beginnings of my last deeds.

The old sin when we fell; and the last chastisement when we entered into serious ethical troubles. Will they be the last for us? They will so be if we return now to the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

❖ “*You created me*” in this mortal nature.

“*You have laid Your hand upon me*”; Your hand that recompenses, and bring down the proud.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

It is better for the proud to be cast down to the ground, so that the Lord would lift him up<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ You have brought me into existence; and laid Your hand upon me. I am indebted to You by my birth. My life is not for me, but is completely for my Creator<sup>2</sup>.

(Father Peter Christologos)

- ❖ “*You created me and have laid Your hand upon me*”. The psalmist moved from God’s might of prior knowledge to His might of creation; and from his might of creation to His might of prior knowledge.

He not only created those who had no prior existence, but He keeps them under His dominion.

About all that, the apostle Paul testifies to Christ, saying: “*In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways; but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things*”, After this he referred to the Creator, saying: “*and through whom He made the universe*”. And talking of Him as a Being, he says: “*The Son is the radiance of God’s glory, and the exact representation of His Being*”; Then he proclaimed the power of His prior knowledge by saying: “*sustaining all things by His powerful word*” (Hebrew 1: 1-3).

And writing to the Colossians, Paul said the same things: “*For by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him*”. Referring to His creative might; then to the might of His prior knowledge, he adds: “*He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*” (Colossians 1: 16-17).

In the same way, St. John testified to both kinds of might, saying: “*Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made*”, he so said to shed light on His might of creation; then he moved to His prior knowledge, saying: “*In Him was life, and that life was the light of men*” (John 1: 3-4).

That was what the psalmist dealt with, saying: “*You created me*”, as a reference to His creative power; then referred to His prior knowledge by saying: “*and laid your hands upon me*”. By saying “*laid*”, he means: (You ordain), (You control), (You lead); to which the apostle

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Peter Christologos: *Selected Sermons (Frs. Of Church)*, 6.

Paul referred by saying: *“In Him we live and move and have our being: (Acts 17: 28). We are in need of His might, not only in being created, but also in continuing to exist and to live<sup>1</sup>.*

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

*“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain” (6)*

His unlimited knowledge, confuses our minds. And being far beyond our perception, it is befitting of us to prostrate ourselves before Him, and confess that *“His knowledge is too lofty for us to attain’*, According to many fathers, the creation of man is more amazing than that of any other creature, for it includes both what is mortal, namely, the body, together with what is eternal, namely, the soul; it represents a strange world that embraces the likeness of angels, namely, the human soul, and the likeness of animals, namely, the body.

❖ Now, listen and hear what is truly and amazingly vague, yet, what brings forth much happiness to understand. God talked to His servant, the prophet Moses through a cloud; and when Moses, longing with a flaring zeal to see how God really looks like, said to God: *“If I have found favor in Your eyes, ... show me Your glory”* (Exodus 33: 13, 18). But God said to Him: *“You cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live; there is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see My back, but My face must not be seen “* (Exodus 33: 20-23).

God says: *“When My glory passes by, you will see My back”*; as though He has a face and a back! Far from it for us to think that way about Divinity!

In these words there are mighty secrets! ... Those who were stirred-up against the Lord, having seen Him incarnate, now seeking counsel, how to find salvation, are told: *“Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven”* (Acts 2: 38). Now, they have seen His back, those who could not see His face, for His hands were over their eyes, until He passed by; Then when He removed His hands from their eyes, they saw His disciples, and asked them: *“Brothers, what shall we do?”*.

They were violent, but now they became gentle.

They were angry, but now they fear.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139.

They were cruel, but now they are exultant.  
They were blind, but now they became enlightened<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ How amazing, O Lord, is Your knowledge, particularly in creating me, as man, which is more amazing than any other of Your creation; For in me you have put both the mortal man, namely the body, and the immortal, namely the soul; the rational, and the irrational; Such knowledge is far beyond my perception, “*too lofty for me to attain*” (6).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ What he means is: Although I enjoy perceiving that You have a prior knowledge of everything, and that You have created me from nothing; Yet, I confess my incomplete, unclear, and inaccurate perception about You, I confess that it exalts above my mind, and is too lofty for me to attain.

He does not mean to say: I do not have knowledge of God, but I do not have a complete and clear knowledge<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ In the book of Ecclesiastes, it is written: “*I am determined to be wise, but this was beyond me. Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and more profound – who can discover it?*” (Ecclesiastes 7: 23, 24).

And in the book of psalms, it is written: “*Such a knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain*” (Psalm 139: 6).

And Solomon says: “*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter*” (Proverb 25: 2).

Before all this, believe me when I say that I often determine to stop writing, but for fear that my silence would be wrongly interpreted as falling in a kind of despair, or may lead to some dissension among you, I press myself to continue writing within limits<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Athanasius the apostolic)

## 2- GOD THE OMNIPRESENT (WHO IS EVERYWHERE):

“*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?*” (7)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 139.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Monks 1: 2.

God not only has knowledge of everything, but He is everywhere at the same moment. But that does not imply the unity of existence, namely, not according to the 'Pantheism' dogma, saying that God and nature are the same thing; and that the material universe and man, are nothing but appearances of the divine being,

The Holy Book confirms that God is not a thing, but He is a 'Person', yet apart from His creation.

Is there a place where man can avoid the Spirit of God? Is there a place where man can flee from the divine presence?

This intention of fleeing from the Spirit of God or His face, goes back to the time when Adam and Eve fell into sin, and attempted to flee from their Creator. Then that feeling became an instinct in the life of man; which distinctly appears whenever a little child does something wrong, then tries to flee from his parents.

It is befitting of us to perceive that God in His love condescends to desire to encounter with us, to let us perceive his compassion, and seek to return to him.

❖ Where can an escapee find refuge from God? Those who may give it to him usually ask him: [from whom are you fleeing?] If it is from someone less powerful than them, they may give him refuge without fear, on account of that he has no mighty master who may follow him. But if they are told that he has a mighty master, they may either refrain from giving him refuge, or may give it to him while being intensely terrified. Even men of authority could be deceived; but who can deceive God? Where can an escapee go from His face<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ He refers to God as being a Spirit and a Presence; .... Namely, "*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?*" You fill everything, and present in everyone; not in part, but whole in everyone. By referring to what is up, down, to length, width, height, and depth, he refers to that He is everywhere. He does not say: Wherever I go You will follow and catch me; but he says: "*Wherever I go, You are there*", I find You ahead of me; hence. he says: "*Your knowledge is too wonderful for me*" (6).

Someone may object, saying: If it is something beyond your ability to perceive, how could it be amazing? It surpasses and swallows my mind; ... Because we cannot seize the sun rays, we are utterly amazed of them!

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139.

It is the same thing with our knowledge of God; we are not completely ignorant of Him; We know for sure that He is there, loving, good, gentle, and compassionate; Yet, concerning His being; how could He be everywhere; this we cannot perceive<sup>1</sup>... That is why he stops at saying that His might is utterly confusing to him, who attempts to search for it by his human mind<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ (in a message to Amphilochius who was ordained a bishop

Blessed be God who, from one generation to another, choose those who bring him pleasure; He, who discern the elect vessels, and use them to minister to the saints. That is why, when you intended to flee, as you clearly admit, not from me, but from the call presented through me, you were caught by the net of sure grace, and brought forth to Pisidia to catch souls for the Lord, and to draw the preys of the devil from the depths to the light; to say together with the blessed David: “*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?*”<sup>2</sup>”

**(St. Basil the Great)**

❖ Notice the secret of the Trinity in that perfect faith. Here, the prophet, talking to the Father, proclaims that the Son is the face of the Father, and saying clearly that the Holy Spirit spreads through everything<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

❖ As no one can flee from the judgment of God<sup>4</sup>, according to the saying of the prophet: “*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?*”(Psalm 139: 7), it is befitting of those who occupy the highest ranks of the church, to begin by searching their own conscience, before judging the others<sup>5</sup>.

**(The scholr Origen)**

❖ If the Spirit of the Lord fills the whole universe; and hence the prophet says: “*Where can I go from Your Spirit?*” (7); Yet the created things are only present in certain places; .... If the Spirit is filling everything; ... if the angels are inferior to Him, and they will go wherever they are assigned to minister, It is therefore imperative not to doubt that the Spirit is not among the created things, and is

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Epistle 141: 1. To Amphilochius.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 212: 3.

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on Rom 2: 3.

<sup>5</sup> Commentary on Rom 2: 3.

definitely not an angel, but is far above and beyond the nature of angels<sup>1</sup>.

**(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)**

- ❖ *“Lord, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations”* (Psalm 90: 1). Your wrath is justice; You would never wrongly judge anyone; *“Where can I go from Your Spirit?”*; And where can flee from You, **except by taking refuge in You?**

We therefore should understand that, if we, being human, cannot bridle our own tongues, according to the words of the blessed prophet (see James 1: 26), we should resort to God who can.

As no horse, camel, elephant, serpent, or a lion, can tame itself; Man, likewise cannot tame himself, although he can, if he chooses tame all the mentioned beasts. I wish we ask God to tame us<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ We shall be in a better condition if we get close to whom no one could be better than Him; I wish we go to Him through love; For He would be nearer to us if we approach Him with pure love. Being everywhere by His perfection, and not limited by a material place, we should go to Him, not walking by our feet, but by our behavior, ... Behavior is usually not distinguished by what man knows, but by what he loves. If love is good or evil, so will be the behavior<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ The face of the Father is the Son; for He is the radiation of His glory, and the image of His Icon; While His Spirit is the Holy Spirit. The prophet's talk, therefore refers to the Holy Trinity: The addressee is the Father, His face is the Son, and His Spirit is the Holy Spirit.

This God, of three Icons, is in heaven, on earth, and everywhere; yet His presence is not location-wise; but, being the Creator of the universe, and the Filler of everything, He is not confined to a particular place.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there” (8)***

If we imagine that somebody went up to heaven; Will he hidden there from God? No way, for heaven is the throne of God (Matthew 5: 34).

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<sup>1</sup> الرسائل عن الروح القدس إلى الأسقف سيرايبون 1: 26 (ترجمة مؤسسة القديس أنطونيوس).

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T :essons, 5: 2.

<sup>3</sup> Letter 15 to Macedonius.

And if he makes his bed in the depths, namely, if he is set free from the body, he will find God here as well.

We shall not be able to flee from the face of God, except by being protected in Him; We shall be able to flee from recompense by hiding in Him.

Let us then have the wings of love, to fly to love itself, and to hide in Him.

❖ Where can man go or flee from Him who perceives everything<sup>1</sup>?  
(**St. Clement, the Roman**)

❖ What the prophet is talking about here is that God is everywhere; something which he does not perceive. Not being able to know how this could be, he gets confused and terrified whenever he thinks of it<sup>2</sup>.  
(**St. John Chrysostom**)

❖ David believes that all transgressions in the world are exposed before God; Neither heavens, nor earth, the seas, the deep cave; not even the night itself, could conceal sins from Him. Perceiving how crimes and evil are sins in the sight of God, the psalmist cries out, saying: “*Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight*” (Psalm 51: 6) <sup>3</sup>.

❖ Where will be the top of the building which we establish? I shall instantly say: to seeing God.

Now you can imagine how great it is to see God, He who so soared, can understand what I am saying. We were promised to see God;

How great would it be to see Him, who sees us. Those who worship vain gods, can easily see them, yet they see, what have eyes and cannot see. We, on the other hand, are promised to see the living God who can see; and long to see Him, about whom the Holy Book says: “*Does He who implanted the ear not hear? Does He who formed the eye not see?*” (Psalm 94: 9).

That is why he says in the psalm: “*Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise?*” (Psalm

94: 8); For many, who commit evil things, being difficult for them to believe that God can see them, they assume that He does not wish to do.

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<sup>1</sup> *First Epistle, 28.*

<sup>2</sup> *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God, homily 1: 25.*

<sup>3</sup> *Fr. Peter Chrysologus: Selected Sermons, 2.*

Few are they who are utter atheists, about whom is written: *“The ignorant said in his heart: ‘There is no God!’”*. The same as few who are utterly pious. But the majority of men would say: [What? Does God think of me now? Does He know what I am doing in my home, and on my bed?] ... *“Take heed, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise?”*.... You, being a man, knows everything that go on in your house; Do you think that He, who made you, will not keep an eye on you? That He, who made your eyes, will not concentrate His eyes on you? He, who created you from nothing, and gave you existence, Will He not care for you now, that you exist? ...

He *“the God who gives life to the dead and call things that are not as though they were”* (Romans 4: 17).

Therefore, do not deceive yourself! ... He sees you, whether you like it or not; and there is nowhere you can hide from him: *“If I go up to heaven, you are there; If I make my bed in the depths, You are there”* (8).

Great will be your troubles when, you do not intend to separate yourself from your evil deeds, and yet, you do not wish to be seen, or you doubt that you are seen by God. ... Just listen to the Holy Book, saying: *“Does He who implanted the ear not hear? Does He who formed the eye not see?”* (Psalm 94: 9), Where can you hide your evil works from the eyes of God? If you do not die from them, your labor is of no avail<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Some Greeks claim that God is the Soul of the world<sup>2</sup>; while others claim that His authority, only prevail on heaven, and not on earth, misinterpreting the verse saying: *“Your truth is up to the clouds”*<sup>3</sup>, They dare to confine the care of God to the clouds and heavens alone, separating Him from things of the earth, and disregard the psalm that says: *“If I go up to heaven, You are there; and If I make my bed in the depths, You are there”* (8).. If there is nothing higher than heavens, and Hades are lower than earth, He who ordains things related to Hades would care for the earth as well<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

*“If I rise on the wings of the dawn; If I settle on the far side of the sea”* (9)

<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons 19: 3.

<sup>2</sup> ذكر شيشرون أن فيثاغورس قال بأن الله هو نفس العالم الذي يخترق كل الطبيعة. Cicero, De Natura Deorum. كما قيل إن هذا الفكر نادى به الرواقيون والافلاطونيون وصار تعليمًا عامًا.

<sup>3</sup> مز 36: 5. "أمانتك إلى الغمام" يبدو أن القديس كيرلس استعار هذه العبارة عن القديس إكليمنضس السكندري الذي قال إن البعض فهم من هذا المزمور بأن العناية الإلهية تنزل من القمر كقول أرسطو. Stromata 14: 9.

<sup>4</sup> مقال 8: 2.

“*The wings of the dawn*” refer to the rays of the sun in the early morning that travel from east to west with a velocity of 186000 miles per hour.

Even if we could travel from one end of the earth to the other end with the velocity of light, we shall find God there waiting to guide and support us..

❖ If by sin, you go down to the depth of evil, and despise confession, saying: “Who can see me”?... You are also there to punish.

I wish, therefore, we flee to God, in hope, and with longing, by the two wings of love<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ It is befitting of you, not to allow the suggestions of evil to grow inside you, or the confusion of Babel to gain strength in your chest. .... Slay the enemy while small; to avoid having a crop of tares; .... Take evil away from yourself while still a bud<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ The way we get astonished in awe, when we look at the open sea with its limitless depths; the prophet David so felt when he meditated in the sea of God’s limitless wisdom! ... He was shocked in terror and awe, and backed up, saying loudly: ‘*I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made*’ (14); And, “*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain*” (6)<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“Even there, Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast” (10)***

Having revealed how the knowledge of God is extremely amazing, and surpasses the human mind; and how being everywhere is unsearchable, he also reveals that He, by His divine care, does not leave us confused, but His hand holds us, to let us experience His existence, care, and compassion.

The hand of God refers to His incarnate divine Word; and His right hand, to the Word of God, or to the Power of God – our Lord Jesus Christ.

By His incarnation, He realized the salvation by the cross, and brought us forth to Him, being the Way; and held us fast to let us enjoy

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 139 (138).*

<sup>2</sup> *Letter 22 to Eustochium, 6.*

<sup>3</sup> *On the Incomp. Nature of God. 1: 24.*

the divine bosoms. Wherever are our movements, and whatever is their velocity, God, by His love, supports us and cares for us.

❖ The great psalmist David draws the shape of the cross before our eyes, singing in his psalms:” *Where can I go from Your Spirit?*

*Where can I flee from Your presence?If I go up to heaven (the height), You are there; If I make my bed in the depths (the depth),*

*You are there; If I rise on the wings of the dawn (the east), if I settle on the far side of the sea (the west) .....” (Psalm 139: 7 – 10) <sup>1</sup>.*

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

❖ Let this be our hope and comfort; Let us take through love, the two wings which we lost by our lusts, that have calcified them, and brought us down from the freedom of our heavens; namely, from the freedom of the breaths of the Spirit of God. From there we lost our wings, were destroyed, and became under the mercy of the fowler. But our Lord saved us by His blood, and let us flee from the snare of the enemy by giving us the wings of His commandments, to stretch them and soar up high... We therefore, are in need of those wings; and in need of the Guide .... Yes, we have the freedom of will, but even with them, what can we do without the support of Him who commands us<sup>2</sup>?

**(St. Augustine)**

**“If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light become night around me....” (11)**

The darkness refers to anguish. He means to say: [I became surrounded by troubles; the darkness treads me under its feet] And according to another version: [The darkness hides me, and the night became light in my helplessness]; and still in another version: ‘[The night shines around me]. What does this mean?He says: [The anguish suddenly turned to good]; or rather: [Although anguish pressed on me, I became in a better condition]. He does not say that the anguish passed away, but [The night shines]; ... Although the night is still there, it is obvious that the troubles and calamities, (to which he refers as the night), tread me no more under its feet, but light shined in the night, namely, support covered me; and things have turned to their opposite, according to the will of God. Have not you ever seen the furnace ignite, while dew falls without putting it off?

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<sup>1</sup> د. سعيد حكيم يعقوب: وقام في اليوم الثالث، ابريل 2006، ص 29.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

Have not you seen the rain together with the fire? (in he episode of the three young saintly men?) <sup>1</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

❖ Now, I believe in Christ; Now, I will soar up high by the two wings of love ... Looking at the length of the way, I say to myself: *“the light became night around me”*... I praise Him, He, who searched for me when I flew, ... He, who scourged my back; ... He, who called me back from perdition, and turned my night into light. ... The darkness of the long night, while we cross this life; .....How did it become light? ... Because Christ descended to the night<sup>2</sup>

(**St. Augustine**)

*“Even the darkness will not be dark to You, the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You”* (12)

If someone thinks that he can hide in the darkness from the face of God, he would be putting his trust in a vain refuge, unable to hide him; for the night cannot cancel the divine presence. As darkness is not dark to God, there is no hiding from Him.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, it is natural to refer darkness to the night; yet God may intend to make light referred to the night as a natural thing as well. The same with afflictions, they bear troubles as a natural thing; but God may intend to make them bring comfort upon man as though it is the natural thing!

According to **St. Augustine**, the night that shines like day, could be realized by the repentance of men, namely, by having their hearts turn to God; namely, turn from darkness to light.

According to **St. Ambrose**, the phrase here refers to the resurrection of the Lord Christ, who shined with the light of His resurrection in the dawn of Sunday, while darkness still prevailed.

❖ *“Light will shine like the day”*That was the great thing, seen and rejoiced by Abraham; which was also described by David, saying: *“This is the day made by the Lord; let us rejoice and be glad in it”*<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Ambrose**)

❖ As you can see, the work of natural elements could change to the opposite according to the will of God; and what is opposite would come to be completely natural; In other words, the night could have

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

<sup>3</sup> The Prayer of Job and David, 5: 14.

light, as it has the darkness; and to refer to this, the psalmist adds: “*for the darkness is as light to You*” (12 LXX) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ In another psalm David says: “*You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light*” (Psalm 18: 29).. But who are they, who turn their darkness darker? They are the wicked who, when they sin, they become darkness; and by not confessing their sins, but defending themselves instead, they turn their darkness darker.

Now, when you sin, you become darkness; and by confessing your darkness, it will become light; but by defending your darkness, it becomes darker ... I wish we do not make our darkness darker by defending our sins<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ This would be realized in the hearts of those to whom Paul refers, saying: “*For you were once darkness, but now, you are light in the Lord*” (Ephesians 5: 8) <sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ Whenever I think, O Lord, that You are everywhere, and that You are caring for everyone; will You let the darkness, which is the afflictions and sorrows cover me and press me with their weight to kill me? Your care and conquest come to me while in the night of calamities, and make me as though in daylight, joy, and paradise.

You did not turn the darkness into light, the night into day, nor the sorrows into joys, but left everything as they are; Yet, You let them do to me what is contrary to their nature. You make the night give me light, and let its darkness disappear as far as I am concerned; as it happened, when the fire became cold for the three young men, at the same time it was a blazing furnace for the people of Babylon, according to its nature. As You brought things into existence from nothing, and are able to send them away, You are also able to bring against them other things, contrary to their nature. You can make the sorrows of the nights like their joys, the darkness of the night like light; not through an illusion, but an actual fact. Moreover what the darkness conceals will not hide from you, for light to you is like daylight.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 219.

❖ We, Christians, as well, the ministers of Christ, should truly stand alert. Like *“the good and faithful servant”* (Matthew 25: 23), keen on giving honor to our Master; Let us bind ourselves with asceticism, strengthen ourselves with firmness, fill our lanterns with the oil of gladness, that of the Spirit; enlightened with prayer. That way, we can courageously fight our desire to enjoy sleep, and the darkness for us would turn into light; and as the prophet says: *“The light becomes night around me”* (Psalm 139: 11), and the darkness will not darken our minds. Let us then watch the dark night with alertness, as though it is a shining day<sup>1</sup>.

**(Martyrus – Sahdona)**

❖ I pray to the Lord to reveal to you the darkness that glitters like day; about which it is said: *“Even the darkness will not be dark to You, the night will shine like the day”* (Psalm 139: 12). I pray to him to open the gates of paradise before everyone of you; for then you would become glad with the water of Christ,<sup>2</sup> “of sweet fragrance<sup>3</sup>”.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

❖ Is Christ’s thought outside, different from it inside the house? What is illegal in the church could not be legal in the house. Nothing is hidden from God. Before Him, *“the night will shine like the day”* (12). *“A man ought to examine himself (before approaching the body of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11: 28)<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ The prophet Elisha healed the leprosy of Naaman for free, and Gehazi, his servant, took his reward and hid it in the dark. But the dark is not hidden from the saints of God (Psalm 139: 12). When Peter asked Ananias and Sapphira: *“Tell me, is this the price you got for the land”* (Acts 4: 7); Elisha asked Gehazi, his servant: *“Where have you been Gehazi?”* (2 Kings 5: 25). He did not ask him out of ignorance, but with sadness! ... From the darkness you came, and to darkness you will go! ... As you sold the healing of the leper, leprosy will be your inheritance! ... It is as though Elisha was saying to him, ‘I followed the command, saying: *“Freely you have received, freely give”* (Matthew 10: 8); But you sold this free grace! ... Elisha said: *Was not my spirit with you?* (2 Kings 5: 26). I was here confined in

<sup>1</sup>كتاب الكمال 69.

<sup>2</sup>النص هو Christ bearing في الطبعة البندكتية "عندئذ تبتهجون بالمياه التي تحمل رائحة المسيح".

<sup>3</sup>مقال افتتاحي: 15.

<sup>4</sup> Letter 48 to Pammachius, 15.

the body, but the spirit given to me by the Lord, saw the far away things, and revealed to me what you have done!

See how the Holy Spirit, not only takes ignorance away, but grants knowledge as well! Notice how he enlightens the spirit of men<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

❖ Yes, it was befitting of the Lord to come clothed by our humanity, to change men, and to reconcile them with His Father. Coming with no weapon, He took over the shield of man, namely, his body, and by it He set forth and wrestled against death and its conquest. ... By a mortal body, He put our enemy to death; and by the body that was a weapon of sin, the Lord condemned the sin (Romans 8: 3).

When the enemies attack, they start by tearing down the walls of the stronghold, by the appropriate heavy weapons. By such a way, the enemy took Adam under his authority by using his body as a weapon against him; And by such a way, he took all mankind into captivity.

But Christ came using the same way, He used the human body as a weapon, by which He tore down the walls, the strongholds of the devil, and all the horrible means he used against man, according to what is written: “ *the night will shine like the day, the darkness is as light to You*” (Psalm 139: 12). Namely, God uses the darkness like the light; “*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive*” (1 Corinthians 15: 22)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Maccari the Great)**

❖ I heard of a man who took the holy Book to his bosom from the seventh hour (one o'clock in the afternoon) up to sunset, without being able to open it, as though it was sealed with lead! ...Abba Anthony, on the other hand, following the instructions of the angel, used to sit and practice his handwork for a certain time, then gets up to pray, then sits again to read in the holy books. That way, he enjoyed such an enlightenment, he described to one of the philosophers of his time, saying: [It is enough for me to meditate in the nature of creation all the time; and to read in the words of God until the darkness of the night. To that extent he was connected to God; his night shone like daylight, according to psalm 139: 12.

**(St. Nilos of Sinai)**

### **3- GOD, OUR MAKER IN THE WOMB:**

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<sup>1</sup>مقال 16: 17.

<sup>2</sup> الرسالة الثانية، 4 (في عيد الميلاد غالبًا في إحدى سنوات القرن الرابع – فردوس الأباء).

***“For You created my inward parts; You knit me together in my mother’s womb” (13)***

Through his dealing with God, the psalmist perceived that God, is not only ‘Omniscient’ and ‘Omnipresent’, but He is ‘Omnipotent’ as well; By his might, He created man; and through his limitless love, He intends to work perpetually to edify His beloved creature.

The men of God often stood with awe before the Creator’s amazing work, even in the conception of man, and the formation and growth of the fetus in the womb, until the time of birth; things that were not yet known by science in the old. And even, with the great progress of science, man’s knowledge and vision of these issues, are still limited.

What amazed men of the old, as they expressed, is in harmony with the wisdom continuously discovered by science, that glorify the Omnipotent Creator (See Psalm 22{9-10; 71:5-6; Job 10: 8-11; Isaiah 49: 2; Jeremiah 1: 5}).

The “*inward parts*” – (the ‘kidneys’ in the Arabic version), refers to the lust; Creating my “*inward parts*” means submitting my lusts and thoughts.

The psalmist moves from talking about God, as being present everywhere (Omnipresent); to His care for man, since his first formation in the womb.

The heart for the Jews refers to the thoughts; whereas the “*inward parts*” refers to the emotions, lusts, whether holy or evil.

If the conception of man, the formation of the fetus, and its growth, are considered issues that surpass the human mind, however is the progress of science; How much more would be the conception of the believer, and his reformation in the water of baptism, to be born as a son of God the Father, a member of the body of Christ, and a temple for the Holy Spirit?!

❖ The Creator (God) occupies not only the heart, but the ‘inward parts’ as well ; not just the thoughts, but the pleasures<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The foolish may say: How would it benefit me, if God is great, of authority, and knows what is hidden in the future?! ... That is why the psalmist adds: “***For You, O Lord, guide my inner man***”; referring to the whole man, by mentioning the part (the inward parts). It is not a little thing to trust in His divine care; that we are God’s own; For the Owner cares for His possession; Hence the psalmist

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

adds: "*You knit me together in my mother's womb*"; namely, that You cared for me, and kept me secure since my first days, while being in the cradle; You taught me what to say<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ David says: Thinking about my formation and my nature as man, I wonder what are the mixture of powers that move me! (Psalm 139: 13-16).

How can the eternal mix with the mortal?

How am I going down, and still am lifted up?

What causes the unsettlement of the soul? Why is the soul (the spirit) given life, and still partakes of the suffering?

How could the mind be limited and unlimited at the same time; and how could it be inside us, and travel around the universe in a swift move?

How could the thoughts be conveyed by talk? How could they move in the air and enter together with things? How could they partake of the sense; and, at the same time, isolate itself from the senses?

And most prominent, What was the first stage in the process of our formation in the factory of nature? And what is the final stage?

What is the motive to search for food? And what is the instinct that lead the babes to the first fountain of the material of life (the mother's breast)?

How does the body feed on food; while the soul feeds on the word?

What is the natural bond between the fathers and the sons?

How could steadfast differences in appearance come forth as a result of great number of special factors?

How could the soul of a living being be mortal and immortal together?; How could he, through changes in his condition, die and depart, then come again, like a continuously streaming river?

There are many aspects to think about, concerning our limbs and the members of our bodies; how they work in harmony, ... how they get apart, ... how they work together as one entity; ... how some of them include the others; and all that according to a definite system in their nature?

There are several facts concerning talking and hearing; How the voice is produced by the vocal cords; and how it is received by the ear; And how it is born by air between the source of voice and the ear.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139.

There are, as well, several facts concerning vision, and its vague connection to things. And as vision is directed by will, the same thing happens with the mind; Vision falls on things seen with the same speed by which the mind mixes with thoughts.

And there are many facts concerning the rest of the senses that receive outer impulses, which could not be sensed by the eye of the mind.

There are facts concerning the rest in sleep, the work of imagination in dreams, memory, anger, and desire.

In short, about everything that contribute in running this small world, we call man<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Gregory the Nezianzen)**

❖ God helps us when He creates us; when He allows for us to be born.

The psalmist says: *“You have covered me in my mother’s womb”*

(Psalm 139: 13 LXX). By saying: *“Before I formed you in the womb, I know you; Before you were born I sanctified you”* (Jeremiah 1: 5, 6), the Lord means to tell the prophet, that He cares for those whom He creates, in, and even before, their birth. The Lord is called the Helper, as a Creator of mankind, and He supports us by continuing to visit us with His protection. Hence the psalmist says in another psalm: *“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty”* (Psalm 91: 1). The Lord’s first help is therefore in creating us, and the one next to it, is protecting us. Listen to the prophet Moses saying: *“As an eagle, spreading out its wings, taking his young up, carrying them on its wings”* (Deuteronomy 32: 11 LXX)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

***“I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well”* (14)**

God’s works are amazing in creating the fetus, from the moment of its conception, to the consummation of its growth, and its birth...It includes 60 trillion cells; 100,000 miles of nerve fibers; 60,000 miles of arteries and veins to carry the blood; 250 bones, etc<sup>3</sup>.

The psalmist describes the formation of the fetus as *“fearfully and wonderfully made”*; Every member is the work of the amazing divine Artist.

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<sup>1</sup> العظة اللاهوتية الأولى: عظة رقم 27 عظة تمهيدية ضد أتباع يونيموس، 22.

<sup>2</sup> Prayer of David 4: 5: 21.

<sup>3</sup> See Believer’s Bible Commentary, Ps. 139.

Let us just tell, as an example, how the brain records events, voices, odors, memory, etc., and how it makes instant decisions, and give Commands to the other members of the body to move together in complete harmony.

How could the psalmist say: “*My soul knows very well*”, when, in the same psalm, he says that he does not know God as He is! ... The answer is that, while he knows for sure that God is great and exalted beyond any understanding or comprehension. ... Yet our sure knowledge about God, confirms to us our ignorance of the secrets of His nature, and the perception of His essence. Our ignorance supports us to testify to His knowledge.

❖ “*I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well*”

He says: You made me, yet I do not know how!...You care for me, yet, with my limited mind, I cannot perceive the divine care as a whole at the same time....You are everywhere, yet I do not understand how! ... You know the past, the present, and the future, together with the secrets of our mind; yet I do not know how! ... You change the nature of things; and let the things existing, bear contradictory features, which may look as though original and natural.

Gathering all that together, the psalmist cries loudly out, saying: “*I praise (confess) you, for You make awesome things*”; namely, You are amazing, both in appearance and being. “*Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well*<sup>1</sup>”.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ Looking at heaven and earth do not help us know God more than the serious study of our existence. The prophet says: “*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*”; namely, looking at myself, I can recognize Your limitless wisdom<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Basil the Great)

❖ How can my soul know that very well, except that the night is light in me?

Except that Your grace dwelt upon me and lighted my darkness?

Except that You acquired my ‘inward parts’? ... Except that You have covered me with Your care in my mother’s womb<sup>3</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139.

<sup>2</sup> The Hexaemeron, 9: 6.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

❖ I counsel you to search the multitude of wonders in your body. ... Yes, you may be a small being, yet you are a vast world! That is how the prophet David expressed by saying: “*You make wonders, and that my soul knows very well*” (Psalm 139: 14). An accurate understanding of the body of man, will surely lead to an equal understanding of the great Being who created him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Basil the Great)

*“My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth” (15)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “My bones was not hidden from You, which You made in secret, and my person in the lowest parts of the earth”.

Notice how the psalmist, while talking about the work of God in the formation of the fetus, talks about himself, saying for example: “*my bones*”.

Here, the psalmist confirms God’s amazing accurate knowledge of him since the first moment of his creation, when he was still being secretly formed in the womb, as though in the lowest parts of the earth, seen by no one.

Nobody knows how the bones of the fetus are formed in his mother’s womb, nor the condition of man, soul and body, after being buried in the grave!

According to **St. Augustine**, the bones here, refer to the strength and abidance of the soul; for God grants His believers the strength of perseverance, so that they would not break down before the stir-up of their enemies all around them.

❖ There is nothing strange for an angel to be of courage; but it would certainly be for man! How could he attain such courage when he is an earthly vessel; except because, in him, there are bones secretly formed<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Once again he talks about knowledge, and say to God: You know all these things; You accurately perceive my creation, my every part, even the tiniest of them; and in my growth, according to the words of the Lord Christ, Himself: “*The very hairs of your head are all numbered*” (Matthew 10: 31)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> عظة على أصل الإنسان 1: 2.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 139 (138).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 139.

(St. John Chrysostom)

***“Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, when none of them as yet existed”***  
**(16)**

While still in the early stages of his existence, an unformed fetus in his mother’s womb, God saw in David the sweet psalmist of Israel. In His divine book, all his days were written, even before his first cry-out as he was born<sup>1</sup>.

God saw him while still an unformed fetus, as though he was completely formed; He saw him grow day after day, His divine eyes did not miss a single day. That was how the psalmist felt about God’s unfailing care for every detail of man’s life, being His most beloved and very valuable creature<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Your eyes saw , not only what is perfect, but what is wanting as well. I wish those who are not perfect would not fear; I wish they get on in their life as far as they could; I wish that every day they get addition; I wish that every day they attain some progress, and never fall from the body of the Lord; namely, I wish they join the other parts of the one body, to be qualified to be granted what they are promised<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed”*** ... You know me when I was still unformed; Your eyes saw me clearly, as though I was perfectly formed and created<sup>4</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

***“How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!”*** (17)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: “How much I honor Your elect, O God! How much I cherish their dominion”.

The psalmist honors the elect of God, who work with every possible way, to the account of God’s kingdom, and minister to His holy church.

The psalmist meditates in God’s plan and His care for his spirit, soul, and body; and, according to ‘Andrew Ivy’, every single cell of his

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<sup>1</sup> *Believer’s Bible Commentary Ps. 139.*

<sup>2</sup> *Believer’s Bible Commentary Ps. 139.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 139 (138).*

<sup>4</sup> *On Ps. 139.*

body, with no exception, knows its role for the realization of its goal, to the account of the whole body<sup>1</sup>.

❖ The purple, as well, should be added to the gold and the scarlet. While his heart meditates in the things he is going to say in his sermons, the priest should put to death all his wicked desires, whatever small, keep his eyes on his renewed inside, and strengthens his right in the heavenly kingdom by his behavior in this life. Such a spiritual exaltation was on St. Peter's mind when he said: "*You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*" (1 Peter 2: 9). As for the strength by which he can overcome sin, St. John the beloved, supporting and comforting the shepherds, says: "*As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God*"

(John 1: 12). In such a strength, the psalmist meditates, when he says: "*How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them*" (17). As much as the saints are despised in the eyes of men, their minds exalt to the highest levels<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Gregory the Great)

***"If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You" (18)***

As it is impossible for man to count the sand, it would also be to count those who faithfully work in God's vineyard, who are often unknown except to God who knows the hearts and hidden things.

By saying "***When I awake***", he probably means the moment he was born. In verses (13 to 18), he confirms that God alone was close to him through the nine months before his birth; But once he was born, although the portrait is totally different, yet God remains his Helper, Advocate, and Guide. He talks about the moment of his birth as the moment he awakened; the moment he first saw the rays of the day<sup>3</sup>.

❖ So many are the things you ponder in your heart, to say: "*If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand*" (18).

Beloved brother, As nobody knows how this place will eventually be, except God who "*knows the heart*" (Acts 15: 8), Keep that in mind, and glorify His name. From now on, be free of worry, and live in peace, for all things will eventually come in its due time and order.

(St. Parsonovius)

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<sup>1</sup> Believer's Bible Commentary Ps. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Pastoral Care, 1: 3.

<sup>3</sup> Believer's Bible Commentary Ps. 139.

#### 4- GOD HIS PROTECTOR AGAINST THE WICKED:

*“Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men” (19)*

Having talked about God’s care since the first moment he was conceived in his mother’s womb; Now the psalmist moves to the wicked who oppose God, the bloodthirsty men who are worthy of punishment.

- ❖ The psalmist asks God, not to destroy these people, but to change them from sin to righteousness<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain” (20)*

*“Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? (21)*

Although the prophet David bears no personal hatred, nor a desire of revenge, Yet he cannot endure evil, but hates it; Although he seeks the salvation of the wicked through their repentance, and their return to the Savior, who anticipates their return, and even seeks to work with His Holy Spirit in them.

- ❖ Being completely bound by the covenant of spiritual peace, David testifies that he is not conforming with the wicked, when he says: *“Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise against You; I count them my enemies” (21, 22)*. Here, it is obvious that hating the enemies of God, means to love their persons, but loathe their deeds; and rebuke their evil behavior, to be of benefit to them<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Gregory the Great)

- ❖ Let us hate the heretics, who are worthy of hatred; let us keep away from them. And let us say to God about them: *“Do I not hate them, O Lord? Do I not loathe those who rise up against You?” (Psalm 139: 21)*; For it is written: *“I will put enmity between your offspring and hers” (Genesis 3: 15)*. Friendship with the serpent means enmity against God, which would bring forth death<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

*“I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies” (22)*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Pastoral Care, 3: 22.

<sup>3</sup> مقال 16 : 10.

Enmity here is against evil, and not against the evildoers. Or, according to **St. Augustine**, we should love God's creation, and hate what is alien to it. Here, the psalmist proclaims his hatred against evil, not out of fear of its results, but merely because he cannot endure evil. Loving the Holy God, he hates evil, His enemy!

❖ What does he mean by saying: "*I hate them with perfect hatred?*" Although I hate their iniquities, yet I love them being God's creation.

It is not for the sake of iniquities that we hate men; Nor, it is for the sake of men that we love iniquities! ... He adds: "*I count them my enemies*", not only because they are God's enemies, but for his own sake, for he does not endure evil<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

❖ It is befitting of man to desire to be liberated from iniquity, not to be spared from its consequences, but because he hates them according to what is written in the Holy Scriptures<sup>2</sup>.

❖ The Holy Spirit is everywhere, and is not limited to a certain place; Being an absolute Spirit, He poured Himself in the disciples, despite their presence in diverse, separate, and far locations in the whole world. Nothing could escape Him, nor deceive Him<sup>3</sup>.

(**St. Ambrose**)

## 5- SEARCH ME O GOD:

*"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Test me, and know my thoughts"* (23)

*"See if there is any wicked way in me; And lead me in the way everlasting"* (24)

Here, the psalmist confirms that the hatred in him is not a vain way, for he does not hate a certain person, but desires for all men to enjoy the eternal life; and for all to walk in Christ, being the everlasting Way.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 139 (138).*

<sup>2</sup> *Maxims on the Spiritual Life.*

<sup>3</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit, 1: 82*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 139**  
**LET ME ENCOUNTER YOU, TO RECOGNIZE YOUR LIGHT**

- ❖ Let me encounter You. to have the light of Your knowledge shine in me;  
My soul exults, to see You preoccupied with me;  
To see You know my falls, to lift me up;  
To see You know my rising up, to make me abide in Your grace;  
To see You know my thoughts, to sanctify them;  
To see You know my words, as well as my works, to guide my whole life;  
To see You know all my depths more than I know them myself;  
To see You know me, not to judge me, but to let me live in You.;  
To see You know me; to let me perceive Your love, and recognize You.
- ❖ Let me encounter You; to perceive Your presence everywhere;  
To perceive Your dwelling in me;  
To enjoy Your fiery Spirit kindle my depths;  
Let me flee to You, and hide in You;  
To turn my darkness into shining light;  
To fill my heart with the power of Your resurrection;  
To make me taste the sweetness of being crucified together with You.
- ❖ Let me encounter You, O my Mighty Creator;  
You formed me when I was still a fetus;  
You knit me in my mother's womb;  
I see Your amazing work, even in my body;  
You brought me forth from nothing;  
And when I fell down to the depths;  
You lifted me up with the power of Your cross.
- ❖ You inscribed my name on Your palm;  
You wrote it in the book of life;  
To prepare a place for me in the divine bosoms;  
And to bring me forth to the heavenly sanctuaries.
- ❖ You are preoccupied with me in Your heavens;  
As though I am Your only creation;  
How amazing are You, in Your love and salvation!  
Every morning You enflame my heart toward sanctity;

You prepare me to encounter You face to face;  
To let me live in Your sanctuaries, together with You, O Holy One!

❖ I give You thanks for making sin bitter in my mouth;  
I shall not endure it; not enjoy its pleasures;  
I do not fear its consequences,  
But I intend to become Your icon, O Holy One;  
I hate what You hate;  
And reject the devil, and all his works;  
Take me away out of his defiled mouth;  
For he seeks me as his food;  
Uproot the sin from my mouth and heart;  
To enjoy the banquet of heaven;  
And to enjoy the food of the angels.

## **PSALM 140**

### **A PERPETUAL BATTLE**

This psalm is a personal lamentation, a prayer presented to God for the sake of deliverance from affliction, in complete trust in God who saves His believers from their enemies.

As the enemies in the Old Covenant refer to the devil and his hosts, the psalmist sees in his enemies the character of violent oppression, and that they keep on setting traps to catch him. Yet he believes that evil always comes back over the wicked, while God supports the innocent oppressed.

The devil will never cease to fight those who intend to consummate the will of God; and is more violent against the true leaders, particularly the shepherds and the preachers.

1- **The weapons of the enemy:** The devil uses two dangerous weapons: the deceptive tongue (1 – 3), and the hidden snares (4 – 5).

2- **The weapons of God:** It is befitting of us to confront this enemy with divine weapons, namely praying (6 – 11), holding fast to God's promises, and practicing praise and thanksgiving (13).

The prophet David wrote this psalm concerning king Saul, who kept on listening to the slanders of those who had a grudge against him (David).

❖ I believe that, listening to this psalm, you hear the voice of the church, dwelling among the wicked, complaining, sighing, and pouring a prayer to God; For her voice in every prophecy is that of every needy, who hungers and thirsts for righteousness (Matthew 5: 6); until she ultimately comes to enjoy the reward kept for her, according to the divine promise<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

<b>1- The plotters</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>
<b>2- A cry-out to God, our Savior</b>	<b>4 - 5</b>
<b>3-The way of salvation</b>	<b>6 - 7</b>
<b>4- Bringing evil back upon the wicked</b>	<b>8 -13</b>

#### **The title:**

Prayer for deliverance from evil men

**To the chief musician. A psalm of David.**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: The ultimate end, by David. ... On this **St. Augustine** comments, saying:

❖ We seek no ultimate end except that expressed by the apostle Paul, saying: “*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes*” Romans 10: 4)

The Lord Christ is of the seed of David, not according to the Divinity, by which He is the Creator of David, but according to His manhood. This psalm is presented to the Son of David Himself; It is the voice of His body, namely, of the church.

(**St. Augustine**)

## 1- THE PLOTTERS:

*“Deliver me, O Lord from evildoers; Preserve me from violent men”* (1)

The psalmist starts this psalm by presenting a prayer to God to deliver him from the slanders of the wicked who kept on distorting his reputation, and from the oppressors who kept on violently plotting against him.

The devil will never cease to oppose the believers in every way; for he is the enemy of God Himself in the persons of His believers.

In every generation there will be the “violent men”, opposing the divine Truth, particularly in the end of times when “*the man of sin, the son of perdition*” is revealed (2 Thessalonians 2: 3).

The secret of the conquest of the church is her prayers to God who, alone, can strengthen and keep His church, and support the believers in their afflictions.

According to **Father Onesimus of Jerusalem**, the word “*evil*” in Greek is translated as (suffering). Evil brings suffering and anguish over man. When Cain killed his brother Abel, he actually caused his brother to be sent, crowned with glory, to a life of non-corruption; while he, himself, had his life filled with anguish. Likewise, Joseph’s brothers, having betrayed their brother and done evil to him, caused him to be glorified, while they had their lives filled with doubt and apprehension.

According to **St. Augustine**, after talking about deliverance from the evildoers, the psalmist talked about the man of violence; for the evildoer is usually violent, even against him, with whom he enters into a deep friendship.

The Holy Book, indeed, seeks from us not to judge those on the outside, but those on the inside. It does not isolate us from the non-

believers, but exhorts us to love them; Yet, a friendship that goes beyond the fitting limits, may cause harm to the soul.

**St. Augustine** is probably fearful for the sake of his people, lest their intimacy without limits with the heretics, would cause their children to pervert from the evangelic truth. For the heretics, by their seemingly gentle words, attempt to destroy the upright faith, and inject their poisonous views into souls.

❖ ***“Deliver me, O Lord, from evildoer”***. Not just from a single man, but from the whole category; Not just from the (vessels), but even from their prince, namely, Satan. Why does he say “*man*”, if he means Satan? For he was symbolically called “*man*” (see Matthew 13: 24-28).

Now, we have become light against darkness, namely, against the sinners, still acquired by Satan, together with their prince himself, who works in the children of iniquity.

***“And preserve me from violent men”***; for the violent man is evil and unrighteous. Lest you may think that any unrighteous could be a good man, as many such men may look as though harmless, not violent, nor persecutors; Yet they are unrighteous, in the sense that they practice certain abominable habits, like excessive wine drinking, fornication, etc.

An evildoer is any unrighteous man; he is harmful, whether he is gentle or violent, and will cause harm to those who fall into his nets, even if he seems on the outside to be harmless<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ We say: ***“Deliver me, O Lord from evildoers; Preserve me from violent men”***; For our Lord Himself command us, saying: ***“Pray that you do not fall into temptation”***.

We should not fall into temptation through our free option; yet, in case it happens to dwell upon us, we should endure it with courage, and seek God’s help; presenting to Him, on our side, what give him pleasure of good works.

❖ Notice, O Christian, how he did not seek from God to deliver him from wild beasts, lions, serpents, or scorpions; but to deliver him from the evildoer; For the former creatures have been so born by nature; whereas man may seem contrary to his nature, and would be, accordingly, difficult to detect.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

- ❖ Nothing is more harmful to man than sin; Ridding oneself of it, would turn trouble away, and make everything easy and peaceful for him; whereas with it, everything would go down, and would provoke destructive tempests.

I wish we would not be reproached to describe an evildoer as more vicious than a wild beast; on account of that the latter, although wild by nature, and the way it acts is befitting of it, yet it could be easily tricked. The former, on the other hand, who intends to do evil, adopting a diversity of deceptive appearances; avoiding his harm would prove far more difficult than avoiding a wild beast. Being wolves clothed as lambs, many would unwittingly become their victims. Hence, the psalmist prays to God to deliver him from the deception of such men, whose appearances are used by Satan to strike his victims with them.

As craftiness has many consequences, and the unexpected temptation may bring forth much trouble, the Lord taught us to pray: *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evildoers”*.

As the ways of attack are diverse, there is great need for getting prepared to confront them. It is like when someone intends to sail across the ocean; he is committed to get prepared against violent waves, storms, tides, hidden rocks; attacks of vicious sea animals; traps of pirates; probable hunger and thirst; controversies between sailors; decrease of provisions; etc.

As all those sources of danger in sailing across the sea, necessitate taking precautions, and making plans to confront them; We, likewise are committed to take precautions against the difficulties of the present life, against the lusts of the body, the anxieties of the soul, the deceptions of men, the attacks of enemies, the evil plots of false friends, the need, the sufferings, the insults, beside the envy of the devil and his hosts; until the time comes when man ultimately reaches the royal city, and enters with his (cargo) into a secure haven<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ As there is no way for the devil to succeed, like deceiving us through evildoers, the psalmist prays to God to deliver him from their deception<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“Who plan evil things in their hearts; they continually gather together for war” (2)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps., homily 50 on Ps. 139 (140).

The psalmist moans, for the wicked oppose him for no reason except that they find happiness in entering into destructive wars. He cries out to God, because what they reveal is different from what they hide in their hearts; because their hearts are filled with evil, even though they bear the appearance of meekness and gentleness. On another aspect, because, all their life, they continually gather together for war; and use every chance to practice their evil acts. Instead of fighting against the devil and sin, they even practice violence against one another.

- ❖ It would be easy to keep away from an obvious enemy, who has oppression on his lips and in his heart; but it is difficult to avoid him who utters good words by his lips, while hiding evil in his heart<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ They actually kill by their minds; and murder by the evil hidden in their hearts; Their whole life, they gather together for war.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips” (3)***

The first task of the wicked is to sharpen their tongues to become deadly like swords; and to let their words come out of their lips as lethal poison.

- ❖ ***“The poison of asps is under their lips”***. Here, the psalmist warns us against the heretics, whose words bear amity on the surface, while they are actually loaded with lethal poison<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Notice how he likens the evildoer with the serpent, that, among all beasts, has craftiness and deception to cause harm. Having no feet by which its approach could be heard; it smoothly crawls, yet not in a straightforward path. So are the evildoers who smoothly crawl, undetected, to do harm, who hide ***“the poison of asps under their lips”***<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Do you notice the meanness of sin? It turns men into vicious beasts, serpents and asps; and turns the tongue of mind into a horrible tool<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps., homily 50 on Ps. 139 (140).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 140.

❖ You should learn from those beasts how to reach virtue, and avoid iniquity. The jackals and the serpents are crafty and deceptive; do not imitate them; but imitate the bee that flies over the fields to draw its nectar, not from all flowers, but only from the right ones. You should follow its lead; choose for yourselves what is of benefit, and practice your work by the freedom of your option<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ As the bite of the serpent can kill the body of a man, the poisonous word, likewise, can kill the soul by its deception. That would apply to all those who throw wile and slander against others; and would also apply to the heretics who smear their vain teachings with the poison of the devil, to deceive the souls of the simple<sup>2</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ Their wars are worse than the traditional wars, that are carried out by traditional tools; The wicked “evildoers” turn their tongues, given to them by God to glorify Him, into what are like the fangs of serpents, that carry lethal poison, to kill the hearts of men by their slanders wile, and blasphemy.

Moreover, while the traditional battles are carried out within certain battle fields; those of the evildoers happen everywhere: in homes, on the streets, and open markets.

They hide their tricks as snares and nets, they set along the pathways of men, as destructive spurs and offenses, from which no one can be delivered, except by the help of God.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ The heretics, who are worse than all, have sharpened their tongues, even against the Holy Spirit; who have, according to Erinaos, the interpreter, dared to utter things full of hypocrisy’ and claimed to be, themselves, the Holy Spirit; among whom was Simon the sorcerer, mentioned in the Book of Acts<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

## **2- A CRY-OUT TO GOD, OUR SAVIOR:**

***“Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked. Preserve me from violent men, who have purposed to make my steps stumble” (4)***

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning the Statues, homily 12.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Rom 3: 13.

<sup>3</sup> مقال 16 : 6.

**St. John Chrysostom** often talks about the dangers of the wicked, saying that the devil will never find a more effective tool than the use of the wicked against the righteous. Yet, at the same time, what would come over the wicked himself through his deception of the righteous, is far worse than what would come over the righteous. The evil, practiced by the wicked, would fill the cup from which he drinks.

- ❖ Nothing is more oppressive against righteousness, than those who practice evil, who do wrong against themselves before doing it against the others<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

- ❖ Here, we are committed to pray, and not to enquire who they are. ... But how can you pray against such people; For many are those who pray in the wrong way against the wicked.

*“who have purposed to make my steps stumble”*. We cannot understand this in a non-spiritual way.... He makes your steps stumble if he hinders your progress along God’s way -- the upright way; if he makes you fall along the way; draw you out of the way; let you stop. or let you go back to where you were.

What happens to you here is deception and hindrance; against which you are committed to pray, lest you lose the heavenly inheritance; lest you lose Christ, with whom you are a partner in inheritance; and with whom You are made to live together forever. You have become a heir, not to someone you will outlive after his death, but to Him with whom you will live forever<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

*“The proud have hidden a snare for me and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set traps for me” (5)*

The devil will not cease to set nets and hidden snares to catch the innocent; and he trains his servants, who work to his account, to be experts in setting these snares, and to use every possible way to seduce their victims to fall into the net of the devil.

The psalmist pray to God to keep him from falling, and to grant him the spirit of discernment, wisdom, and strength; for there is no deliverance for him except by a divine intervention.

- ❖ Saying *“the proud”* is a short description of the whole body of the devil; For most of them claim to be righteous when they are actually

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

wicked; for whom there is nothing more serious, than not confessing that they are sinners. They are false righteous who envy the true ones ... That is the devil's first wish; who having, himself, fallen, he envied the man, still standing aright.

What are "the cords"? It is written: "*He is caught in the cords of his sin*" (Proverbs 5: 22); and Isaiah says: "*Woe to those who draw iniquity with the cords of vanity*" (Isaiah 5: 18). Why was it called "cords"? Because every sinner, who is kept in his sins, adds a sin to his sins. Being accused of his sins, to get reformed; defending himself, would double his sins, which should be taken away by confession; and he most probably adds other sins beside the ones that he already committed.... Those spread their sins before the righteous, in an attempt to provoke them to practice the evil they themselves do.

"*They have spread a net by the wayside*". Not on the way, but "*by the wayside*". The ways are the commandments of God; out of which I wish you do not go astray, to avoid falling into nets and snares by the wayside<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ He sets his nets, not only for his relatives, friends, or his wife; but he sets them even for himself<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ "*They have spread a net for me by the wayside*". The heretics attempt to set snares for me in the Holy Book, by presenting false and vain interpretations<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ "*A noose is hidden for him on the ground, and a trap for him on the road*" (Job 18: 10 LXX). That is a fact; for the devil hides his snares in the ground, through using those whom he has deceived, those who live according to the wisdom of this world (1 Corinthians 6: 2; 3: 9); and according to the lusts of men (1 Peter 4: 2; 2 Peter 1: 4). The devil attempts to catch his victims by using all the possible ways of men. He would attempt to catch the righteous by self-righteousness, and the sinner by his own greed. David sings, prophesying: "*They have spread a net by the wayside; they have set traps for me*" (5).

**(Father Hesichius of Jerusalem)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 140.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps., homily 50 on Ps. 139 (140).

❖ How could man say that he is safe from those enemies?

I started to talk about this; but I think I have to deal with this issue of the enemies with some detail. Having recognized who they are, let us now talk about how we can defend ourselves against them. ... *“I shall call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies”* (Psalm 18: 3). That is what you have to do: Call the Lord by praising Him. For you will never be safe from your enemies if you praise yourself.

The Lord Himself says: *“Whoever offers praise, glorifies Me; and to Him who orders his conduct aright, I will show the salvation of God”* (Psalm 50 23).

Where is the Way?...In the sacrifice of praise. ... Do not let your feet go astray from this way; ... stick to it ; ... do not get away, one step, from praising the Lord; for, in case you go astray from this way, and praise yourself, instead of praising the Lord, you will never be delivered from your enemies, about whom it is said: *“They have spread a net for me by the wayside”* (5). ... If you, therefore, happen to think that there is some goodness in you, even to the least extent, you would be going astray from the way of praising God....If you deceive yourself, why should you marvel if you are deceived by your enemy? ... Listen to the apostle Paul, saying: *“If anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself”* (Galatians 6: 3) <sup>1</sup>.

❖ As though he says: Which way will you take? ... ***“I am the Way”***.

Whereto are you going? ... ***“I am the Truth”***.

Where will you dwell? ... ***“I am the Life”***.

Let us then walk along the way with confidence. Do not be afraid of the nets spread by the enemy; for he spread them by the wayside, and would not dare to spread them on the way itself; For Christ is the Way. Yet he will never cease to spread them by the wayside.

That is why it is said in the psalm: *“They have spread a net for me by the wayside”* (5 LXX).; and in another book, it is written: *“Know that you are stepping among snares”* (Sirach 9: 13). Yet these snares are not set on the way, but by the wayside.

Why then, should you fear? Just walk along the Way! You should fear if you go astray from the way;

That is why the enemy was allowed to set his snares by the wayside; lest, through the security of pride, you may forget the way, and fall into the snares.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 17: 6.

The humble Christ is “*the Way, the Truth, and the life*”. Christ is the glorified Most High God; If you follow His lead in humility, you will reach glory<sup>1</sup>.

❖ If you accuse yourself, the enemy will find no way to accuse you before the judge. If you accuse yourself, and the Lord is your Savior; the enemy would be nothing but a mere swindler.

By that, the Christian can strengthen himself against his unseen enemies (the devil and his hosts). Being unseen, the enemies, have to be confronted by unseen ways.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Seeing the snares of the devil set over the whole earth, Abba Anthony sighed and said: [O Lord, who can get away from all this?] A voice came to him from heaven, saying: ‘The humble can get away from them’.

When the brethren asked an elder: [Did St. Anthony see the devil in a sensory or a mental way? And who said to him that by humility man can get away from his snares?] The elder answered: [St. Maccar saw something like that in the inner wilderness. He saw the likeness of two men; one of them clothed in a robe full of holes, and has several colors; and the other clothed in a torn out robe, to which several vessels are attached. Each of them had wings covering him all around. .... All that, St. Maccari saw by his physical eyes; Whereas St Anthony, by his mental eyes, saw all the snares that the devil sets for the monks all the time, in an attempt to keep them from walking along the way of virtue; as it is written: “*The proud have hidden snares for me and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside*” (5). ... Seeing how they were set like the snares that the hunters set to catch the wild beasts, St. Anthony was astonished by their multitude, and because those who fall into them would never get away: like the snare of greed, gluttony, love of silver, adultery, vain glory, pride ... and the rest of the snares shown to him by the angel, who showed him, as well, all the tricks and deceptive ways by which those snares are hidden to catch the brethren

(The garden of monks)

### 3- THE WAY OF SALVATION:

*“I said to the Lord, ‘You are my God; hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord’” (6)*

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 92: 1-2.

The way of my salvation starts by getting close to God, being my personal God, who hears the voice of my supplications; before whom I daringly present my supplications.

❖ What is the solution among such evils, in such temptations and dangers? ... *“I said to the Lord, ‘You are my God’”*. The voice of prayer is high; It gives man confidence.... Is He not the God of others, as well? ... He is the God of those who enjoy Him, minister to Him, and submit to Him by their own free will. ... For the wicked, as well, submit to Him, yet, against their free will.

*“Hear (by Your ears), the voice of my supplications”* ... The voice of my prayer is its life, its soul;... not the voice of the words, but the voice that gives life to my words<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“I said to the Lord, ‘You are my God’”*. Only a saint, has the right to utter these words, he; on whom sin has no authority; who bears the testimony: *“The Lord is my portion, says my soul “* (Lamentations 3: 24)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Having referred to fights and plans of battles, and showed the unutterable calamities; he found refuge in the help which could never be resisted, by seeking help from heaven, capable of taking those things away. That is the proof of an exalted spirit; and a sound mind; when troubles dwell on every front, when destructive plans threaten him; and when his heart does not collapse, nor falls a victim of terror or horror; when man does not seek refuge in human help; but looks up to heaven, and calls God, who is everywhere<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation; You have covered my head in the day of battle”* (7)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: *“O Lord, O Lord, the strength of my salvation”*.

Through this daring, I perceive that God is the strength of my salvation. I do not lean upon my capabilities, possibilities, nor my human experience; but upon the Almighty, who is preoccupied with my salvation; He who covers all around me, and becomes a helmet that

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps., homily 50 on Ps. 139 (140).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 140.

protects my faith, and my mind; and keep me safe against the arrows of the thoughts of the enemy, and his destructive tricks.

❖ ***“O Lord, O Lord, the strength of my salvation”***. He who grants strength to my health.

By this he means that he may complain against the snares and nets spread by the wicked vessels of the devil; those who bark all around him; the proud who envy the righteous. But, he instantly gets comfort through remembering the promise: *“He who perseveres up to the end will be saved”*; ... he, again, resorted to hope, saying to himself:

Yes indeed, I shall be saved if I persevere up to the end; but that depend upon strength; You are the strength of my salvation; You make me persevere to be saved.

Having labored in this battle, he, again, resorted to God’s grace. Starting to suffer from heat and draught, he discovered as though there is a shadow over his head ***“You have covered my head in the day of battle”***<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“You have covered my head in the day of battle”***. Do you see the thanksgiving spirit? ... He remembers that, all along his past events, God has established him in security; ... Look how he showed how God protected him. He does not say: *“You have prepared security for me beforehand”*; but said: You established me ***“in the day of battle”***, when anguish threatened, when the battle started; when I confronted sure danger. ...Here you see that God needs no prior preparation; Being everything: the past, the present, and the future, He is Almighty, always ready to help.

To refer to the exceptional feature of conquest and security given to him by God, he does not say: *“You delivered me”*, but says: ***“You have covered me”***; Namely, You confirmed to me, that I will never have to suffer any danger or any sting of heat, but I will always be established in great security, satisfaction, and comfort; that I will never taste any unbearable heat, but will always enjoy a cover over my head. That is why he added the word *“cover”*; as though he says to the Lord: [It is enough for me to know that You are there; For then, everything will be alright<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 140.

❖ The way You covered the Israelites while crossing through the wilderness, to protect them against the heat of the sun; I seek Your help, to cover me, as well, lest I may suffer the heat of the craftiness and evil of the wicked

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

#### 4- BRINGING EVIL BACK UPON THE WICKED:

*“Do not grant, O Lord, the desires of the wicked; Do not further his wicked scheme, lest they be exalted” (8)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: *“O Lord, Do not deliver me, through my evil desires, to the wicked who counseled against me; Do not forsake me, lest they be exalted”*.

The psalmist prays to God to bring the schemes of the devil; to no avail, the way He did with Ahitophel who desired the perdition of David the prophet and king. The psalmist seeks from the Lord not to allow the wicked to realize what he has in his heart and mind of hatred and violence.

Covering his head, will protect him against his personal weaknesses, and will grant him the strength to endure the anguish with perseverance, to be saved; But the psalmist fears, lest, through the seductions of the enemy, he may be able to catch him by stirring-up in him the wrong desires.

As examples for that, **St. Augustine** says that the enemy, sometimes, instead of using violence, may cast before man a chance for material Prophet, if he forsakes his faithfulness. It would be like using a bait in a trap to catch a prey. Fearing that, the psalmist prays to the Lord not to deliver him into the hands of the wicked.

According to St. John Chrysostom, the wicked are like *“the devil who walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5: 8). That was how Satan attacked the righteous ‘Job’, and how he intended to attack the apostle Peter, according to the words of the Lord Christ to him, saying: *“Simon, Simon! Indeed Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat”* (Luke 22: 31). By such a spirit, the wicked works, about whom is said: *“those who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perversity of the wicked”* (Proverb 2: 14).

❖ He means to say: *“Do not deliver me to the evil desires of the wicked; Do not allow him to realize his evil desires against me”<sup>1</sup>*.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140.

❖ Notice the humility of this man. He does not say: “Do not forsake me on account of my worthiness, nor of my virtuous life”; but he says: “lest they be exalted”; lest they be more haughty, and become more foolish when they see that You have forsaken me<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ According to an interpretation by **the scholar Origen** of this word: [While I desire salvation, my sinning enemy desires killing me. Do not further his wicked scheme, lest he be exalted].

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“As for the head of those who surround me, let the evil of their lips cover them” (9)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: *“The head of their corruption, and the evil of their lips, cover them”*.

Indeed, God may allow the devil to oppose, and the man of oppression and sin to dominate, Yet God surrounds His believers; while the wicked will reap the fruits of his evil.

The supplication of the psalmist does not stop at his own salvation, but he seeks from God to bring the evil of the devil and his hosts back on them; and that what they plan would dwell upon them. That was what happened when the devil strove to get rid of Jesus the Lord of Glory by crucifying Him in shame and disgrace. And lo, the devil lost his dominion by the cross, and became, himself, in disgrace.... If the Lord Christ was crucified in the body, it was for the sake of the salvation of the world. But, by the cross, the dominion of the devil was nailed, and became helpless over those who believed in the One Crucified.

Nothing would preoccupy the heart of the wicked; or what his inner lips would utter, except to bring trouble on others. But what they utter in their Depths, will dwell upon them; as *“There is no peace for the wicked; so says my God”*.

According to **St. Jerome**, the heretics act like the serpent which, on seeing someone going to strike it, it winds around itself, and hides its head deep inside, to protect it against being stricken. So the heretics do when they hide their heads under the sayings of the famous philosophers, to defend their erroneous views. ... A man of God, on the other hand, uses the words of the Holy Book as a rod by which to strike the heretics on their heads.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140.

**St. John Chrysostom**, sees in the word “*surround*” a portrait of the wicked, gathering together, to plan corrupt schemes, and to produce evil against the psalmist; yet they will all be stricken by the rod of the Lord.

- ❖ Those evil schemes, the climax of their wickedness, and the corruption of their views, will ultimately bring them down and destroy them.

Joseph’s brothers, intending to make him a slave, they themselves fell into serious troubles; whereas he, even though he suffered servitude and near death, he eventually thanked them for what they have done to him.

Absalom, likewise, plotted to destroy his father David; yet he eventually fell the victim of his own scheme<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ The psalmist says: As for me, the shadow of Your wings cover me, for “*You have covered my head in the day of battle*”; But, what will cover them? the head of their corruption; namely, pride<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ We should warn the unfaithful to let them perceive the burden of guilt suffered by the hypocrites. They shamefully attempt to defend themselves, perpetually motivated by fear and apprehension; when there is nothing safer than defending faithfulness, and nothing easier than uttering the truth. When man has to defend falsity and lies, his heart would be burdened with labor; hence the saying of the psalmist: “*the evil of their lips cover them*” (9). What fills their inside now, will eventually overflow, and shackle them with chains; and what dwells upon their hearts of simple anxiety, will eventually sweep them away with bitter recompense. The prophet Jeremiah says: “*They have taught their tongues to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity*” (Jeremiah 9: 5); Namely, he who could be a friend of the truth, without labor, strives now to fall into sin; And while rejecting the life of faithfulness, he exhausts himself by rough perdition<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Gregory the Great)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

<sup>3</sup> Pastoral Care, 3: 11.

***“Let burning coals fall upon them; let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits no more to rise” (10)***

Whatever the enemy seeks and tries hard to achieve, will only become like rain coming down on him, yet not of water or hail, but of burning coal, of which there is no escape. With the same measure he gave humanity, he himself will have, and even more. This is a serious principle that man should put before his eyes: Whatever he does or even wish to be done to others, will dwell upon him, whether blessings or curses,

The evil schemes of the wicked against their brethren, are like burning coals which will eventually fall down and cover them. That is beside the fact that the evil spirit and the intentions they embrace will stir-up the wrath of God on them. And in case God is longsuffering in the hope of their repentance, If they do not repent, the day of chastisement will eventually come, here, in this world, or on the great day of the Lord.

According to **St. Augustine**, the fire here is a heavenly fire, that will turn man from cold black coal into burning coal ignited with the Spirit that would affect others as well.

Saul of Tarsus has been black coal, when he was a blasphemer, slanderer, and a persecutor; But once he had the mercy of the Lord, he got ignited with a fire from heaven. The voice of Christ, took the blackness away from him, enflamed him with the fire of the Spirit which enflames others through him<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ ***“Let burning coal fall upon them, let them be cast into the fire”.***

Here he means, that while evil itself would destroy those who fall into its nets, they would, as well, submit to the divine wrath dwelling upon them.

Fire and burning coal here, refer to the punishment that would come from up high, which usually takes the form of fire, like what happened to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who rebelled against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16), and to those who stood close to the fiery furnace in Babylon (Daniel 3: 22) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Who is the fire? ...It is the enemy himself about whom David says: *“Let burning coal fall upon them”* (10 LXX). ... It is Satan who came

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 140.

down in the form of fire upon the flocks of sheep, to let the righteous 'Job' blaspheme against God (Job 1: 16) <sup>1</sup>.

(Hesichius of Jerusalem)

***“Let not a slanderer be established in the earth, let evil hunt down the violent” (11)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: ***“A slanderer will not be established on earth; and evil will bring a violent man forth to corruption”***.

By a slanderer he means someone with a loose and uncontrolled tongue. He, who plans evil together with others; actually sets a trap for his own perdition.

The psalmist uses the word ***“hunt”***, for evil is like a hunter who conceals the traps to let the prey fall into them. According to the wise Solomon: ***“His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin”*** (Proverbs 5: 22).

He who commits evil, and intends to destroy others, loses his reason and insight, and will find himself a victim of his own evil.

As the conquest of the true believers is sure in the Lord; So will evil be brought back on the evildoer. The adversaries will drink from the cup of evil, unless they return to the Lord by true repentance.

❖ The slanderer loves saying lies, and finds pleasure in much talk!

He does not care for what he says, as much as for keeping on talking!

He is incurable!

The minister of God, on the other hand, enflamed by the burning coal, who himself becomes burning coal of salvation, has the tendency to listen more than to talk; according to the advise of the apostle: ***“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak”*** (James 1: 19).

Let everyone test himself, not by utterly refraining to talk, but to know when to talk, and when to keep silent.

***“Let evil hunt the violent man to his destruction”***. The violent man will not be established, for evil hunts him to his destruction.

Yet, evil dwelt upon many of the good and righteous men; it hunted the bodies of our martyrs, but their spirits were crowned.

The body, delivered to its persecutor, might be burned, scourged, and distorted, but its divine Creator who created it from nothing, will bring it back in a better shape<sup>2</sup>!

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on Job 1: 16.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 140 (139).

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ The slanderer and the aggressive will not be established on earth; and the oppressor will surely fall into the trap of his evil, for his own destruction.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ The slothful mind will fall step by step, through doing harm by talking too much nonsense.

It may start by talking about the affairs of others, then moves to slandering their persons; then ends up to openly defaming them. That is how, by stirring up controversies, fire will ignite in the focus of wrath, and peace of the heart will be quenched.

It is well expressed by Solomon, saying: *“The beginning of strife is like releasing water”* (Proverbs 17: 14). By releasing water he means releasing talk by the tongue. He also says: *“The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; the wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook”* (Proverbs 18: 4). When we release water we become a source of controversy. Those who do not control their tongues break harmony; according to the wise words: *“Like an archer who wounds everybody, is one who hires a passing fool or a drunkard”* (Proverbs 26: 10).

Moreover, those who are addicted to much talk, utterly go astray from the straightforward way of righteousness; hence the prophet says: *“The slanderer will not be established on earth”* (11). Solomon says: *“In the multitude of words, sin is not lacking; but he who restrains his lips is wise”* (Proverbs 10: 19); And Isaiah says: *“The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever”* (Isaiah 32: 17).

Where there is no control on the tongue, the righteousness of the soul will be lukewarm. Hence, according to the apostle James: *“If anyone among you thinks he is righteous, and he does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless”* (James 1: 26). He also says: *“Let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”* (James 1: 19); And describing the power of the tongue, he adds: *“No man can tame the tongue, it is an unruly evil, it is full of poison”* (James 3: 8).

That is why the Truth Himself warns us, saying: *“For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment”* (Matthew 12: 36). By *“idle word”*, is meant any unjustified, and unnecessary word, that serves no goal of piety. ... If, therefore, we are to

give account of any idle word, let us then think about the punishment stored for the multitude of nonsense that are harmful and carry iniquity<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Gregory the Great)**

***“I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted and justice for the poor” (12)***

❖ By saying: ***“I know”***, he means that the evildoers will surely not go unpunished, if they do not repent.

And those he calls *“poor”*, are not the needy, but who are humble and remorseful.

He so says to give comfort to those who are unjustly treated, and to bring the evildoers back to reason; so that the former would not lose hope in the future; and the latter would not become more evil, because of the probable delay (to fall into the fruit of their doings).

The delay is actually meant to lead to repentance; although it would also make the punishment more severe upon the rebellious; which is just, on account of that they did not use the chance given to them to become better.

Above all that, by His compassion, God, allowing for His elect to endure oppression, may not avenge them, to let them be in a better shape through repentance.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

The Holy Book confirms that God is perpetually on the side of the afflicted, the poor, and the oppressed; and that He never endures violence and oppression.

*“the poor”*, would not be the one full of words, who always wish to be rich, and never to know hunger.

About the poor it is said: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled”* (Matthew 5: 6). They moan, and pray to their Head (the Lord Christ) to deliver them from the wicked.

*“and justice for the poor”*. Although they are now suffering from troubles, yet God will never disregard their right; and their glory will be manifested when their Head will. About them, while being here, the apostle says: *“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”* (Colossians 3: 3).

We, therefore are poor, and our life is hidden; Let us cry out to Him, for He is our bread (John 6: 51) <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pastoral Care, 3: 14.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 140 (139).*

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Having talked about the wrath of God, he instantly proclaims that evil, itself, is enough to destroy those who practice it.

Being swift to talk, and not bridling the tongue, are actually not little things.

While he, who is longsuffering, gentle, and knows how to keep quiet, will be secure, and the subject of pleasure for everyone; He, on the other hand, who practices a controversial life, will create for himself a multitude of enemies on all fronts; will cause trouble to himself before causing it to others; and will not have peace for himself; but will rather stir-up enmity and anxiety, when no one else does.

*“Evil hunts the man of oppression for his destruction”*; and according to Solomon: *“His own iniquities entrap the wicked man; and he is caught in the cords of his sin”* (Proverbs 5: 22), Notice again how evil will destroy him who practices it<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ This saying tells about the general judgment, in which the sinners are cast into unbearable suffering, as a pay back for their submission of the poor. Whereas the righteous, and the upright in heart, will dwell in the kingdom of God. And will behold His face as far as is possible for men.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name; the upright shall dwell in Your presence”* (13)

The psalmist ends his psalm by imagining that the faithful believers, those who obeyed the divine commandment; will perpetually be in the presence of God, not ceasing to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise with joy and exultation.

According to **St. Jerome**, the upright shall dwell in His presence, namely, shall be established in the heavenly Christ.

- ❖ Defending and keeping their right, they will *“confess Your name”*. They will refer nothing to their own worthiness; but will refer everything to Your mercy.

*“The upright shall dwell in Your presence (Your face)”*. ... With their face’, offense used to dwell; whereas *“With Your face”*, good things will dwell.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 140.

Loving their own faces, “*By the sweat of their faces, they shall eat bread*” (Genesis 3: 19); Whereas “*Your face*” will bring forth good on them to satisfaction. They will ask for nothing more, for they will have nothing better than what they already have.

They will never forsake You, nor will you forsake them. As, after His resurrection, it is said about the Lord: With Your face “*You make me to hear joy and gladness*” (Psalm 51: 8).

Because without His face we shall have no joy, we purify our faces so as to have joy by His face<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ “*The righteous shall give thanks (confess) to Your name*”. Namely, whatever happen, they will give thanks; even if they see the humble oppressed, and the wicked exalt. ... They seek no settlement of old accounts! ... The sign by which the righteous are distinguished, is that they always, and in all circumstances, give thanks.

“*The upright shall dwell in Your presence*”; namely, shall enjoy Your help, shall always think about You, and shall perpetually be with You, They will never forsake You. ... Whatever happen, they will never complain, for they find no fault whatsoever<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 140 (139).*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 140.*

**AN INSPIRATION FRPM PSALM 140**  
**KEEP ME FROM THE EVIL TONGUE ANF TRAPS OF THE**  
**ENEMY**

- ❖ The devil will never cease to oppose Your believers in every way possible;  
He has two dangerous swords: his tongue, and his traps.  
His tongue, full of deception; may offer honey, but it is poisoned.  
He sets his traps by the way side, yet hidden;  
Like a serpent, without feet, he crawls and makes no noise;  
He is filled with poison and moves with craftiness;  
Grant me to walk in You;  
Being the Way, the enemy will not dare to set his traps in You!  
Grant me not to pervert from You to the right or to the left;  
To be perpetually secure from the traps of the enemy.
- ❖ Who is my enemy, but the devil?  
He who spread his nets by the wayside;  
He is deceptive, a liar, and deadly;  
He will never find rest until he lets me fall into temptation;  
Who can deliver me from him, but You?  
His ways are numerous and diverse;  
He will always use the body lusts;  
He will always corrupt my senses and emotions;  
He will always make me anxious, and destroy my inner peace;  
He will always stir-up controversies among friends and households;  
He will always distort everything to destroy me;  
He will always find his happiness in my misery;  
Who will deliver me from him, but You?  
Carry me on your hands;  
Cover me by the riches of Your mercy;  
Until You bring me forth into Your kingdom.
- ❖ How amazing! The enemy finds no time for rest;  
He assumes that his rest is in continually opposing Your believers;  
He never calms down, day or night;  
He is perpetually on the move, yet not straightforward;  
He is always hungry, and his food is dust;  
He hopes, therefore, that I fall into sin, to become dust, to devour me;  
Make angels out of men;  
Then the enemy would not dare to attack me;

For when he search for dust in me;  
He will be astonished to find that You have set Your kingdom in my depths.

- ❖ Let the devil work with all his energies;  
You are my un-conquerable weapon;  
You grant me the spirit of discernment, wisdom, and strength;  
You even grant me Yourself, a Leader, and a weapon to protect me.
- ❖ You may allow for a battle; yet You will never forsake me;  
While the enemy prepares for the battle with all his energies;  
You grant me to resort to You by praying, watching, and praising;  
While the enemy sets his hidden nets;  
He does not know that they let me experience more of Your compassion;  
While the enemy sets the cords of sin;  
Assuming that he can shackle me, and draw me to him;  
He does not perceive that, by his own cords, he will himself be caught;  
And instead of drawing me, he himself will fall into the eternal chains;  
While the enemy hides his traps underneath the ground;  
By Your Spirit, You bear me as though to heaven.
- ❖ The enemy does his best to make me fall into pride;  
He wishes to turn me into his image;  
To make my destiny the same as his;  
Grant me the spirit of humility and meekness;  
Let me follow Your lead, and bear Your image, by the work of Your Holy Spirit in me;  
Walking in You, I walk in humility;  
And will not fall into the nets of the proud enemy;  
Grant me not to cheat myself;  
As there is no goodness in me except by Your grace;  
How could I refer Your gifts to myself; as though I am righteous?!
- ❖ My eyes look up at You, for You are my God;  
No one can deliver me from the nets of the enemy, but You;  
You are the strength of my salvation;  
You surround me, and be a helmet for me, to protect my faith;  
And a shield to protect me against the fiery arrows of the enemy, and his deadly spears;

You cover my head, to protect me from the heat of the sun of temptations;  
You have already supported me in my past battles;  
And will keep supporting me up to the end;  
Your divine presence grants me the conquest;  
Looking at You, the fire of the furnace turns into enjoyable dew.

- ❖ I give You thanks, and praise Your name, O Holy One!  
For what the devil prepares for us;  
He will eternally drink from it;  
He will fall into the net he sets for the believers;  
Who will enjoy the everlasting glory;  
Glory be to You, O Leader of the battle, and Grantor of the conquest;  
You are my conquest and my crown.

## **PSALM 141**

# **KEEP ME FROM THE EVIL AND THE EVILDOERS**

This psalm was either written when Absalom rebelled against his father David, or while the aggressive king Saul persecuted him. The psalmist used to sing it every evening while lighting the lamps in the sanctuary (Compare Exodus 30: 7-8; Daniel 9: 21).

Singing it in the time of his anguish, David knew for sure that behind the troubles, there are evil counsels given by wicked men. And while moaning from such evil counsels, he, fearing lest he may, himself, might fall into uttering evil words, he seeks from God to “*set a guard over his mouth, and to keep watch over the door of his lips*”,

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, this psalm was used in the evening prayers in the whole world, by the Christians to search their hearts and their behavior on a daily basis; for fear that they may utter evil words, as an expression of anger in the mind or heart; and for fear that their words may turn into evil behavior.

### **Sanctifying the body together with the soul:**

While the apostle Paul calls on us to “*present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service*” (Romans 12: 1); to pay love back with love, and the unique sacrifice of Christ, back with a sacrifice of love and holiness; The psalmist calls on us to have all our body members work to the account of God: and to lift up our voices to cry out in prayer (1-2); together with our hands (2); our mouths, and lips (3-4); our heads (5-7); and our eyes (8-10).

After asking for the divine help in general (1), the psalmist supplicates (2), lest he may get lost through the seduction of the wicked, whose end is perdition (3-7); who will be harmed by their own wickedness (8-10)

<b>1- A cry-out to the Lord</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2- “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth”</b>	<b>3 - 5</b>
<b>3- The perfect faith</b>	<b>6 – 10</b>

### **The title:**

Prayer for safekeeping from wickedness. A psalm of David.

### **1- A CRY-OUT TO THE LORD:**

***“Lord, I cry out to You; Make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You” (1)***

In an amazing daring, the psalmist David begins this psalm by calling on the Heavenly God to hasten to him, and to give ear to his voice when he cries out to Him. He feels that his cry-out is like a bird soaring up to heaven, to reach the throne of God.

- ❖ If the anguish comes to an end, so will the crying out. But the church – the body of Christ -- for which the anguish will surely persist until the end of time; will not only say: ***“To You I cry out”***, but also: ***“Give ear to my supplication”*** <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ While the prophet Moses was praying to God in silence, God said to him: ***“Why do you cry to me?”*** (Exodus 14: 15). God was listening to his voice; but the Holy Book did not tell us what he said in his prayer; only that he was crying out.

The blood of the martyrs perpetually cries out to the Lord, to which He listens with compassion.

Let us perceive that the souls of the righteous are kept under the Lord’s altar (Revelation 6: 9) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ He refers here to the cry-outs coming out from inside the fiery heart; because of which God listened to Moses.

In other words, God gives ear to such a cry-out that gathers all the powers of the heart, and allows for no distraction on the part of the mind of the one who prays.

God not only gives ear to such a cry-out, but also considers the fact that it is truly directed to Him. Many who stand for prayer, do not lift their cry-outs to God; For, while moving their lips, and uttering the name of God, there is no harmony between their minds and their words. Such men do not cry out, even if they do so loudly; They do not pray to God, even if they seem as though they do.

Even though we may be sinners and transgressors, we get great goodness by praying and keeping the law of God. But we should still remember that the devil, knowing that prayer is the greatest of all weapons; he lies in wait eager to draw us away through slothfulness and distraction, to corrupt our prayer, and to make it useless<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 141 (140)*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies of Ps., 51.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 141.*

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ In case our supplication is a cry-out to God; namely, with a fervent heart, and an alert mind; in piety and persistence; and seeks nothing of the mortal worldly things, but seeks what concern the salvation of the soul, and the perpetual immortal goodness; To such supplication, God will give ear.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“Let my prayer be set before You as incense; the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (2)*

If, by the daring of love, the psalmist sees his prayer like a bird which sets forth toward heaven to reach the throne of God, he counts it, as well, like an offering of incense, that ascends before God, to smell it a sweet fragrance of pleasure and gladness; and counts the lifting up of his hands as a sacrifice accepted by God.

This phrase has a special taste, that the church uses it in its liturgy; and the believers find pleasure in reciting it before God in their prayers.

The evening sacrifice has a special concept. As the Lord Christ has delivered Himself a sacrifice, in the evening -- at the fullness of time; We, in the same way, lift our hands with thanksgiving to the Savior, at the end of the day, looking at Him, being the Savior of the World, the Unique Sacrifice.

Commenting on this phrase, **St. John Chrysostom** says:

1- The psalmist offered the incense ahead of offering the sacrifice; As the incense is offered inside the sanctuary on the golden altar; whereas the sacrifice is offered outside on the bronze altar.

2- As the incense of sweet fragrance, could not be offered without igniting the coal, So is the prayer, it could not ascend with sweet fragrance,, unless it comes out of a mind kindled with the fire of love.

3- He did not say ‘a morning sacrifice’, but “*an evening sacrifice*”, by which he means both; but mentioned the evening sacrifice, on account of that many evil works, like murders, are mostly plotted by night. The evening prayer is therefore, very important, to ask God to take away those evil works.

- ❖ This is usually understood, concerning the Head Himself, as every Christian knows. For, by the advent of the evening, the Lord, was hanged on the cross, “*laid down His life that He may take it again*”

(John 10: 17); He did not lose it against His own will; which is symbolized here.

Our weakness is nailed on the cross; according to the words of the apostle: “*Our old man was crucified with Him*” (Romans 6: 6). With the voice of our old man, He cried out, saying: “*Why have You forsaken Me?*” (Psalm 22: 1; Matthew 6: 6). Here is the evening sacrifice; the passion of the Lord, the cross of the Lord; the burnt offering, accepted by God. That evening sacrifice was realized in the resurrection; the morning sacrifice.

Hence, prayer is lifted up with purity from a faithful heart, and ascends like incense from a holy altar.

Nothing is more joyful than the fragrance of the Lord; ... Let every believer acquire such a sweet fragrance<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Let the prayer of man go like a prayer up to the Lord; and not fall down to earth; as the prayer of a holy man pierces the clouds; whereas the earth opens up its mouth and hides the prayer of the wicked in the blood of the body; according to the words of God to Cain, the murderer of his brother, saying: “*You are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand*” (Genesis 4: 11) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ “*Let my prayer be set before You*”. Yet, If, instead of incense, smoke goes up from you and your works; What punishment would you deserve<sup>3</sup>?!

No incense will be put, before the coal in the censor already ignites hot. So it will be with your minds, which should be kindled with zeal beforehand, before lifting up your prayers<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ “*Let my prayer be set before You*” . Let it go directly up to You, with no evil, with no defilement of the devil’s work.

The incense also represents the prayers of the saints; as according to the book of Revelation, “*the twenty-four elders have golden*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 141 (140)

<sup>2</sup> Prayer of Job & dauid, 8: 27.

<sup>3</sup> On Matthewm homily 73.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 141.

*bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*”<sup>1</sup> (Revelation 5: 8).

- ❖ The apostle also says: “*Lift up holy hands (for prayers)*” (1 Timothy 2: 8). ... And, in the battle against Amalek, when Moses held up his hands, Joshua prevailed, and when he let down his hands, Amalek prevailed” (Exodus 17: 11) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Prayer is good in itself; But if raised with a hot soul, kindled with longing for God, it would be well-received by God. For the one presenting it would be, as though, turning his heart into a pure golden censor.

The psalmist also asks God to receive the lifting up of his hands as an evening sacrifice, perpetually accepted by Him. By remembering God’s command to us, to lift our hands in prayer, we would be careful to keep them from any unbecoming works, like taking bribes, or striking others; so that they would have the daring to be, blamelessly lifted up to Him for supplication.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Let the Catechumens also hear this – for this also concerns them – while presenting offerings and alms; as these are sacrifices as well. For, according to the prophet: “*A sacrifice of praise glorifies Me*”; and, “*The lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice*” (2).

Prayer is therefore, a sacrifice, to be reasonably presented. And It is recommended to forsake your prayer and go to reconcile with your neighbor; ... For this goal, God became a Man, and all what He did, was to unite us in one. ... Here, He sends the evildoer to the one oppressed; While, in the Lord’s prayer, He sends the oppressed to the evildoer to be reconciled together; saying: “*We forgive those who trespass against us*”; and He says: “If someone does something against you; Go yourself to him”; namely, He sends the oppressed to his oppressor<sup>3</sup>.

- ❖ “*Let the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice*”. ... Let us, as well, together with our hands, lift up our minds ... Let us lift up our thoughts to the One High up<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps., 51.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Ps., 51.*

<sup>3</sup> عظة ربنا يسوع المسيح على الجبل.

<sup>4</sup> *Homilies on Hebr., 22: 6-7.*

❖ He was the One who instituted the ministries of the holy church; and that evening sacrifice, He, Himself, has presented to the Father, through lifting up His hands on the cross, for the sake of the salvation of the whole world<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Cassian)

❖ The movements of the hands, which were, before, unbecomingly following the will of the mind; Now, the Spirit instructs the mind to purify them, to be fit to be used in the works of mercy, and in prayers; according to the words: “*Let the lifting up of my hand be as an evening sacrifice*” (psalm 141: 2); And in another location: “*The hands of the diligent makes rich*” (Proverb 10: 4) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Abba Anthony)

❖ It is befitting of us, therefore, to offer a sacrifice in the evening for Christ, even in the same hour of the evening; (at the twilight of the world); according to what is written in the book of Exodus: “*The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight*” (Exodus 12: 6); And again in the psalms: “*Lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice*” (Psalm 141: 2). ... But we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord in the morning<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Cyprian, the martyr)

❖ If someone, now, has no smell of sin, but has the smell of righteousness, and the sweetness of mercy; he is perpetually offering incense to the Lord, and says: “*Let my prayer be set before You, as incense; the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice*” (2) <sup>4</sup>.

❖ Lifting up the hands, is lifting up all the works toward God, with nothing lowly nor earthly, but work for the glory of God and heaven.

He lifts up his hands, he who lays up for himself a treasure in heaven (Matthew 5: 20, 21); “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*”; so there will be your eyes and hands, as well.

He lifts up his hands, he who says: “*Let the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice*”. By that, Amalek will be defeated (Psalm 17: 8-16). ... Yet, the apostle counsels us to “*lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting*” (1 Timothy 2: 8); And he also says: “*Therefore, strengthen the hands which hang down, and feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Institutes* 3: 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter* 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Letter* 63: 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Homilies on Genesis* 11: 1-2.

*dislocated, but rather be healed*” (Hebrew 12: 12). Lift up your hands, therefore toward God, and the commandment of the apostle, saying: *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5: 17) <sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

❖ Beloved brethren, ... There are some who seek the Lord, yet, being slothful and aliens from virtue, they are not worthy of finding Him; And even if they find Him, they are not worthy of seeing Him.

For, what did those blessed women seek at the tomb, except the body of Jesus?

And what do you seek in the church, except Jesus, the Savior?

If you intend to find Him; you should come the way those women did; Namely, you should forsake the darkness of evil in your hearts; for the body lusts and the evil deeds are darkness. He, who has such darkness in his heart, will never see the Light, and will never perceive Christ; for Christ is the Light.

Take out, therefore, the darkness from yourselves; namely, take out the evil lusts, and every iniquity; and provide yourselves with the good spices; namely, with the fervent prayers; saying together with the psalmist: *“Let my prayer be set before You as incense”* (2).

❖ They now purchase Christ, who grants the sweet fragrance (compare Genesis 37: 25; 2 Corinthians 2: 15-16); the incense, by which the holy altar of the worshipping heart is treated; Concerning it, David says: *“Let my prayer be set before You as incense”* (2) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ It is befitting of us to pray often, yet, with short prayers; For if we make them long, our crafty enemy will manage to sow something unbecoming in our hearts.

These short and frequent prayers are true sacrifices, As *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart”* (Psalm 51: 17); they are pure offerings of benefit; *“sacrifices of praise”*, *“sacrifices of righteousness”* (Psalm 50: 22), essential burnt offerings, offered by humble and contrite hearts. Those who strongly experience such controlled and fervent spirit (in prayer), about which we spoke, can praise God, saying: *“Let my prayer be set before You as incense; Let lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice”* (2). But the approach of

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<sup>1</sup> In Exod. Hom. 11: 4.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph 3: 17.

the proper hour (for prayer) exhorts us to practice it with befitting dedication, as much as we can<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Isaac)**

❖ We should not present offerings that could be rejected.

We should not slothfully offer to God sacrifices of thanksgiving; but offerings He receives with pleasure; lest, these offerings would be returned to us.

As these sacrifices exalt above those of irrational animals; we should elaborately search them, for any blemish; and if we find any, we should cleanse them with our tears before offering them with love and longing before the Lord; “*Lifting up pure hands in prayers*”; but, at the same time, “*lifting up our minds without wrath or doubting*” (1 Timothy 2: 8); asking God, with tears and the sighs of heart, to receive our offerings, together with those of the prophet, “*as an evening sacrifice*” (2) <sup>2</sup>.

**(Martyrius – Sahdona)**

## **2- SET A GUARD, O LORD, OVER MY MOUTH:**

“*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips*” (3)

The psalmist seeks a heavenly guard over his mouth, lest a word, unbecfitting of him as a man of God would come out of it.

❖ He does not say ‘Set a strong wall’, but says “*Set a strong door*”; for a door could be opened and closed: could be opened to confess sin, and be closed, in case we intend to justify it. Hence it would be a door for protection, and not one for destruction<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ It is unbecfitting of man to open up his mouth to utter unbecoming talk, but to produce treasures of God’s goods.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Concerning the mouth and tongue, we should care to offer prayers free of evil. ... If we would never use a golden vessel to keep defiled objects; how much more would we care, not use our mouths, which are more precious than gold and jewels, to utter corruptive and ugly talk. You are not offering incense on a bronze or even a golden altar, but on what is more precious, in a spiritual temple; For the former is

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 9: 36.

<sup>2</sup> كتاب الكمال، 19.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 141 (140)

made of lifeless material; whereas in the later, God would make His dwelling; on account of that you are the members of Christ.

Let us then, perpetually set our mind, a guard on our mouth; not to close it all the time, but to open it in the proper time.

There is time, when silence is more precious than talk; And there is time when talk is more precious than silence.

We should, therefore, not only care to keep our silence and talk within the frame of proper time; but we should do it with great love; according to the words of the apostle Paul: “*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one*” (Colossians 4: 6).

Take into consideration that our tongue is the body member, by which we enter into a debate with God; and by which we offer Him praise. This is the body member on which we receive the awesome sacrifice of communion. The true believers know what I am talking about<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ If it could be such a destructive body member; some may ask, why did God put it in the body from the beginning? ... That is because It could also have great benefit, if we so choose. Just listen to the words of the prophet counseling us, saying: “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue*” (Proverb 18: 21). And the Lord Christ reveals the same thing, saying: “*By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*” (Matthew 12: 37).

The tongue is located at the exact center of the mouth, well prepared to work in either way; and you are its master. So is the sword; if you use it against the enemy, it would become a tool for your security; but if you wound yourself with it, it would not be its edge that causes your death, but your misuse of it....

You should think of the tongue, as a sword in the middle of the mouth; which you can use to condemn your sins, and not to wound your God ... That is why God surrounded the tongue by a double fence: the teeth, and the lips; to keep it from uttering unbecoming words, slothfully and with ease. ... Keep it, therefore, under control in your mouth; and in case it still misbehaves, bite it with your teeth; for it would be better to punish it now, than to be denied the comfort of having a drop of water later on<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Baptismal Instruction 9: 33-35.

❖ I say: It is better for the body to be crushed, than to utter a word that could destroy the soul; Hence we are counseled to watch our tongue, saying: “*A muzzle on the mouth will stop reproof*” (Sirach 20: 29)..

Again, revealing our need of help from above, to precede and accompany our strife, and to keep this vicious beast, well inside our mouth; the prophet prays to God, saying: “*Let the lifting up of my hands be as an evening sacrifice; Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips*” (2, 3); And Sirach says: “*Who will set a guard over my mouth, and an effective seal upon my lips*” (Sirach 22: 27) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue*” (Proverb 18: 21); And the Lord says: “*But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment*” (Matthew 12: 36). That is why the prophet prays, lest his words would be idle, but holy, and gives pleasure to God; And seek from Him a guard over his lips, to keep him from submitting to sin.... According to the prophet Jeremiah: “*Death has come through our windows*” (Jeremiah 9: 21). We have five such windows: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Be reasonable, O Pharisee, “Set a guard and a seal over your tongue. For you are talking to God who knows everything. Wait for the verdict of the divine Judge. ... No wrestler crowns himself, but waits to be called to get crowned; as unexpected things may happen, which may come in the way, and would eventually deny him the crown.

**(St. Cyril of Alexandria)**

❖ We know through the prophet Zechariah about a measuring line in the hand of an angel, like a rod; which is conveniently colored red, as a symbol of the redemption. ... If Christ speaks through someone like Paul (2 Corinthians 13: 3); He puts such a scarlet-colored line on his lips, as a kind of measuring line, which has got that beautiful color of the blood<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Instruction to Catechumens, 1: 4.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Ps., 51.*

<sup>3</sup> عظة 15 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

❖ A monk should be always silent, and should resist the thoughts that motivate him to much talk, that would loosen his soul. He should keep silent, even if he sees someone, through ignorance, laughing loudly, or uttering idle talk. An ideal monk should follow the wise psalm, saying: “*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips*” (3). A monk who does that, would never downfall with his tongue, but would come to be a god on earth.

**(St. Maccari the Great)**

❖ Lest it would be assumed that the chastity we ask to have from God, is confined to what concerns the lusts of the body, the psalm sings: “*Set guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips*” (3). ... If we perceive the right concept of the words “*my mouth*”, we would know that chastity as a gift of God, does not only concern the physical mouth, to keep it from uttering an evil talk; but there is, as well, “*the mouth of the heart*”, which I think that the prophet asks God to keep on it a strong door (chaste).

There are many words, not uttered by the physical mouth, but cry out loud in the heart ... What does not come from the heart, the mouth does not utter; Whereas what comes from it, if it is evil, would defile man, even it is not uttered by the tongue.... That is why the watch should be there (on the door of the heart), where the conscience speaks, even for the silent<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The wound caused by the words is incurable ... hence the prophet says: “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue*” (Proverb 18: 21). Indeed, O beloved brethren, if you deeply look, and diligently search, in the malignant tumor swollen in the heart, you will discover that the wounds caused by the words, may cause death<sup>2</sup>.

❖ To talk or to keep silent, both would be perfect if used in befitting way, Silence is great, and so is talk; but it is up to the wise to choose between the two. As the exaggerated silence may be sometimes referred to lack of reason; too much talk may be also referred to foolishness<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Valerian)**

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<sup>1</sup>Contenance 2.

<sup>2</sup>Homilies, 5 (FC)

<sup>3</sup>Homilies, 5 (FC)

❖ Be a friend to the poor, the humble, the stranger, those who are girded with the fear God, who bear the cross, and who “*sets guard over his mouth*” (3).

(St. Steven of Thebes)

❖ We should bridle the tongue, so as not to talk in ignorance; And if he can say something of benefit, he should not slothfully keep silent. Saying “*set guard over (his) mouth; keep watch over the door of (his) lips*” (3), He did not ask Him to set a wall or fence around it, but a door that could be opened and closed; to teach us how to open our mouths, and how to close it with wisdom, and in proper time<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory the Great)

***“Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works, with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies” (4)***

The psalmist fears, lest his inner depths would be drawn to evil; for evil often bears a deceptive appeal.

By saying: “***with men who work iniquity***”, he means man’s attempt to justify his faults by casting the blame, not on his own will, but on the circumstances, on which he has no control, which is the way of those who work iniquity. That is why the psalmist blesses the man “*who walks, not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners*” (Psalm 1: 1); And the apostle Paul writes: “*If anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person, and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed*” (2 Thessalonians 3: 14).

“***And do not let me eat of their delicacies***”. The psalmist does not want to partake of their licentious ways of life. Commenting on this, St. John Chrysostom warns us against partaking of the defilement practiced in the indecent parties of friends.

**St. Augustine**<sup>2</sup> believes that it is the Lord Christ who seeks here that His heart or body, namely, His church, would be like the Pharisee who justified himself, and despised the others (Luke 18: 11).

**St. Jerome** uses this phrase to exhort us to follow the lead of the psalmist who feared to imitate the wicked who, instead of repenting their evil works, attempt to justify themselves by excuses that made them commit evil. Among such excuses, a young man may say: [my body enslaves me, the fire of nature enflames my lusts to practice the sexual

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<sup>1</sup> *Pastoral Care*, 3: 14.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 141 (140)*

acts]. And a murderer may say: [ I was in need of food and clothing; and I had to kill someone to save myself from hunger and cold<sup>1</sup>].

- ❖ It is written: “*Do not kindle the coals of sinners*” (Sirach 8: 10). When the sinner stood against me, I was mute, humble, and kept silent (see Psalm 39: 2-3). And “*Set a guard, O Lord over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips; Do not incline my heart to any evil thing*” (Psalm 141: 2-3) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the psalmist starts first by the mouth, then the heart; the way is followed when the authorities start by caring for guarding the gate of a prison (the mouth), before caring for anything else. So it is befitting of the believer to care first for guarding his mouth and tongue, then for what lie deep in his heart.

Saying: “*Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works, with men who work iniquity*”; Casting the blame, not on their will or behavior, but on their nature on which they have no control, it is as though the wicked are casting the blame on the Creator Himself.

- ❖ Saying: “*Do not incline my heart to any evil thing*”; does not imply that God inclines the heart to evil things; Far from it! But it rather means: [Do not allow the heart to be inclined, or to pervert to evil thoughts; for the heart is the fountain of both the virtue and the iniquity<sup>3</sup>.
- ❖ The sinner should not cast the blame on anything but himself; For the murderer usually blames the anger; the robber blames the poverty; and the adulterer blames his body lusts The cause of sin is nothing but the behavior of the sinner himself<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ We are committed to beware of the adversaries, the enemies of virtue; for when they see that the whole night, we are keeping watch over our treasures, they would surround us on all sides, hoping that we shall eventually sleep and turn slothful, then would fall upon us to rob us of our most treasured possessions.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ After securing his mouth and lips, which are the “door” to the heart, the psalmist moved on to the (store) of thoughts in the heart; and

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<sup>1</sup> St. Jerome: Letter 55 to Amzndus, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Isaiah 11: 39: 11-21.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 141.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 141.

prayed to God. ***“not to incline his heart to any evil thing”***; on account of that the heart is the fountain of both good and evil. By saying ***“do not incline”***, he means: [do not allow it to incline to evil talk and thoughts that slander God. By so saying, he confirms that evil is not a nature in us, but comes from the inclination and perversion of our heart, through our own option.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ Let there be a guard over your heart, to know the motives inside it. For the solid food is for the grown-ups, who, through watching and training, have got the ability to discern between good and evil (Hebrew 5: 14). Such a discernment is the guard over the heart (3-4).

**(St. Steven of Thebes)**

- ❖ If ***“All things are possible for him who believes”*** (Mark 9: 23), ... Where would be our faith?

If you ***“let the dead bury their own dead”***; Why do you not go and preach the kingdom of God? (Luke 9: 60). .... How long will you sleep? ... Wake up and cry, together with the prophet David: ***“Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity”*** (4).

If you think you understand more than all those who teach you (Psalm 119: 99 Septuagint); the demons who are leading you astray and attacking your heart, plan to wage a fierce war against you. ... Have you forgotten the words of the Holy Book, saying: ***“God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able ...”*** (1 Corinthians 10: 13); And the saying of the Savior: ***“Do not worry about tomorrow”*** (Matthew 6: 34)?

**(St. Parsnovius)**

***“Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it, for still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked”*** (5)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: ***‘Let the righteous chastise and rebuke me. The oil of the sinner will not anoint my head’***..

David, being the greatest man of prayer in the Old Testament; used to seek from God all his needs, particularly the spiritual among them. Here he seeks from Him to separate him from evil and iniquity. He attaches himself in friendship to the pious men of God; accepts their counsel and suggestions, and even their criticism and rebukes.... Man, in most cases, deceives himself, and does not recognize his own faults, but

a pious man welcomes the view of the men of God of him, not to hear their commendation, but rather their criticism to reform him.

❖ My head will not grow on compliments. The unbefitting commendation is a kind of compliment; hence it is “*the oil of the sinner*”..

You, therefore, should rather be rebuked by the Righteous (God) with kindness; than to be commended by the sinner with ridicule.

Let there be oil in yourselves, so that you will be in no need of the “*oil of the sinner*”<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ He means to say: I shall not partake of the gatherings of the licentious; I prefer those of the firm and committed; who rebuke, criticize, and reveal faults. For that is a sign of kindness and compassion..

He says: “*The oil of the sinner will not anoint my head*”. ... Do you notice the soul committed to virtue? How it receives with pleasure the criticism of the righteous, which causes reform, and rejects the compliments of the wicked, which may cause destruction?. While kindness is bound to the criticism of the former, death may be bound to the compliment of the later. ... Wise are the words, saying: “*Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*” (Proverb 27: 6).

Reflecting the same meaning, the apostolic advice says: “*Convince, rebuke, exhort*” (2 Timothy 4: 2). The criticism of the righteous is like what the surgeon does, when he cuts and severs to heal. To make the rebuke acceptable, the Lord Christ, did not allow it to be public in the beginning, saying: “*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone*” (Matthew 18: 15).

That was what the apostle Paul did, presenting rebuke, together with kindness, saying: “*O foolish Galatians*”; then, in the same epistle, he says to them: “*My little children, for whom I labor in birth*” (Galatians 3: 1; 4: 19). He, who rebukes needs to present a shepherding thought, to make his rebuke acceptable; For he, who treats an ailment needs to be more sensitive than a surgeon who cuts<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ The saying of the prophet means that, out of his kindness, and his compassion; the righteous anoints and purifies the wounds of my

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 141 (140)

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 141.

soul, by the medications of his rebuke; which I truly need. Whereas the words of the sinner, smooth as oil, being no more than compliments, they will not anoint my head.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ We should always remember the words inspired by the Holy Spirit in the psalm, saying: ***“The oil of the sinner will not anoint my head”***; lest man perverts from the way, goes astray from the path of truth, and be anointed by the oil of the heretics, the adversaries of Christ<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyprian)**

- ❖ ***“Let the righteous strike me, it shall be a kindness; and let him rebuke me, but the oil of the sinner will not anoint my head”***. This means that, if the righteous sees my sin, he should not forsake me; but should rebuke, and even strongly chides me, to liberate me from my sin. His words may sound firm and cruel, but deep inside, he is kind and merciful<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ Beware of the words used by those who deceive with compliment; for they are “the oil of the sinner<sup>3</sup>”.

- ❖ I wish you do not let the oil of the sinner; namely, his compliments, anoint your head; As the righteous rebukes to reform; whereas the evil one compliments to destroy<sup>4</sup>.

**(Father Caesarius bishop of Arle)**

- ❖ ***“Let the righteous strike me, it shall be kindness; And let him rebuke me”***.... ***“For whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives”*** (Proverbs 3: 12; Hebrew 12: 6). ... Lucky is man, who is chastised in this life; for God will not chasten twice on the same offense (see Nehemiah 1: 9 – Septuagint); and fearful is God’s wrath, if it is not done here; for, otherwise, we would be led like a calf to the slaughterhouse. ... He truly said to Jerusalem: ***“Many are your sins, and numerous are your iniquities, to provoke me to anger”*** (Compare Ezekiel 16)... Just meditate in how God, is like a wise Physician, who, if he sees a corrupt body member or an infected tissue in the body of a patient, he will not hesitate to cut it off, and bandage the wound. ... He may seem as being cruel, but he is actually

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<sup>1</sup> Epistle 69: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 59: 6.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 59:7.

<sup>4</sup> Sermon233: 7.

merciful for saving the life of his patient. The same may apply to a teacher; if he expels a student out of his class without telling him his fault, he would be hating him; but not if by doing that, he is attempting to reform and correct his behavior.

“**Striking**” or “**reforming**”, could be understood in two ways: to rebuke or to guide.

“*The oil of the sinner will not anoint my head*”. Those who call you “blessed people” are deceiving you. ... By complimenting those who listen to them, and promising them the kingdom of heaven, the heretics anoint their heads with the oil of pride.

“*For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked*”. This means that despite being stirred up to foolishness, yet I still keep praying for their reform<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ You may anoint your head; Yet, beware not to anoint it with the oil of the sinners (5); but anoint it with the oil of exultation, “*the oil of gladness*” (Psalm 45: 7), the oil of mercy; according to the advise, saying: “*Let not mercy and truth forsake you*” (Proverb 3: 3)<sup>2</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ After supporting a brother with many wise sayings, the elder let him go rejoicing in the Lord, and singing: “*Let those who fear You turn to me, those who know Your testimonies*” (Psalm 119: 79); and, “*The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death*” (Psalm 118: 18); and, “***Let the righteous strike me, it shall be kindness; Let him rebuke me***” (Psalm 141: 5); and saying to himself: “*Return to your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you; for You have delivered my soul from death*” (Psalm 116: 7, 8). He then returned to his cell, and lived the rest of his life according to the counsel of the elder.

(The paradise of the fathers)

❖ “***Let the righteous strike me, it shall be kindness; let him rebuke me; but the oil of the sinner will not anoint my head***”.(Psalm 141: 5).

The oil of the sinner are the words of vain compliments and commendation; hated strongly by the prophet, who prefers the rebuke by the righteous, firmly with kindness, to the commendation with hypocrisy

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on Ps., 51.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Leviticus 10: 2: 4.

and partiality; for the latter will not benefit man, but will rather make him more ignorant and steadfast in iniquity.

On the tongue of His prophet, God says: “*O My people, those who lead (bless) you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths*” (Isaiah 3: 12); Namely, those who compliment you with hypocrisy, deceive you, and will utterly destroy you; whereas those who rebuke and chide you, are doing you a great favor.

Slothfulness or meekness to the sinner is not a virtue or love, but weakness; It is not love, but rather cruelty on those souls, that would perish without being faithfully counseled.

(St. Augustine)

### 3- THE PERFECT FAITH:

***“The judges are overthrown by the sides of the cliff (the Rock), and they hear my words, for they are sweet” (6)***

If the psalmist sometimes seeks the chastisement of the wicked, yet, not for the sake of avenging himself against them, but wishing for them to return to the Lord Christ, the true Rock, to enjoy salvation. And the chastisement of the wicked presents, as well, a practical lesson for the repentance and the reform of others.

The words of the psalmist are sweet and edifying for himself, as well as for his brethren.

According to **St. Augustine**, the judges are the philosophers, the elites, and those of authority, who control their subjects according to their views and philosophies; Yet, if compared to the true Rock; namely, to the Lord Christ, they would be overthrown to the ground.

❖ Put them beside the Rock; Compare their authority to that of the gospel, and their pride to that of the Crucified.

We shall say to them: [You have written your words on the hearts of the proud; Whereas He planted His cross in the hearts (and on the foreheads) of kings.

Finally, He died, and is risen; whereas you are all dead.

***“They hear my words, for they are sweet”***. My words win over theirs, because I utter the truth<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Here, the wounds of sin are apparent, and the problems caused by the iniquity are obvious ... He says that they are of authority, yet they all will be “*overthrown*”, ... They will be no more; There will be no

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 141 (140)

trace that they ever existed. As it is said of the wicked: *“He passed away, and behold, he was no more; Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found”* (Psalm 37: 36).

He means to say that, as when a piece of rock is overthrown into the sea, will leave no trace; so they will drown, and will be no more.

They may get a kind of sweetness in my counsel; for the blame of the righteous is of benefit. ... Virtue may cause a temporary feeling of discomfort; but it will eventually bring forth a persistent happiness<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Even the heretics, although they may despise the simplicity of the church ... When they return to the Holy Book, they will be instantly swallowed by the Rock – the Lord Christ – and will get back to Him.

*“They hear my words, for they are sweet”* The Lord Himself says: “Those who come to Me, rejoice in My words, and will turn to Me in the church”<sup>2</sup>

**(St. Jerome)**

*“Our bones are scattered at the mouth of the grave, as when one plows and breaks up the earth”* (7)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: *“Like the fat of the earth, they were broken up, and their bones are scattered at the Hades”*

Some believe that the psalmist feels sorrow over the people of Israel, who became like dry bones scattered all over the earth.

The prophet Ezekiel saw that scene (See Ezekiel 37: 1-14); Yet the Lord brought them out of the graves of their blasphemies, and of their denial of the Savior, to become a very great spiritual army.

According to **St. Augustine**, the “fat” of the earth is the manure, although despised by men; yet the farmer spread it over the earth to bring forth fertility and a plenty of fruit. The wicked may assume that they have overcome the witnesses of the Lord Christ, by killing them; But what they have actually done, is that they turned hem into manure that will immensely increase the spiritual crop.

The martyrs may indeed die; But *“Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of His saints”* (Psalm 116: 15)

The world may disregard the martyrs, But *“the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, God has chosen, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are”* (1 Corinthians 1: 28).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., 51.

God lifted up Peter and Paul, as though from trash, when they were condemned to death, and despised. Now the whole earth are richer with them.... Where will the rulers and nobles of the earth, and even the emperor Himself, hasten to go when they come to Rome?, but to the memorial of the fisherman – Peter?!

❖ Whatever happens, we trust in God, and will always look up to Him; We say together with he prophet: *“My eyes are upon You, O God the Lord; In You I take refuge; Do not leave my soul destitute”* (8).

He says: Even if we are surrounded with wars, battles, death, or the gates of Hades, We shall not forsake the holy Anchor; We shall always, with hope, attach to His help<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

*“My eyes are upon You, O God the Lord; In You I take refuge; Do not leave my soul destitute”* (8)

The psalmist, as he used to do, moves on from seeking his own salvation to seeking that of his people; then, he again seeks for himself. The believer does not isolate himself from his brethren; he cries out for the sake of his own salvation, without disregarding that of his brethren. By his love he seeks for the sake of his brethren, without disregarding his eternity.

According to **St. Augustine**, these words are uttered by the martyrs and those who suffer affliction.

❖ Tortured by persecutions, many of them fall...; But in the midst of the anguish of persecution, a voice will be heard praying: *“My eyes are upon You, O God the Lord”*. ... [I do not care for their threats; My eyes are upon You; upon Your promises in particular. I know how much You have endured for my sake; and what you have promised me<sup>2</sup>].

**(St. Augustine)**

*“Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, and from the traps of the workers of iniquity”* (9)

❖ What does he mean by the snare? They say to those taken to martyrdom: If you cooperate, and denied faith, we shall keep you alive.... In the snare they put the taste of the present life! ... If the bird likes it, it will fall in the snare. ... But if it can say: *“O Lord, I have not desired the woeful day; You know what came out of my lips”*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 141.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 141 (140)

(Jeremiah 17: 16); *‘He shall pluck my feet out of the net’* (Psalm 25: 15).

He refers to two things, to be discerned from one another: The snare set by the persecutors; and the offense that would come from the bad example of those who may fall into the snare, and end up denying their faith; And he seeks protection from both, lest he may fear the one, or follow the lead of the other<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ He does not refer here to the plots planned in general, but only to the hidden snares, that are difficult to detect, and to avoid; which particularly need the intervention of grace from high above<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ He, who looks up to God, lifts his insight up to Him, and trusts in Him; would be saved from the evil plots of the wicked; But those who set snares for the people, will themselves fall in them. ... He, who is able to reform and correct others, let him mix with those he could reform. But he, who cannot, would rather avoid having intimate relationship with them, all his life, until he departs in peace.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ The heretics, and the demons, will always set snares for us. As Iniquity is always close to virtue, they will set the snare beside the alms. If I intend to show off, and stretch my hand to be seen doing good by others, I shall fall into shortcomings and sin... The snares and nets are set everywhere the hunter discover that the deer frequent. The deer symbolize the saints, for the deer is a noble and gentle animal, who have strong antlers, and can kill the serpents; hence a psalm says: *“He makes my feet like the feet of deer”* (Psalm 18: 33)<sup>3</sup>

**(St. Jerome)**

- ❖ Beware not to fall with your feet into one of the snares set by the enemy to catch the innocent souls, if he finds them asleep. ... You should, therefore *“Be sober, be vigilant”* (1 Peter 5: 8) And with the pure eyes of the soul, sing the words of the psalm: *“Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I escape safely”* (Psalm 141: 10); and add the saying: *“We have been with a child, we have been in pain,*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 141 (140)

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 141.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Ps., 51.

*and we have brought forth the spirit of Your deliverance in the earth”*  
(Isaiah 26: 17) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Maccari the Great)

*“Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I escape safely”*

(10)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as:  
*“The wicked fall into his nets, and I would be alone, until the iniquity passes by”*.

**St. Augustine** believes that it is the Lord Christ who talks here. For when the time came for persecution, and He was arrested, some of his disciples fell into the net of the enemy, and all of them forsook Him, to pass alone through the winepress.

❖ Is it possible that Your disciples, O Lord, fall into his nets?... Once the persecution start, all of them forsook you alone, and are scattered each to his own (John 16: 32)... Yes, even those most attached to You, forsook You at the time of Your trial, when Your enemies sought You to be crucified... And that one who dared to promise to go with you unto death; once the time came for him to be tested; and was accused, not by the high authorities, but by a humble servant and a maidservant, he succumbed, and denied three times that he knows you<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ How miserable are we, mankind! ... Searching for excuses for sin, we add one sin to another<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> رسائله المكتشفة حديثاً عن مجلة: Recherches Augustiniennes, 1999 – 31, p. 104: رسالة 4: 2 (فردوس الأباء).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 141 (140)

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Ps., 51.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 141**  
**SET A GUARD OVER MY WHOLE BEING**

- ❖ How great is Your love, and Your longing for my salvation!  
You allow for me to be afflicted by the wicked;  
To learn how to cry out to You;  
I seek protection from myself, before I seek protection from them;  
When affliction dwells upon me, I run to You;  
I seek Your divine protection;  
When I see the wicked, I remember my weakness;  
For without affliction, my depths would become lukewarm;  
Through affliction, my depths desire to encounter You;  
I first, seek protection from myself, lest I may sin;  
And from the wicked, lest I may pay evil back with evil  
I seek their salvation from the evil enemy;  
I seek from You to kill evil in them, and grant them to return to You.
- ❖ The enemy intends to destroy me, as well as all mankind;  
He finds no comfort, except in our perdition;  
But to oppose him, I fly with Your Holy Spirit;  
I take refuge in You, and throw myself into Your bosom;  
The enemy presents what he has of evil jealousy;  
But Your Spirit grants me to offer You a sacrifice of love and praise;  
Receive my cry-outs to You, as an evening sacrifice;  
That ascends as though from above the golden altar in the sanctuary;  
They ascend hidden in the evening sacrifice of Your cross;  
In the evening, at the fullness of time, You came to proclaim Your  
love;  
Grant me a holy prayer, melded with the strength of Your cross;  
Without Your cross, my prayer would become like smoke, corruptive  
to my eyes;  
By Your cross, You smell my prayer as incense that bears Your sweet  
fragrance.
- ❖ With the lifting of my hands in prayer;  
Grant my heart to be lifted up, as well, with love for You, and for my  
brethren.  
And my mind to be lifted up, to meditate in the glories You prepare  
for me;  
And my whole being to be lifted up, to enjoy fellowship with the  
heavenly hosts.

- ❖ Grant me not to pay evil back with evil;  
Set a strong door over my mouth;  
Which opens up when I confess my sins to You;  
And shuts down if I attempt to justify myself;  
Grant me a door which opens up and shuts down under the guard of  
Your Holy Spirit;  
Don't set a strong wall over my mouth;  
Lest I would be denied talking to You;
- ❖ O my God; If I fear the oppression of the wicked;  
Let me cry out to You: Do not let me receive their smooth words;  
Through their compliments, they pour oil over my head;  
And I may start to believe their compliments;  
Together with the wise virgins, grant me the oil of Your grace;  
Instead of receiving the destructive oil of the sinners;  
Let me be so enriched with the oil of Your Holy Spirit;  
That I do not desire the oil of the sinners;  
Your chastisements and Your rebuke, are for the edification of my  
soul;  
Whereas their sweetened words are for its destruction;
- ❖ Faithful. are the wounds of the righteous;  
Their criticism of me is for the edification of my soul;  
And deceptive, are the kisses of the wicked;  
Their love is full of destructive deception;  
I receive the reproach of the righteous;  
And reject the empty talk of the wicked.

## **PSALM 142**

### **NO ONE WHO TAKES NOTICE OF ME; NO ONE CARES FOR ME**

This psalm is considered as a personal lamentation written by King David, most probably when he was in the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22).

As far as the verse: “*Bring my soul out of prison*” (7), So far, Israel has not known prisons as a way of punishment for criminals, or to separate them from the society. But the psalmist, having experienced how, even his dearest friend has deserted him, counted himself as though in a prison, or as though dead while alive, with no one to support him with a word of comfort, nor to give him food. The word “*prison*” here, probably refers to the bitter persecution and insults he was suffering<sup>1</sup>.

#### **A cave or a sanctuary of God?**

We have already enjoyed a psalm concerning the cave (Psalm 57; 1 Samuel 22: 1, 2; 24: 1 etc.)

Here, amid his anguish, the psalmist reveals to us the secret of his comfort, while being like a prisoner in a cave:

1- **God hears the cry-outs of the heart** (1-2). Prayers are sometimes offered as a kind of worship (Psalm 141: 1); and other times as a spiritual battle, in which the heart is poured before the God, although He knows all our needs. By prayer, the cave turns into a temple for the Lord.

2- **God knows our paths** (3). All of us complain of the snares set by the devil, hidden to catch us; yet, having received the Lord as our path to the bosom of the Father, we come to be secure from any snares.

3- **God knows our sufferings** (4). When all have forsaken us, not being able to partake of our sufferings, the Savior embraces, comforts, and cares for us (1 Peter 5: 7).

4- **God is our portion** (5). When we acquire God as our portion, What more do we need?

5- **God is glorified in us** (6-7). Turning our sufferings into our edification, let us then praise Him amid our sufferings, until He brings us forth into His glorified comfort.

**1- I poured out my complaint before the Lord**

**1 - 2**

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<sup>1</sup> Sthmeller, P. 202.

<b>2- Falling into a snare</b>	<b>3 - 4</b>
<b>3- You are my portion and my refuge</b>	<b>5 - 6</b>
<b>4- I hope the Lord will deal bountifully with me</b>	<b>7</b>

**The title:**

**A plea for relief from persecutors.**

**A contemplation of David. A prayer when he was in the cave.**

“*A prayer when he was in the cave*”. Both this psalm, and psalm 57 give us a clear idea about David’s different feelings and emotions while in trouble. In psalm 57, we see him very strong and steadfast, and with an amazing trust in his conquest in the Lord. Whereas in this psalm, we see him pouring his complaint before the Lord. With his spirit utterly broken down, expecting a snare secretly set for him, and feeling weak before his strong enemy; Yet he does not lose his hope in the Lord, being sure that He will deal bountifully with him.

This psalm carries a prophecy about the King of kings, the Son of David, who will endure reproach as a King without, neither an earthly crown, nor kingdom. It carries, as well, a prophecy about the church that will endure the ‘abomination of desolation’, and will flee to the mountains, where God will hide her as though in a cave, and protect her with His might, while crying out seeking salvation.

It is a portrait of the believer whom God allows to pass through affliction, to feel as though in a prison, helpless, surrounded with darkness, on the verge of death, with no refuge except in the Lord Himself.

❖ Here he shows king Saul as though the devil, who presents nothing but defilement and corruption; and the cave is this world, for it is very dark, if compared to the light of the world to come; although, by His coming to this world, the Lord, being the Light, made it exceptionally shine

As David entered into the cave while fleeing from Saul, So did the Lord, He came into this world, and endured persecution<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome).**

**1- I Poured out my complaint before the Lord:**

**“I cry out to the Lord with my voice; With my voice to the Lord, I make my complaint” (1)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Homily 52 on Ps. 141 (142).

This psalm came as a cry-out from the depth of the psalmist's heart; who, moaning as though in seclusion, with no one around to partake of his feelings, yet he was crying out.

Although he knew for sure that God hears the hidden sighs of his heart, yet the bitterness in his depths made him cry out, even though there was no one around to hear him. His intention was to let God know about all his troubles and sorrows.

The word "**voice**", (qol) in Hebrew, is used to mean thunder; Extreme anguish gives the believer the spirit of strength to pray as though in a voice like thunder. According to **St. Jerome**, the prophet, here, is like a patient in great pain, who hastens to the physician to tell him about the symptoms of his illness, anticipating treatment.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the psalmist often repeats his cry-outs and supplications, sometimes twice in the same psalm, to proclaim that he seeks through the strength of the spirit, and the alertness of mind. ... It is befitting of us, likewise, to pray by a kindled spirit, and an alert mind, according to the words of the apostle: "*I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the mind. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the mind*" (1 Corinthians 14: 15).

❖ "***I cry out to the Lord with my voice***". Though it would be enough to say "with the voice"; Yet, not without reason he added "my", the article of possession, and said "*with My voice*"; As many cry out to the Lord, yet not with their voice, but with that of their body.

I wish the inner man, in which the Lord Christ starts to dwell by faith (Ephesians 3: 17), is the one who cries out to the Lord; not with the sound of the lips, but with the feelings of the heart. For God does not listen to what man does; Man listens to the sound coming through the lungs. Larynx, and out of the mouth; But it is the cry-out of your mind that the Lord hears.

My cry-out is my prayer, not by curses, complaint, or blasphemy.

❖ That voice is surely not the voice of him who wrestles, but of him who loves; not the voice of the body, but that of the heart<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. Augustine**)

***"I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble" (2)***

What gives him comfort is his knowledge that God is completely aware of his condition, how his strength is utterly collapsed.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon 206: 1.

❖ ***“I pour out my prayer before Him”***. By saying, *“before Him”*? ... he means (in His sight). ... God looks where man does not. Your thoughts are not seen by men, but only by God. ... Therefore, pour your prayer where He alone sees and rewards you. The Lord Jesus Christ commands you to pray in secret; If you know what your secret place is, and purified it, there you should pray to God. He says: *“When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly”* (Matthew 6: 6)

If it is men who will reward you, then pray before men; And if it is God who will reward you, then pour your prayer before Him; and shut the door, lest the tempter will enter.

Shut the door of fear and lust before the devil, and open it before Christ.

How can you open such door with so many bends before Christ? ... You open it by your desire for the kingdom, and by your fear from the fire of Hades!

Through longing for this world, the devil will enter; and through longing for the eternal life Christ will enter.

Through fear of temporal punishment, the devil will enter; and through fear of the eternal fire, Christ will enter<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“I pour out my complaint before Him”***.... With no reservation, the psalmist cries out: [I pour my whole heart before the Lord]; ... the way man reveals his wound before the physician, and tell him all his troubles, to let him write down the plan of treatment.

***“I declare before Him my troubles”***. That is the kind of tribulation welcomed by the apostle; the tribulation, which, together with others, will produce hope, without limits<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Do you see the spirit, liberated from the earthly concerns? Do you see how he does not make humans his refuge, nor look forward to their help; but seeks an un-conquerable help, and a grace from high above?! ... Intending to show the sharpness of his mind, and the extent of his inner zeal, he says: ***“I bountifully pour ...”***

By this we learn how much can temptations contribute in the enjoyment of sound concepts.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 142 (141).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. Homily 52 on Ps. 141 (142).

That is the fruit of affliction, which I wish no one would avoid, For affliction has two benefits: It makes us more zealous and alert; and it reveals a cause, that makes the Lord listen and respond to his prayers<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ Saying: “*I pour out my complaint before Him*”, means that my prayer is rich and bountiful, emerging from the depths of my heart, ... I do not complain to men, but “*I declare my troubles before the Lord*”.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ “*When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me*” (Psalm 42: 4)

When the soul is poured over the body, it may cover up the weakness and the lusts of the body; and let the strength of the soul and spirit dwell in all its members (Compare 2 Corinthians 12: 9).

That is why he says in a text to follow: “*I pour out my prayer before Him*” (Psalm 142: 2); for when the prayer is poured, sins are covered (Compare psalm 32: 1; Romans 4: 8). ... But what would his thoughts be? ... Surely in the issues he longs for, namely, to come and appear before God (Compare psalm 42: 2), to behold the sanctuary of the heavenly God, where he walks by the spirit, and have the pleasure to partake of entering into it<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

## 2- FALLING INTO A SNARE:

Here, the psalmist presents his lamentation, mourning his lack of every human comfort, and of any help from those round him; ... just like Jeremiah (25: 34-35). instead of giving him help, they set a hidden snare to catch him.

“*When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk, they have secretly set a snare for me*” (3)

The psalmist often repeats how the enemy chases him, and keeps on plotting troubles against him; and setting snares on the way through which he expects him to walk.

According to **St. Augustine**<sup>3</sup>, the psalmist, going through an extreme tribulation, that his spirit seems as though completely

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Prayer of David 4: 2: 8.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 142 (141).

exhausted, and the opponents assume that he is utterly collapsed. Yet, through secretly holding fast to God, and pouring his heart and mind before Him, he perceived that *“they have bowed down and fallen, but he has risen and stood upright”* (Psalm 20: 8); and that *“his eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He shall pluck his feet out of the net”* (Psalm 25: 15). And, *“having endured to the end, and will be saved”* (Matthew 10: 23).

What the psalmist says apply to the martyrs, over whom the wicked assume they have full authority, and for whom they set snares along their way; For behold, Christ Himself is their Way, to which no snare could crawl. The martyrs acquire Christ Himself as their Way, conquest, and crown.

❖ ***“In the way in which I walk, they have secretly set a snare for me”***. Iniquities are at the door next to virtues. In every way he decides to walk, there they secretly set snares; whether in fasting, alms-giving, or any other good work<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ When you see someone overwhelmed by despair because of tribulation, and hear him uttering difficult words; do not assume that tribulation is the cause, but it is his own weakness. It is only natural for tribulation to produce -- as contradictory effects --: care, remorse, alertness, and deep piety. That is why Paul also says: *“tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character, and character hope”* (Romans 5: 3, 4).

If the Jews murmured, it was not because of the tribulation, but because of their own foolishness.

Going through temptation, the saints, on the other hand, become more magnificent, and their concepts more established; hence the psalmist says: *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes”* (Psalm 119: 71); And Paul says: *“Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me; ... Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness’. Therefore most gladly I would 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*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Homily 52 on Ps. 141 (142).

*persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Corinthians 12: 7 – 10).

Do you see how he becomes more alert by temptations?; Do you see how he takes more refuge in God; and how he holds fast to Him, even when he enters into the depths of trouble?. That is exactly what the psalmist means by saying: "*When my spirit was overwhelmed within me*"; by which he appears to be full of zeal<sup>1</sup>

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ All paths in life are full of snares; hence the righteous says: "***In the way in which I walk, they have secretly set a snare for me***" (3). That is why it is befitting of you to walk along the "Way", He who says: "*I am the Way, the truth, and the life*". Then you can say that He guides my soul along the way of justice for His name's sake<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

❖ David says: "*In the way in which I walk, they have secretly set a snare for me*"; Namely, in the way of virtue, along which we walk; ... But, if we seek the ignorance of our call, and boast our success, we shall fall into the snares of vain glory<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Cassian)**

❖ At the time I come near death, namely, when my soul leaves me, in the time of tribulation; I will not despair. ... You, O Lord know that; You know my paths, as well as the tricks played by enemies against me, who set snares in my path.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***"Look on my right hand and see; for there in no one who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; No one cares for me"*** (4)

The psalmist looks on his right hand; namely, to where he assumed that he may find someone to help and to defend him, but he finds no one. No one cares for the misery he has reached; no one cares for his life, or to save him from tribulation. It is a miserable and bitter cry-out;... a cruel selfishness and a strange attitude toward the others.

Here, the psalmist presents to us a prophecy about the suffering and the lonesome Lord Christ, deserted by His own disciple

By looking on his right hand, he means that, at the time of his sorrow, he looks for his buddies, specially his friends, to find them

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Death as a Good, 6: 24.

<sup>3</sup> Institutes, 11: 6.

pretend not to know him, because of their fear of the enemy. That is exactly what happened on the evening the Lord Christ was delivered and tried; when the disciple Peter vowed, and cursed, and denied that he ever knew the Lord Christ, nor even his name.

According to **St. Augustine**, he who looks on his left hand is blind, and will see nothing; whereas he who looks on his right hand, can see; ... But what will he see? He will see that no one acknowledges him, nor helps him. He would then moan for feeling that no refuge remains for him; and that no one can help him except God Himself.

His adversaries may assume that they have managed to surround him, that he has fallen in the snare they set for him, and that they have full authority over him. Seeking his life to destroy him, they do not perceive that his true life is the Lord Christ, the Grantor of life.

The Lord Christ sought from His disciples, that when persecuted, to flee with their body, but not with their spirit, for their life is actually the Lord Christ Himself.

❖ If we interpret this psalm that it concerns the Lord Himself; it is He who said: All My disciples have forsaken Me and escaped; except one, he who promised, saying: *“Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You”* (Matthew 26: 35). Yet it was he, who denied his Lord. Actually everyone was crying out, saying: *“Crucify Him, Crucify Him!”*<sup>1</sup>

(**St. Jerome**)

❖ Here, the calamity appears in its worst, and the problem increases to its maximum. Together with the approach of the enemies and their plots to catch him; What is worse than the disappearance of anyone who may give him help, is their denial that they ever knew him. .... It is the feeling of seclusion and isolation.

Yet, that does not cause him much harm, but rather a great benefit, namely, it would bring him forth to a closer relationship with God.

That is why, O brethren, when you see evil increase, do not let your hearts fail, but, on the contrary, be of good cheer. For this is why God allows for temptation to come over you, to shake you off the condition of slothfulness, and wake you up from your sleep<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Homily 52 on Ps. 141 (142).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 142.

- ❖ That is what happened to test the righteous ‘Job’; and what made the blessed David sing, saying: **“I look on my right hand and see; for there is no one who takes notice of me, ... no one cares for me”** (4)<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Dedymus the blind)

### **3- YOU ARE MY PORTION AND MY REFUGE:**

Once man suffers a feeling of seclusion, and is forsaken by those he expected to help him, he discovers that his refuge and portion is no one but the Lord; And would cry out to Him, saying:.

**“I cried out to You, O Lord. I said, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the loving’” (5)**

When there is no more human refuge, the psalmist resorts to the Lord Himself, as a personal refuge; as though God cares only for him; or as though there is no one in the creation but him.

God loves all, for He is God of all, and disregards no one. He lets everyone feel that He has dedicated all His possibilities for his sake; that he is God’s beloved, and that his place is in His divine bosoms, well established in His amazing heart.

- ❖ In such a siege, the prophet cried out to the Lord, saying: You are my portion and my hope; not only in this world, but also in the land of the living, namely in the age to come.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ **“I said, ‘You are my refuge’”**. ... Everything human proved to be of no value; ... the tempest surpasses every help, ... is destructive beyond every measure. ... We are drowning; Yet, O Lord, we keep on hoping, and will never fail.

**“You are my portion in the land of the living”**; Namely, You are my inheritance, my treasure, and my riches. You are everything in Yourself to me.

**“In the land of the living”**. You are perpetually my Support; and **“in the land of the living”**, I will be more attached to You<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”** (Matthew 5: 5). It is most probably the earth (the land) mentioned in this psalm, saying: **“You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living”** (Psalm 142: 5 LXX). He means to confirm the abidance and strength

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Job 6: 15.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 142.

of the perpetual inheritance. As the soul there, is in comfort in her designated place, like a body, subsisting on its food on earth; which is the life of the saints, full of peace. The meek are those who, although they submit to the evil of the wicked, and do not oppose it, yet they “*overcome evil with good*” (Romans 12: 21).

Let, therefore, the proud fight and wrestle for the sake of the temporal earthly things; but “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5: 5); the earth from which they would never be taken away<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

**“Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I” (6)**

❖ “*For they are stronger than I*”.... Who says that?

It is the body of Christ crying-out. ... It is the voice of the church, the body of Christ. “*Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold*” (Matthew 24: 12) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low*”.

This is not an accusation, as much as it is a reference to the suffering and weakness of the one who cries. Considering what his sins are worthy of, this low feeling is not much; but considering his weakness, it truly is. ... I mean to say that God here, does not seek the punishment according to the crime committed. For even if the low feeling seems unbearable to the one who suffers, it is not because of the nature of what has dwelt upon him, but rather because of his own weakness<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low*”. Unless man is humble, God will not compassionately attend to his cry. What benefit would realize salvation, if the words of prayer is uttered by someone thick-necked and proud. Let us always keep in mind what the Lord Himself says: “*Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart*” (Matthew 11: 29) <sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on the Mount, 1: 2: 4.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 142 (141).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 142.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. Homily 52 on Ps. 141 (142).

❖ *“Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I”*.  
Those who fight against us are stronger than us; they are the rulers of this world<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

#### **4- I HOPE THE LORD WILL DEAL BOUNTIFULLY WITH ME:**

*“Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name. The righteous shall surround me, for You will deal bountifully with me” (7)*

In the midst of tribulation, one feels as though he is a prisoner of bitterness; and once the Lord rescues him from it, he would offer Him a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. He would then join the pious in a choir of praise, giving thanks to the Lord for His amazing salvation.

According to **St. Jerome**, the prison here is the body which, by its lusts opposes the desires of the spirit. However, we see many fathers of the church look at the body as a holy and good creation of God, and a talent which should be kept pure, and sanctified by the divine grace.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the psalmist prayed to God to spare him of getting into temptation; Yet, when it actually came upon him, he endured it with thanksgiving, and offered praise to the name of the Lord. .... Such thanksgiving amid the tribulation, would take away from us the burden of our sins; It is the benefit, or the blessing, that would dwell upon us by enduring tribulations with thanksgiving; beside granting us the daring to supplicate to God, and to seek His help, without slothfulness, lest we would perish.

According to **St. Augustine**, the title of this psalm, refers to that the prophet David was hiding in a cave, which was his prison.. He also believes that the psalmist was longing to depart from the body, so that his soul would set forth to the Lord Christ, which would be far better for him.

❖ I wish God leads us and bring us forth, out of the body, when He chooses to do so. It was said by some, that our body is a prison, not that it is so created by God, but on account of that it became as such under punishment, submitted to death. There are two things in our body, in which we should meditate: the work of God, and the punishment that we came to be worthy of.

By saying: *“Bring my soul out of prison”*, he may also means: Bring my soul out of corruption.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Homily 52 on Ps. 141 (142).

Finally, brethren, he probably means to say: Bring my soul out of tribulation; As, for someone in joy, even a prison would be spacious; whereas for someone in sorrow, even an open field would be a tribulation, out of which he prays to God to release him.

It is therefore, not the body that brings the soul down, but it is the corrupt body; It is not the body that is a prison, but it is corruption<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Now, what he means is: Bring me out of troubles, counting them as his prison.

Those who are slothful while in comfort, would despair if they fall into a tribulation.

The psalmist, however, kept alert with the change of circumstances; the temptation did not make him faint-hearted, but, on the contrary, it led him to pray and supplicate more and more; he did not easily fall into slothfulness, but, but temptation led him to thanksgiving.

He also says that it is also of benefit, even to the righteous; who would rejoice and become exultant, when they see me liberated from tribulation. The souls of the righteous, would partake of the grief of those going through tribulation; they would not envy those in prosperity, but become glad and partake of their happiness and fulfillment<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ ***“Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name”***.

Namely bring my soul out of the prison of my body, that I may praise Your name; Namely, to glorify Your name by praise, the way the Lord said in His prayer: *“I thank You Father”* (Matthew 11: 25).

***“The righteous shall surround me, for You will deal bountifully with me”***. Here, the Lord says: the disciples shall wait on me, anticipating my resurrection from the dead<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ ***“Bring my soul out of prison”***. The prophet prays to be released out of Hades<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Caesarius, bishop of Arle)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 142 (141).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 142.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. Homily 52 on Ps. 141 (142).

<sup>4</sup> Sermon 93: 5.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 142**  
**MY GOD, THE SOURCE OF MY COMFORT**

- ❖ We may be committed to flee into a cave, to escape from enemies;  
To escape, lest we would be seen by the enemy;  
Who keeps on setting snares for us;  
Let him set his fearful snares as he wishes;  
My soul may be extremely disturbed;  
Yet, in the midst of the bitterness of my soul, Your comforts fill me  
with hope;  
In the midst of the prison of tribulations,  
I shall never forget how the high priest has sent You chained to  
prison;  
How foolish of him to send to prison, him whom heaven and earth  
could not accommodate;  
You stretched Your hands to be chained;  
By Your own free will, You walked to prison;  
Where You encounter me, a prisoner for his weakness and faults;  
In the darkness of the prison, there I encounter You, O Light of the  
world;  
There, my soul is comforted by You;  
I count it blessed, for encountering the Mighty heavenly Liberator.
- ❖ In my tribulation I cry out to You;  
Although You hear the sighs of the heart;  
However they may seem silent and secret;  
My soul thunders within me;  
And my mind cries out seeking Your help;  
I know that You do not seek the loud noise of the lips;  
But You would rather listen to the silent screams of the heart.
- ❖ I pour out my complaint before You;  
Although You know all its details, without uttering a single word;  
I reveal my wounds to You, O the heavenly Physician;  
I do not complain to any human, but I pour myself out before You;  
My soul is lifted up, as though to Your heavenly sanctuary;
- ❖ When the enemy see me in the midst of tribulation, he assumes that I  
have perished.  
Yes, So I look as though I am about to die;  
Yet, when I get attached to You, I rise up and live;  
While the enemy, in his pride, falls down and perish.

- ❖ In my human weakness, I look on my right hand;  
I look toward those from whom I expect help;  
But I find that no one acknowledges me;  
In the time of tribulation, they all flew away, and left me alone;  
With no friend nor a companion;  
Even my own father and mother have forsaken me;  
For my own sake, in the time of Your tribulation, You allowed all to forsake You;  
Yet You and the Father are One, with the same Essence;  
But I, in my tribulation, I see You alone;  
I see You stretching Your hands to embrace me in Your bosom;  
While the enemy thinks that I have fallen in his snare;  
I discover that I have more abided in You; my Life.
- ❖ When all have forsaken me, I found Him who is grater than all;  
My seclusion has driven me to get more attached to You, O my Lord and Savior;  
My seclusion has shaken me off, to get rid of my slothfulness..  
In my seclusion I perceived that You are the portion of my soul;  
I said together with the prophet Jeremiah”  
*“The Lord is my portion, says my soul”* (Lamentation 3: 24);  
And said together with the psalmist:  
*“You are my refuge; my portion in the land of the living”*.  
This is my home;  
The place to which the enemy cannot approach;  
Whoever enters into it, nobody can drive him out.
- ❖ Glory be to You, O the amazing Savior;  
You allowed for me to enter into tribulation;  
To make my soul desire to set forth joyfully to the heavenly home;  
Let me encounter You, and live forever with You.

## **PSALM 143**

# **A CRY- OUT OF A SPIRITUAL SOLDIER IN BATTLE**

This psalm, counted as the last one of the seven psalms of repentance, probably on account of what came in verse 2; represents a cry-out coming out of the depths of the heart to God, the Righteous, the Faithful in His promises, and the Keeper of His covenants with His people. The psalmist reveals his inner and outer sorrow, longing for the help of God, given to His faithful servants.

Most probably, the prophet David wrote this psalm when his son Absalom rebelled against him, and sought killing him. It is the cry-out of a suffering soldier in the midst of a spiritual battle.

<b>1- Give ear to my supplications</b>	<b>1 - 6</b>
<b>2- Answer me, O Lord</b>	<b>7 - 9</b>
<b>3- Teach us to do Your will</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4- Revive us, for Your name's sake</b>	<b>11 – 12</b>

### **The title:**

An earnest appeal for guidance and deliverance.

According to the Septuagint version it came as: A psalm of David, when his son Absalom was chasing him.

❖ The title of the psalm came as: A psalm of David when his son was chasing him. We know from 2 Kings 15, that that actually happened ... But we are committed to recognize in it the true David, strong in His help – our Lord Jesus Christ – For all the events that happened in the past were symbols of things to come.

I wish, in this psalm, we search for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who proclaimed Himself ahead in His prophecy, telling what was to happen through previous events far in the past. He proclaimed Himself in the prophets; being the Word of God ... Let our Lord speaks; and let Christ be with us<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

### **1- GIVE EAR TO MY SUPPLICATIONS:**

***“Hear my prayer, O Lord, Give ear to my supplications! In Your faithfulness answer me, and in Your righteousness” (1)***

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 143 (142).

The psalmist starts his psalm seeking from God to hear his prayer and supplications, not for the sake of any self-righteousness in him, but for the sake of God's faithfulness. He promised to hear His servants whom no one defends and He is faithful in His promises; It is befitting of us, therefore, to talk frankly to Him, for no one will help us except Him.

Commenting on this phrase, **St. John Chrysostom** asks us to be particular in the way we raise our prayers and supplications to God, by approaching Him as is befitting. We need no one to give a surety for us before God, when we pray; except to be sanctified to prepare ourselves to encounter Him.

❖ You do not need to present your requests.

When the King approaches, anticipate the right moment to talk.

When does the King approach? ... All the time!

When will be the right moment? ... Once you intend; ... and once you are qualified!

God commanded the Jews to take their places at the foot of the mountain to appear before God, wash their clothes, and not to come near their wives (Exodus 19: 10-19). ... As for you, Wash your souls instead of your clothes; approach, self-controlled, with humility, and in no haste. ... Approach God, if you intend to get what you wish to have.

This approach will not cost you much... Just take virtue with you as a provision in your journey toward Him.

Where does this King work? ... Close to the contrite heart. Therefore, take that way; for, according to the Holy Scripture, "*The Lord is near to all who call upon Him*" (Psalm 145: 18); ... There, you will find Him; there you will encounter Him.

He is close to him who break bread to the poor, and who practice alms; ... If you walk along this way, you will find Him ready to hear your prayers<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

❖ These are the words of someone who trusts in "**Your Truth**", namely in Your Christ who says: "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*" (John 14: 6).

"***In Your righteousness, answer me***". Namely also in Your Christ. I do not trust in myself, but look for the mercy of Your faithfulness and righteousness<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 143.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps., homily 53 on Ps. 142 (143).

(St. Jerome)

***“Do not enter into judgment with Your servant; for in Your sight no one living is righteous” (2)***

Someone may probably see that this phrase contradicts the one preceding it, in which the psalmist sought from God to answer him, and to realize his request, according to His divine justice; While here, he says that, on account that no one living is righteous, or justified, in the sight of God; he asks Him not to enter into judgment with him. ... How, by the divine justice, could his request be answered; when, at the same time, he would not be justified by His justice?!

**Father Onesimus of Jerusalem** answers this, by saying: [As God’s justice in this world goes hand in hand with His mercy, Justice is often said to be mercy].

God’s chastisement of man in this world, even if it happens according to the divine justice; Yet, God, in His chastisement, exhorts us to repent; and that would be through His mercy.

Probably for this same reason, “God’s justice” is often termed “God’s righteousness”; on account of that His justice in this world always goes hand in hand with His mercy.

The psalmist asks God not to treat him according to his justice without His mercy; lest he, together with all believers, would fall into a calamity; for all are sinners, and no one can reach the befitting righteousness; hence the psalmist resorts to God’s grace,

❖ ***“Do not enter into judgment with Your servant”***. Here the psalmist very clearly proclaims his trust in Christ’s compassion, full of love. It is as though someone goes through a trial in the presence of God and the prophet; as it came in psalm 51: *“So that You are justified in Your sentence, and blameless when You pass judgment”* (Psalm 50: 4 LXX). For there would be no other cause for God to enter into judgment, except to judge with justice<sup>1</sup>.

*“For in Your sight, no one living is righteous”*. He is called the Lord, *“the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; for He is not the God of the dead but of the living”* (Luke 20: 37, 38). Even the patriarch fathers are not justified in God’s sight; and *“All the stars are not pure in His sight”* (Job 25: 5) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

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<sup>1</sup> Xenophon: *Cyropaedia* 3: 1.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps., homily 53 on Ps. 142 (143).

- ❖ All the saints grieve with daily sighs because of the weakness of their nature. And while searching their minds, and their hidden consciences, in their deep retreats, they cry out supplicating: “*Do not enter into judgment with Your servants, for, in Your sight, no one living is righteous*” (2).

There, you see how all saints, together with all people, confess that they are sinners; However they never despair of their salvation, but look forward to an utter purification through God’s grace and mercy.

No one, however sanctified, is without sin in this life; hence, granting His disciple a model of the perfect prayer, the Savior instructs them to say: “*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*” (Matthew 6: 12).

Therefore, having granted them that as a prayer to be practiced by the saints; how could then be anyone so arrogant, rude, and puffed-up with the pride of Satan, to dare to claim that he is without sin<sup>1</sup>!?

**(Father Theonas)**

- ❖ Who could be justified before God? Even a babe of one day on earth would not be pure of sin (Job 14: 5 LXX); No one can be glorified in his uprightness and purity of heart<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ You count my steps; not one of my sins could escape You (Job 14: 6 LXX). He says: I wish I would be saved, for I am the work of Your hands, and not because I am righteous in any way; nor that I seek justice from You; nor that I ask You to forget my iniquities; for no transgression could escape You.

- ❖ Having learned all that, I wish we would not despair, even though we sin;... knowing that, with the persistence of the spirit, we, the unworthy, could become worthy of taking. ... Even if we have no one to intercede on our behalf, we would not fail, knowing that we have a great Advocate. Let us, therefore, go to God, Himself, with great zeal.

- ❖ Nothing would make our good works useless and vain, except if we remember them, counting ourselves as doing good.

- ❖ Confess that, by grace, you may be saved, to feel that God is the Creditor ... If we refer our good works to God, our reward on our humility would be greater than the reward on our works themselves.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Cassian: Conf., 23: 16-18.*

<sup>2</sup> *Death as a Good, 11: 49.*

❖ The preacher, uttering in the name of the divine wisdom, says: “*For there is no just man on earth who does good, and does not sin*” (Ecclesiastes 7: 20); And, “*Who can say: ‘I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?’*” (Proverb 20: 9). ... No one is pure of sin, even if his life is one day on earth.

David persists on this when he says: “*I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me*” (Psalm 51: 5); And, “*In Your sight, no one living is righteous*” (Psalm 143: 2). This last phrase is wrongly interpreted by some, away from its true meaning, saying that it means that, compared to God, there is no one perfect. But the Holy Book does not say: “(Compared to You), no one living is righteous”, And when it says “*In Your sight*”, it means that those who seem righteous in the sight of men; as far as God – the Perfect in knowledge – is concerned, they are not righteous. “*For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (1 Samuel 16: 7). In the sight of God who sees everything, and before whom all the secrets of the heart are revealed, no man is justified<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ‘Job’, Zechariah, and Elizabeth, were called righteous; according to the righteousness that could eventually change to unrighteousness, and not according to the non-changeable righteousness of God, about which it is said: “*I am the Lord; I do not change*” (Malachi 3: 6) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ To some who may probably wonder: [Would what came in Ephesians: “*That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*” (Ephesians 1: 4), contradict with the prophetic saying: “*In Your sight, no man living is righteous*” (Psalm 143: 2)?] ... To this we say: [Let us look at whom is meant by the prophecy. ... In God’s sight, no one could be righteous all along his life span; for he will definitely sin sometimes. But that, in certain times, they could be “*holy and without blame*” (Ephesians 1: 4), if they so become through reform<sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

***For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in darkness, like those who have long been dead*” (3)**

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 133 to Ctesiphon, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Against the Pelagians, Book 1: 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ep. To Ephesians.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: ***“For the enemy has persecuted my soul; and humiliated my life on earth”***.

How difficult on David’s soul to see his beloved son Absalom become his enemy, and uses every possible way, not only to take away the throne from him, but even to seek his life, namely, to kill him, and to humiliate him before the people and the army. The prophet proclaims that he was disturbed, and became as though dwelling in darkness like those who have long been dead; That he was in a serious situation; as though in the darkness of the grave; like a dead man without anyone to support or to rescue him.

The goal of the devil from opposing the believer, is to crush his life to the ground, and to make him dwell in darkness like the dead. While the Lord Christ intends to carry us up to His heavens; the devil, on the other hand, intends to bring us down to the ground, and to bind our hearts and minds to the earthlies and not to the heavenlies. ... While the Lord Christ is the Sun of Righteousness, who shines over those sitting in the darkness, the devil intends to isolate us from Him, to bring us down as though to the graves, where the darkness of evil and sin prevail.

According to **St. Augustine**, the devil has persecuted the Lord Christ, in an attempt to let Him dwell in the darkness, together with the dead of the world who die in their sins. The Lord received that persecution through His own free will, and not because of any sin He has committed; to die for our sake, to liberate us, who came to be the dead of the world because of our sins.

The devil keeps on persecuting the church – the body of Christ – so that all would dwell in the darkness of Hades, being the dead of the world. But he, who attach himself to Christ, may die in the body, yet will enjoy the resurrection through the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ.

❖ ***“For the enemy has persecuted my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground”***. Here, the Head is talking on our behalf. It is obvious that the devil has persecuted the soul of Christ, and that of Judas. And up till now, he keeps on persecuting the body of Christ, and the followers of Judas as well.

What does the devil seek from persecuting us; except to make us lose our heavenly hope, submit to him, and love the earthlies?

***“He has made me dwell in darkness like those who have long been dead”***. This you can perceive more, concerning the Head, who

truly died for our sake. Yet He is not one of those of the world, who died out of their worthiness, in their own sins, as the fruit of the original sin that came down to them; according to the words: “*In sin, my mother conceived me*” (Psalm 51: 5).

He, on the other hand, says: [I consummate the will of My Father; Yet I do not deserve death, for I did nothing to die for; but it is my mission to die, so that by the death of the Righteous, those who are committed to die, would be liberated<sup>1</sup>].

**(St. Augustine)**

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, he who falls in the snares of the enemy, would deny himself of the Sun of Righteousness, and would dwell in darkness like the dead; his spirit would fail, his heart would be disturbed within him, to find no comfort from anyone. The work of the devil is to corrupt the insight of man, to be impossible for him to look at the Sun of Righteousness.

He also says about those who fall into the despair of sin: [There will be no peace for them, nor a spirit free of anxiety, but, for them, the time would rather be difficult; neither day nor night would protect them against the tempest which would strike them on all sides; even if there are no disturbance outside, it would be as the though the enemy dwells within themselves, torturing them on every aspect.

They would look with envy to the good of others, and their minds would suffer to see others in prosperity].

❖ “*For the enemy has persecuted my soul*”. While understanding this to concern king Saul, who kept on chasing David as his worst enemy, It could also be spiritually understood, to concern the greatest enemy, namely, Satan, who keeps on chasing those who belong to God.

How can we get rid of that chase? ... If we find for ourselves somewhere he cannot enter?

Where could this place be, other than heaven? ... But how can we get there?

Just listen to the words of the apostle Paul who reveals that, although we are bound to the body, yet we can live there in heaven. He says: “*Seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God*” (Colossians 3: 1); And also: “*For our citizenship is in heaven*” (Philippians 3: 20) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 143 (142).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 142.

❖ *“For the enemy has persecuted me”*. No need to say that the enemy is Satan.

*“He has crushed my life to the ground”*. I had before two wings to fly up with; But now, the enemy persecutes me, captivates me; and put my hands and feet in chains.

*“He has made me dwell in darkness, like those who have long been dead”*. Like those who have long been dead, although they are not truly dead! ... How is that? ... Because he is contrite in heart.... He who sins and does not repent has long been dead! ... the enemy intends for me. not to be remorseful on my sins which he provoked me to commit<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ There are several kinds of humiliation; Some are good, like when man humiliates himself and becomes humble. Another kind, when man is humiliated because of his pride; Or because of the calamities in this world, like what happened to the righteous ‘Job’; And when man is humiliated because of sin.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

*“Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is distressed” (4)*

The psalmist feels that he has reached the climax of bitterness; his soul became utterly helpless; his heart lost its vitality, and he came to be almost senseless.

On the other hand, the Lord Christ, through His own free will, received death, and has gone through it, to raise us together with Him ... He cried Out, saying: *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death”* (Matthew 26: 38).

❖ *“My soul is extremely sorrowful, even to death”*. Here we hear one voice, going from the Head to the members; and from the members to the Head<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

*“I remember the days of old; I meditate in all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands” (5)*

By *“the days of old”* he means God’s dealings and care for him in the past; as well as His dealings with the believers. Like the men of God in the Old Covenant. The psalmist finds his hope in the Lord through His promises to his fathers. *“You will give truth to Jacob, and*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps., homily 53 on Ps. 142 (143).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 143 (142).

*mercy to Abraham , which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old” (Micah 7: 20).*

As to the believers of the New Covenant; Together with remembering God’s dealings and promises to men of God, they are filled with hope in Jesus Christ, in Whom the divine promises to the fathers, and the end of the law, are realized; according to the words of the apostle: *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10: 4).*

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the psalmist, meditating in the days of old through the Holy Book, which presents to us the dealings of God with the early believers; he becomes filled with hope. Hence the apostle Paul says: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3: 16).*

And according to **St. Augustine**, the Lord Christ received His true passion, and His Spirit, is overwhelmed within Him; not because of a sin he has committed, but out of His love for us; ... We, in our turn, should partake of His passions with whole love, meditate in His works, and contemplate in the works of His hands in creating us and saving us.

❖ *“I remember the days of old”*; I remember the days that passed, when I used to have confidence; but now, I am in an all dark night<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

*“I spread out my hands to You; My soul longs for You like a thirsty land” (6)*

In the preceding psalm the psalmist talks about spreading his hands like an evening sacrifice. Here, he spreads them to proclaim the thirst of his soul to God; It is like a thirsty land anticipating the rain of the Holy Spirit, to water it, and to turn it into a divine paradise.

Attaching ourselves to the Crucified, we spread our hands together with Him. Yet, carrying no water, and proclaiming our thirst to Him, He waters us with His grace, to carry the fruit of the Spirit.

❖ He says: *“I spread out my hands to You, my soul longs for You like a thirsty land”*. Rain on it. O Lord, to make it bring forth good fruits. .... *“Yes, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase” (Psalm 85: 12).* Spreading my hands to You, O Lord, my soul longs for You like land without water; it longs for... . I can thirst for You, but I cannot water myself<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps., homily 53 on Ps. 142 (143).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 143 (142).

(St. Augustine)

❖ *“I spread out my hands to You”*. Revealing the deep feelings in his heart, he is as though jumping out of his body and running toward Him. Being inspired by all the great works of God, and meditating in his compassion and teachings that benefit him in his tribulation ... he seeks refuge in Him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ *“I spread out my hands to You”*. Being chained by the enemy, I can do nothing, but repent my sins, and spread out my hands to you in supplication.

*“My soul longs for You like a thirsty land”*. Like a thirsty land, so dry to beg for water; my soul, longs for You and thirsts for You, O Her God<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Remembering the works of God in old days, giving help to the oppressed, and comfort to the sorrowful; The psalmist exhorts them to spread their hands in supplication to God; puts hope in their souls; and instigates them to lean upon God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ If you wish to have back the heat that has forsaken you; ... Make a covenant with God; Say to Him:: [Forgive me my past slothfulness; ... I shall never disobey You again].

To keep yourself from any slothfulness in the future, you should not have the least of physical or mental rest, but reveal your thoughts before the Lord day and night; ... Cry unceasingly before Him, and rebuke your soul with sorrow, saying: [ How could I become so slothful so far? How have I become so barren all those days?].

And in order to remember the day of judgment and the eternal kingdom, you should perpetually reprove yourself, saying: [How could I live in such slothfulness, when God has granted me all these honors?].

He submitted all the creation to me, and yet, I am disobedient!

Once you keep saying that to your soul, reproving her day and night, the divine heat will soon come back to you; yet in a better way than before on every aspect.

Feeling much disturbed, the blessed David says: *“I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times, ... I meditate*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 143.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps., homily 53 on Ps. 142 (143).

within my heart” (Psalm 77: 5, 6); And, “*I remember the days of old; I meditate in all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands; I spread my hands to You; My soul longs for You like a thirsty land*” (Psalm 143: 5, 6).

Once you get back the heat within, you will dedicate yourself to meditate in the greatness of God; and you will be saved by the grace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, forever, Amen<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Maccari the Great)

## 2- ANSWER ME, O LORD:

*“Answer me speedily, O Lord! My spirit fails! Do not hide Your face from me, lest I be like those who go down into the pit” (7)*

The psalmist often repeats the word “*speedily*”; as though he is in a continuous state of emergency, seeking a quick rescue, as though on the verge of death. On another aspect, he daringly seek from God a quick action.

When God delays His response, we assume that He has hidden His face from us; hence the psalmist asks Him not to hide his face from him, whatever his sins are. as that would be a verdict of death against him. According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the true cause for this delay is our sins; as, according to the prophet Isaiah: “*Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ears heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear*” (Isaiah 59: 1, 2)... It is as though the sinner falls into a pit, and is in need of the ropes of the Holy Book to bind his will, and lift him up from the pit.

**St. John Chrysostom** calls upon us to realize that, saying: [If, after our fall, our heart does not fail, and do not despair, but sing to ourselves those inspired words: “*Will they fall and not rise?*” (Jeremiah 8: 4); and also, “*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the day of trial in the wilderness*” (Psalm 95: 7, 8), We shall then bind ourselves with these thoughts, and withdraw ourselves from the pit<sup>2</sup>.

❖ “*Answer me speedily, O Lord*”. There is no need for more delay to satisfy my thirst; ... if I am already, with zeal, thirst for You!

You have delayed the rain, to let me drink from Your abundance, which I have previously rejected. ... Now grant me the rain, for my spirit fails; Let Your Spirit fill me.

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<sup>1</sup> الرسالة السابعة 5-6 (فردوس الآباء).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 143.

Answer me speedily; O Lord; Now, as I am poor in spirit; Grant me to be blessed in the kingdom of God (Matthew 5: 3)

**“Do not hide Your face from me”**. You hid it from me when I become proud.

It so happened; having been in a state of satisfaction, I became puffed up, saying *“I shall never be moved”*; not perceiving Your righteousness and support. ... To prove to me that what I have of satisfaction is from You, *“You hid Your face from me, and I was troubled”* (Psalm 30: 6, 7).

I was spiritually troubled, my heart was disturbed within me; and I became like a thirsty land.

You hid Your face from me when I became proud. Now, reveal it again to me, for I am in humiliation.

If You hide Your face from me, I become like those who go down into the pit.

Do not allow the pit to shut its mouth on me<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ **“Answer me speedily, O Lord, my spirit fails”**. What is he saying?! ... Would the physician be hastened to give his treatment? ... No, yet this is how the spirits under temptation moan; those who suffer always hasten the physician, even though it may be too early to give them comfort. ... Here, the psalmist gives the reason for hastening: *“My spirit fails”* ... Certainly God, who is capable of raising from the dead, can do that, even before the due time<sup>2</sup>!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ **“Answer me speedily, O Lord, my spirit fails”**. My soul is unconscious within me; my body fails; O Lord, have mercy on me<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

**“Cause me to hear Your loving kindness in the morning, for in You do I trust. Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You” (8)**

He longs to hear the voice of the Lord, for His words are sweet and satisfactory, and reveal God’s loving kindness, compassion, and mercy.

The divine guidance is indispensable, for we do not know the Way, unless “the Way” presents Himself to us, to be attached to Him, to

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 143 (142).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 143.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps., homily 53 on Ps. 142 (143).

be united with Him, to taste the sweetness of His cross, and to consummate the mission set for us by the Savior.

❖ Behold, I am going through the darkness of the night; Yet, “*in You do I trust*”, until the iniquity of the night passes by. And as St. Peter the apostle says: “*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). ... “*In the morning*”; so he calls the time following the end of the world, when we shall come to see what we believe in, here in this world.

But how about here, until the morning dwells? ... It is not enough to hope for the morning; we have to do something!

What shall we do? We should seek by “*spreading our hands to the Lord*”; Namely, seek by the good works.

That is how we are committed to hope for the morning: We should endure the night, and persist on perseverance until dawn. ... Why should we do that? ... Lest you may think that you are doing something by yourselves, by which you are qualified to reach up to the morning, he adds: “*Cause me to know the way in which I should walk*”<sup>1</sup> (8).

(St. Augustine)

❖ He does not just say: “*Cause me to know the way in which I should walk*”, but adds: “*for I lift up my soul to You*”; Namely, Longing for You; I stir up at You<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*Cause me to know the way in which I should walk*” ... Cause me to know Your Christ who says: “*I am the Way*” (John 14: 6)<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ He says: “*In the morning*”; Speedily, O Lord, give me the good news of Your mercy; Cause me to know the way that leads me to You. That is the work that gives You pleasure; And it is the way on which he walks, he who lifts himself up from the love of the world to the love of God.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

“*Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies; In You I take shelter*”

(9)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 143 (142).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 143.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps., homily 53 on Ps. 142 (143).

The continuous threats of the enemies, and their hidden and manifest opposition to him, let him take shelter in the Lord to save him.

❖ ***“Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies; In You I take shelter”*** (9).

I, who has once flown away from You; Now I fly to You.

When Adam flew from the face of God, and hid among the trees of paradise, he was likened in the book of job to “a servant who flew from the face of his master, and found a shade” (Job 7: 2 LXX).

Woe to me if I stay in the shade, lest it would be later said: *“All things vanish like a shadow”* (Wisdom 5: 9).

You should fight against the wicked rulers of this world, the devil and his hosts.

Great is Your strife; for although you do not see your enemies, yet you overcome them<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ He who does not take shelter in men, takes shelter in God; who will save him from his enemies, both hidden and manifest.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

### **3- TEACH US TO DO YOUR WILL:**

***“Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; Let Your good Spirit lead me on a level path”*** (10)

With every enjoyment of conquest, we perceive more our need for the Holy Spirit of God to teach us the divine Truth.

It is befitting of the believer in the midst of his tribulation to cry out to God, to grant him the work of His Holy Spirit, who guides and leads us to do according to His pleasure, or His divine will; to lead us on a level path, to reach the land of the living.

We need, not only to learn, but also to be practically trained, on the life of obedience to God, and on doing His divine will. The Holy Spirit alone, is able to lead us on a level path, where there are no hidden dangers.

**St. Jerome** used this to answer the followers of Arius, who claim that, God the Father is greater than the Son, and is alone “Good”.... Now, if the Holy Spirit, who is counted by them as inferior to the Son, is called “**Good**” by the psalmist, How would the Son not be “Good” as well?

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 143 (142).

❖ **“Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God”**.... What a glorious confession! ... He says: *‘For You are my God’*. If it was someone else who created me, I would hasten to him to recreate me! ... Shall I search for a Father to have inheritance? You are my God, who, not only grants me an inheritance, but He is, Himself, my inheritance! ... Shall I look for a support to give me life, and get redemption? You are my God.

Say: **“Your good Spirit leads me on a level path”**; For my own spirit leads me on a twisted path.

What should I deserve? And what is the worth of my good works, without Your help? By which I would get, and become worthy of being led by You Good Spirit on a level path<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The Holy Spirit is called “Good” for He is God, and by His authority He leads the believers on a level path, which is the land of the living, and the place of the righteous.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ He did not just say: **“Teach me Your will”**, but said: **“Teach me to do Your will”**, according to Your pleasure. Namely, Lead me to do Your will practically. As there is need for grace to learn it from up there, to walk along the way of virtue; not to stay idle, but to contribute in what You, Yourself do.

**“For You are my God”**. Notice how he presents his spiritual request? ... not to acquire anything, nor to realize glory; but to consummate the will of God; the treasure of all goodness, an inexhaustible wealth; the beginning; the root; the way; and the goal of God’s pleasure.

**“Let Your good Spirit lead me on a level path”** (10). Notice how we should learn and be trained to consummate our journey by the Holy

Spirit. Hence the apostle Paul says: *“For God has revealed them to us through His Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 2: 10). ...

**“On a level path”**.... Superficially, he would mean (his homeland); Yet, spiritually, he means the path leading to virtue ... For nothing is well paved and smooth-going, like virtue, in which there is no fears or disturbances<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 143 (142).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 143.

❖ Do you think that the apostle contradicts himself when he says that men become learned through the work of the Holy Spirit, who gives them instructions, how, and what to do? ... Or we are committed to understand that, although it is the duty of men to keep on learning, and the teachers to keep on teaching; Yet, once the Holy Spirit gives, “*Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God gives the increase*” (1 Corinthians 3: 7). ... Therefore, although we have saints and saintly angels, designated to help us; Yet no one learns the things concerning life with God “*on a level path*”, unless God, Himself, is ready to teach him; He, to whom David in his psalm prays: “*Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God*” (Psalm 143: 10) <sup>1</sup>.

❖ It is rather befitting of us to hasten to recognize the work of God, more than our own work. For, whatever ministering we do, we are still indebted to Him, and not to men; Hence the apostle says: “*Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase*”<sup>2</sup>.

If even the apostles themselves, could not realize anything unless God gives the increase; how much more would it be as far as we, or anybody who boasts to be a teacher, are concerned<sup>3</sup>?

(St. Augustine)

❖ We cannot deny that the Lord Himself said to His disciples about the Holy Spirit: “*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of Truth has come, He will guide you into all truth*” (John 16: 12, 13). About whom David also said: “*Your good Spirit leads me on a level path*” (Psalm 143:10).

The Son of God came; and having not yet sent His Holy Spirit, He proclaimed that, without the Holy Spirit, we were living like little children; Yet, once He comes, He will transform those little children to mature men of more strength, through their spiritual growth. He so made clear, not to put the strength of the Spirit in the first place, but to reveal that the perfection of strength would be realized through the Holy Trinity<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Christian Doctrine 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ep. 144: 1.

<sup>3</sup> Letter 193.

<sup>4</sup> Of The Holy Spirit, 3: 99.

❖ Who is the Holy Spirit, but the perfection of goodness? He, who, although we cannot get His nature, yet we can get His goodness; ... He fills everything by His authority; but it is only the righteous who enjoy fellowship in Him; ... He is simple in His essence; rich in His virtues; present for everyone; Although He gives what is His to everyone; yet He is present in His wholeness everywhere<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

❖ Any endeavor to reach knowledge of the law itself, could not be realized through actively reading it, but through God's guidance and enlightenment. Hence the psalmist says: "*Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths*" (Psalm 25: 4); And, "*Open my eyes that I may see, wondrous things from Your law*" (Psalm 119: 18); And, "*Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God*" (Psalm 143: 10); And, "*He who instructs the nations*" (Psalm 94: 10). ... David goes even further to seek the understanding from God, to be able to perceive God's commandments, although he surely knows that they are all written in the book of law; he says: "*I am Your servant, give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies*" (Psalm 119: 125).

Although David surely had the understanding by nature; and had perfect knowledge of God's commandments, written in the book of law, Yet he keeps praying to God to teach him the law more perfectly; ... What he has got of understanding by nature, would not be enough for him, unless God enlightens his understanding on a daily basis, to let him understand the law spiritually, and to perceive God's precepts more clearly.

The apostle Paul, the chosen vessel, proclaimed the same thing by saying: "*For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure*" (Philippians 2: 13). ... How would it be more clear, that our pleasure, and the perfect consummation of our work, would be realized through God? ... And, "*You were granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake*"<sup>1</sup>;

Here, he proclaims that our repentance, faith, and endurance of sufferings; are all a gift from God.

The same thing is taught by David, when he prays to be so granted from God, saying: "*Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us*" (Psalm 68: 28); proclaiming that it is not enough to be granted the

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<sup>1</sup> *Of The Holy Spirit, I: 72.*

beginning of salvation, as a gift and grace from God, but we pray to Him to consummate it with His same compassion and continuous help.

For, it is not through our free will, *“But the Lord gives freedom to the prisoners”*

It is not by our own strength, *“The Lord raises those who are bowed down”*

It is not by active reading, *“The Lord opens the eyes of the blind”*

It is not we who care, *“The Lord watches over the strangers”*

It is not we who support, *“The Lord relieves the fatherless and the widow”* (Psalm 146: 7-9) <sup>1</sup>.

**(Abba Pavnottius)**

❖ *“Your good Spirit leads me in the land of the righteous”* (Psalm 143: 10); where we practice our works. Although some brethren may not be here with us, because of work, or of their far away dwelling places; Yet, we have to consummate the commitments of the congregation without hesitation; For the Lord Himself says: *“where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18: 20).

**(St. Basil the Great)**

#### **4- REVIVE US FOR YOUR NAME’S SAKE:**

*“Revive me, O Lord, for Your name’s sake! For Your righteousness’ sake bring my soul out of trouble”* (11)

If we, together with the psalmist, feel that *“our life is crushed to the ground”* (3), and that we have become like dead; No one can raise us from the tomb but Our Savior Himself.

That is why, together with the psalmist, we resort to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to enjoy the eternal life, we seek His righteousness, for He is the way to bring our soul out of trouble.

❖ Attend, therefore, to the praise of the grace by which we are freely saved: *“Revive me, O Lord, for Your name’s sake, by Your righteousness”*; not on account of my own righteousness, or of my own worthiness; for I only deserve to be punished by You. Yet, despite my worthlessness, You purify me, grant me Your gifts, and *“You bring my soul out of trouble”* <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 3: 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 143* (142).

❖ **“Revive me, O Lord, for Your name’s sake”**. Notice how the psalmist, again, takes refuge in God, and does not trust in this life. **“For Your righteousness’ sake, bring my soul out of trouble”**. ... Do you see how he truly – as I said before – calls compassion, “righteousness!”

**“Bring my soul out of trouble”**. **“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation”** (Mark 14: 38) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Not because of my own goodness and my own virtue; but of Your mercy, and the glorification of Your name, **“You revive me by Your righteousness, and bring my soul out of trouble”**.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

**“In Your mercy, cut off my enemies, and destroy all those who afflict my soul; for I am Your servant”** (12)

Cutting off the devil, is out of God’s mercy, and of His righteousness, at the same time.

❖ **“In Your mercy, cut off my enemies”**; Not on account of my worthiness, but of Your mercy, You let me overcome those who fight me; You save me from those who plot intrigues against me; and You bring my soul out of trouble.

**“And destroy all those who afflict my soul, for I am your servant”**.... Notice again how it is not easy for our supplication to be heard, without making ourselves worthy; and without contributing on our side, with what we should. ... Mere prayers would not be enough in itself; For the Jews have prayed, and the divine response was: **“Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear”** (Isaiah 1: 15). ... Why should you marvel, if Ezekiel, himself, was not heard; when it is said to him: **“Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness, says the Lord God”** (Ezekiel 14: 14); namely, they will not deliver their sons and daughters.

You should, therefore perceive, that, together with prayers, we should make ourselves worthy to receive the blessings, both the present, and those to come<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 143.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 143.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 143  
TO YOU ALONE, I CRY OUT**

- ❖ To whom shall I cry out but to You?  
For You are perpetually faithful in Your promises;  
You promised to incline Your ear to Your servants;  
Being close to them, You are perpetually ready to listen to them;  
Let me then, prepare myself to approach You;  
For You are the Way and the Truth;  
Walking along it, I shall encounter You;  
Clothed by You, You will cover me with Your truth and Your righteousness;  
You will respond to me by Your grace;  
And will flood me with Your abundance;  
I have nothing to present by myself;  
But to seek Your mercy, truth, and righteousness.
- ❖ In You, alone, I take refuge;  
For You are a merciful, and a long suffering God;  
No one would be justified before You, not even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;  
Yet, You chastise with righteousness,  
So as to motivate us to return to You;  
To grace us with the riches of Your mercy.  
Before You, not even a babe one day old will be justified;  
Yet, You “*desire all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth*” (1 Timothy 2: 4) “ (  
Nothing could defend us before You, other than taking refuge in You.  
Absalom, the beloved son took the situation of animosity’  
He would not have less than his father David’s head, beside his throne;  
He wished for his own father to enter into the darkness of the grave;  
With no crime against him done by his father;  
For that, David was crushed within himself;  
And experienced sitting in darkness together with the dead;  
Who could liberate him from the darkness of the grave, but You?
- ❖ Behold, O My God, the enemy attempts to bring me down into the darkness of Hades;  
He finds pleasure in my destruction;  
And his happiness in my eternal perdition;

Grant me the wings of the spirit to be able to fly;  
Hearing Your voice, O the Resurrection, I set forth to You;  
You carry me up to your heavens, and bring me forth to the bosoms  
of Your heavenly Father;  
Neither the gates of the pit, nor the locks of Hades, could keep my  
soul away, or could stand before You;  
For You are the Mighty Liberator of my soul.

- ❖ Who could feel the bitterness of my soul but You?  
O who, by Your own free will, went through the death on the cross;  
Looking at what I have reached;  
You cried out, saying: “*My soul is very sorrowful even to death*”  
You did not fear death, through which You went forth by Your own  
free will;  
Yet You are sorrowful for the sake of the fallen souls;  
Which refuse to accept resurrection by You from the dead.
- ❖ Remembering the time of old, my soul is filled with the splendor of  
Your love;  
Your works testify to the might of Your plan for salvation;  
You are the amazing Savior of the world;  
You are the Helper of those who have no one to help;  
And the hope for those who attach themselves to You;  
You, alone, is capable of raising me from the death of sin;  
And of bringing me forth to the heavenly glories  
I prostrate myself at Your feet, and spread my hands toward You;  
What would I seek more than to have my soul satisfied with the water  
of Your love?  
My soul is like a dry land, thirsty for You;  
Your cross transforms it into a fruitful and a joyful paradise;  
You rain over it with the water of Your Holy Spirit;  
That my depths would bear the fruits of the heavenly Spirit;  
And perpetually renew my works;  
To restore its lost divine image; and enjoy the riches of Your exalted  
grace.
- ❖ I confess to You that I have foolishly fallen into pride;  
I assumed that I am capable of getting satisfied by myself;  
You hid Your face from me, to let me perceive my foolishness;  
Now, my soul is like a dry land;  
My depths need to get satisfied by You.

- ❖ Make haste to me, and let Your Holy Spirit water my soul;  
Make haste to me; for I am in the danger of death;  
For there is no life for me, except by being attached to You.
- ❖ I cry out to You; Proclaim Yourself to me;  
You are the Way; Carry me in You, and let me to walk toward You;  
Lift me up to You, and bring me forth into Your bosoms;  
Having escaped from You, I deprived myself of Your face;  
Now, I escape back to you, to enjoy life;  
I take refuge in You; for you let me subdue the devil and all his hosts.
- ❖ I cry out to You; Let Your Holy Spirit guide me;  
Let Him lead me to do according to Your holy will;  
Let me walk on a level path, away from dangers;  
Let Him dwell in my depths, and take me up, as though to heavens;  
Let Him keep my feet from stumbling in the snares of this world;  
Let Him keep my soul from perverting to the right or to the left, away  
from the fellowship with You;  
Let Him open up my insight, to grow in the knowledge of Your  
precepts;  
And to work according to Your divine pleasure;  
Let Him renew my youth like an eagle;  
Let Him accompany us along the divine path;  
Let Him keep, help, liberate, and control us.
- ❖ I cry out to You; I have nothing to present to You;  
But Your holy Name intercedes for me;  
For its sake, You raise me up, as though from death, O the  
Resurrection;  
By Your righteousness, You bring our souls out of trouble;  
By Your mercy, You scatter the evil plots and the works of the devil;  
You liberate me from his servitude;  
To practice sonship to Your heavenly Father;  
And to enjoy the glory of the children;  
By You, You qualify us for the sonhood;  
And by You, we enjoy the deposit of heaven, while we are still in the  
flesh;  
And by You, we inherit the glories You prepare for us.

## ***PSALM 144***

### **THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE**

The prophet David presents to us a praise of thanksgiving to God who trains His children on resisting, and fighting against the devil; to discover the Person of the Lord, the Savior, His work, and His exalted dealings. Here, the psalmist stands confused, as he finds no human language to express the truth of God's love for His church, and for every one of its members, believing in Him.

It is one of the psalms of battles, that helps us in our spiritual battle against the devil and his hosts. We are in need of the Lord Himself to lead the battle by His cross, and to train us on the spiritual battles before entering into them.

In ourselves, we are nothing, but God loves us and prepares us by Himself, to be qualified by His possibilities, to enter into the spiritual battles. Not always telling us how He prepares us, it is befitting of us to deliver our lives into His hands, trusting that He will always grant conquest to His true believers.

When the Lord allowed for David, in his youth, to fight against a lion and a wolf; he did not perceive then, that He was preparing him for the battle against the mighty Goliath.

It deems fit for us to arm ourselves, every morning, with the weapons of God, mentioned in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians 6: 10-18; to be ready to hear the sound of the horn. Seeing by the living faith, God's strong hand working in and by us, we would never fear to enter into the Lord's battle; for He will never forsake us (2 Chronicles 20: 14-19).

It deems fit for us to present a praise of thanksgiving to the Lord for supporting us as individuals (9-11), as families (12), and as a congregation (13-15).

**1- God, my Rock and my loving-kindness 1 - 4**

**2- When will Your incarnation be realized? 5 - 10**

**3- A deceptive enemy 11**

**4- Why does God allow for the opposition of the enemy? 12 - 15**

#### **The title:**

**A song to the Lord who preserves and prospers His people. A psalm of David.**

According to the Septuagint version it came as: Of David, concerning his battle against Goliath.

❖ Although the title of this psalm came with few words, yet it is loaded with secrets. About that battle of David which happened in the days of our fathers, the Holy Book tells us that David put five stones in his pouch, but he struck the Philistine with just one stone. ... Five books were chosen, but their unity prevailed; ... he slung it, and struck the Philistine in his forehead, who fell on his face to the ground. David then took the sword of Goliath, and cut his head with it (1 Samuel 17). ... When the Lord Christ struck the devil by his weapons, the elites who were under his authority turned their tongues to work against the devil; ... Goliath's head was cut by his own sword<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### **1- GOD, MY ROCK, AND MY LOVINGKINDNESS:**

***“Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle” (1)***

The psalmist praises the Lord; for He is everything in his battle in this life; by Him he is trained to confront the enemy; He is the Rock in whom he hides from the vicious devil, and on which the serpent cannot crawl to reach the believer dwelling in it.

❖ These are our words if we are the body of Christ.

Both our **“hands”** and our **“fingers”** work; but,

By the fingers we can recognize the diversity of work, with some kind of unity.

By those fingers, the body of Christ fights, and make battle.

By works of loving kindness, we can defeat our enemy. Which we cannot have, unless we have love. And we shall have no love, unless we receive it by the Holy Spirit. ...

He, therefore, ***“trains our hands for war, and our fingers for battle”***. We can truly say to Him: ***“You are my loving kindness or my mercy”***, as by Him we can be merciful; ***“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy”*** (James 2: 13) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle”*** . ***“Let us lift our hands in prayers, without wrath and doubting”*** (1 Timothy 2: 8). For every time we do that, our prayer would become a weapon against the devil. ... Our prayer is our harp<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps., homily 54 on Ps. 143 (144).

(St. Jerome)

❖ Saying that God is the Trainer on wars, fights, and battles, is not far from the truth; and is not a sin. He trains my hands for war, means that He makes me overcome my enemy. When David killed Goliath, God was the One responsible for the conquest; and the same was true when he fought several wars with success; Hence He praises the Lord in his psalms, saying: “*The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle*” (Psalm 24: 8). He did the same with the prophet Moses.

A worse war, for which we need a special grace from high above, is when we enter into battle against opponent hosts, described by the apostle Paul by the words: “*For 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) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ This does not mean that God instigates wars, and stirs up evil, ... far from it! But it means that by Him, conquest is realized for His beloved, and the defeat for His enemies.... That is why the prophet refers his conquest over Goliath to God, and not to the strength of his own hands.

We, Christians, having been saved from the (mental) Babylon, namely, the sin, by the holy baptism, and faith in Christ, We still have to confront another enemy, more fierce than the seen sensed one; on account of that it is against unseen hosts of a nature different from ours; And the strife between us and those hosts is a matter of life and death; namely, for the sake of the salvation or perdition of our souls.

We cannot see our adversaries, nor can we choose the field, or know the time of battle, for it is all the time and everywhere; with no pause or a time-out; with no intermediaries to go in between, and with no media to announce it.

We, therefore should always be alert on every aspect; Our shields of defense are keeping the commandments of God.; Our sustaining provisions, are studying the holy books; and seeking help from God who trains our hands for war against the devilish hosts, and our fingers for crossing our foreheads, hearts, left, and right. ... By such a sign we fight and overcome the adversary hosts; for it is the cross of Him, who saved us by His shrouds, let us prevail upon our enemies, and supports us by His protection.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

***“My loving kindness and my fortress; my high tower and my deliverer, my shield and the One in whom I take refuge, who subdues my people under me” (2)***

God deals with the true believers, who are serious in their life, on the principle of divine mercy (or His loving kindness). God embraces His believers in the midst of the battle of life; For them, He is the safe refuge, the fortress to which they flee and live in security, and the tower from which they can perceive the dimensions of the battle; ... He will be the Grantor of conquest to those who trust in Him.

Who is this “*people*” whom man needs God to subdue under him, but the senses, emotions, and thoughts, namely, his inner man?! ...For Jesus Christ, the King of kings, lets us have authority over our inner depths through the work of His Holy Spirit, and of His divine grace.

❖ ***“My loving kindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer”***. What a great strife for the warrior, whose body covets against his spirit. Let us hold fast to this, to realize what we desire; until the time comes when, “*death is swallowed up in victory*” (1 Corinthians 15: 54); when that mortal body is transformed into an angelic form, and is lifted up to a heavenly level ... When there would be life and good days, ... when there is no lust against the spirit; ... when it would not be said: “fight”, no more, but “rejoice”; ... for then, every man would say: “Here I am”.

Learn how to say: ***“My loving kindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield”***.... Let me say, “*my high tower*”, so as not to fall; ... “*my deliverer*”, so as not to be stabbed; ... “*my shield*”, so as not to be stricken. In the midst of all my strife, ...of all my battles, ... of all my troubles, I shall find in Him my hope, “***the One who subdues my people under me***”.

Notice how our Head talks to us<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“My loving kindness and my fortress, my high tower and my deliverer, my shield”***. That is how the psalmist talks to God, who has more of these titles.

***“The One who subdues my people under me”***. He so says in the name of Christ concerning His incarnation. So can the apostles talk, and

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

so can the head of a monastery give thanks to God, and say: [Blessed be the Lord my God who subdues my people under me; They are not subdued under me, O Lord, but under You; they obey me to serve You<sup>1</sup>].

(St. Jerome)

❖ Notice how he supplicates to God seeking salvation, based on His “*loving kindness*”, Or how he would rather say: ....I am not worthy of His mercy against His will; for He is my mercy. ... He means to say: I do not seek it through my works. For although He is “*Mercy*”, yet, not everyone enjoys it on an equal basis; for “*He says to Moses: ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion’*” (Romans 9: 15).

The psalmist means to say that he receives the gift of mercy, itself, on such basis (that God is merciful); ... Do you notice his contrite spirit? ... Do you see His thanksgiving behavior? .... Do you see how he refers everything to the loving God?

“My support, my deliverer, my shield, the One in whom I hope”. By having his hope perpetually in God, he counsels everyone not to be swallowed by troubles, but in the midst of calamities, to concentrate his eyes up there, not to despair nor be faint-hearted; for God will always be, above anything, his support and deliverer<sup>2</sup>.

❖ “*The One who subdues my people under me*”. There is need for help and divine grace from high above, not only to subdue enemies and adversaries, but even to subdue his own people, as well, to have them obey him, and not to rebel against him<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Lord, what is man, that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that you are mindful of him? (3)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “*Lord, what is man, that You appeared to him? Or the son of man that You prepared for him?*”

Before God’s exalted love and care for man, providing him with everything he needs for the sake of his happiness, satisfaction, joy, and perpetual growth, the psalmist stands in awe, to marvel: *What is man, that God does all that for his sake? And take such knowledge of him?*

Man is the only creature God created according to His image, gave authority over all the other creatures on earth, honored by giving

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps., homily 54 on Ps. 143 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 144.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 144.

him His commandment; and above anything else, for whose sake, the Word of God incarnated, and became man to save him from corruption, to restore to him his lost honor, to open the gates of heaven before him, and to grant him eternal glory, etc.... Man, to whom God granted all those exalted gifts, is nothing but dust, and his days on earth pass like a swift shadow.

The Lord Christ says to the wicked, on the great day of the Lord: *"I do not know you"* ... *"Knowledge"* here, is not the mental knowledge, and the perception of the truth and features of the person, but that of experience and attachment of love. So is man's knowledge of God; It is that of encountering Him, abidance in Him, and fellowship with Him.

Just contemplate in the greatness of God's perception of you; *"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) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ It is a great thing that man is the object of God's knowledge!

The psalmist does not say: "What is man to know You?", but says: *"What is man, that You take knowledge of him?"*... Paul goes farther to say: *"Now I know in part, but then, I shall know just as I also am known"* (1 Corinthians 13: 12); And the Lord Christ also said to His disciples: *"You did not choose Me, but I chose you"* (John 15: 16); And, in another location Paul also says: *"If anyone loves God, this one is known to Him"* (1 Corinthians 8: 3) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ ***"Lord, what is man, that You take knowledge of him, or the son of man, that You are mindful of him?"*** (3). Here, the psalmist refers to the frailty and weakness of human body!

If you consider his body, *"what is man?"*... But If you consider his spirit, he is of an exalted level.

I wish we, therefore, not despise the body that will reign in heaven together with Christ,,,,, for *"flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 15: 50). It is not the flesh and blood themselves, but the works of the body; ... How will they inherit together with Christ?; *"How shall we sit in heaven, together with Christ?"* (Ephesians 2: 6) <sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 144.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps., homily 54 on Ps. 143 (144).

(St. Jerome)

***“Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow” (4)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as:  
***“Man is like vanity; his days are like a passing shadow”.***

Man is like a swift passing shadow, a breath, as though he has never been.... On one aspect, we glorify God who cares for us, and prepares eternal glories for us; And on another aspect, we should have no fear of any man, who would be, but for a limited time.

❖ ***“Man is like vanity; his days are like a passing shadow”.***

What is ***“vanity”***? It is time that passes by and disappears.

“Truth” holds fast and never fails; for it is the work of God’s hand...

It is written: *“God has filled the earth with His goodness”*;

Whereas those earthly things that disappear and pass away, if compared to the “Truth” who proclaims: *“I AM WHO I AM”* (Exodus 3: 14), are all *‘vanity’*, that pass away with time, like smoke in the air. ... And as said by the apostle James: *“What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away”* (James 4: 14) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Concerning the body, it is described by Abraham as *“dust and ashes”* (Genesis 18: 27), and by Isaiah, saying: *“All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field”* (Isaiah 40: 6).

“Like vanity” means (as though nothing). Nothing human holds fast, it eventually passes away and disappears.

***“His days are like a passing shadow”***, If you think of those who now occupy prominent positions, and have high authority, they may soon be cast in prison and scourged! ... How could they differ from a shadow, not just at the moment of their death, but even before that. ... Today he may be a judge, and tomorrow he would be a defendant<sup>2</sup>!

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ ***“Man is like a breath, his days are like a passing shadow”***. I have been a child, then a teenager, then a youth, then a full grown man; and before long I will be an elder, toward which death crawls.

I change on a daily basis; and do not perceive that I am actually nothing!

We, not even for a single moment, notice the passing time!

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 144.

No one perceives that he is heading toward death ... “*Life is like a passing shadow*”<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Some tend to consider the whole human race as nothing, based on what psalm 144: 4 proclaims that man is just a breath.

Many wish to live long, and many count the days of youth as happy time. Yet every stage of life has its own misery: when we despise our young age, saying: Why are we not older? And when we are grey-haired, we wish to have our young days back. .... As there is no limit for the things that would make us miserable, there is only one way to escape, namely, the way of virtue. Although even this way has its own sorrows, yet, together with sorrow, it certainly has its benefits and fruits<sup>2</sup>.

- ❖ It so seems that the prophet means those who are sojourners from God, who pervert from the way of truth, whose life is filled with evil habits, who love vanity, and who often talk nonsense.

(St. John Chrysostom)

- ❖ Man, created in the image of God, could not be counted as a breath; whereas he who lost this image by falling into sin, and going down into material desires, such a person is positively counted as a breath<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

## 2- WHEN WILL YOUR INCARNATION BE REALIZED?

**“Bow down Your heavens, O Lord, and come down; Touch the mountains, and they shall smoke” (5)**

The Lord previously came down on Mount Sinai to give His people the law; Yet, even coming down to encounter Moses alone, the mountain, not enduring His coming down, smoked; and the people, who did not accompany Moses, got scared and horrified.

In the fullness of time, however, the Lord came down as one of us, dwelt among us, and partook of our life, except for sin. He touched the mountain of our human nature; granting us the crucifixion of our old man, and the enjoyment of the new creation according to His image.

- ❖ What is the heavens that bow? They are the apostles who became humble; as those heavens “*declare the glory of God*” (Psalm 19: 1); About those heavens it is also said: “*There is no speech nor language*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps., homily 54 on Ps. 143 (144).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on 2 Timothy, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac or the Saul, 2: 4.

where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world “ (Psalm 19: 3, 4) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “Bow down Your heavens, O Lord, and come down”. Your scattered and dispersed sheep need You to carry them on Your shoulders.

“**Touch the mountains, and they shall smoke**”. The psalmist did not say, “**they shall burn**”, but said, “*they shall smoke*”; which carry the sign of punishment<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ How deep is the wound of human nature. “*From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment*” (Isaiah 1: 6). Hence the prophets wailed, saying: “*Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion<sup>3</sup>!*” (Psalm 53: 6); and one of them says: “*Bow down Your heavens, O Lord, and come down*” (Psalm 144: 5). Wounds of human nature never heal. “*They have torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets*” (1 Kings 19: 10); Being helpless to reform evil, we need You to reform it<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

“**Flash forth lightning and scatter them; Shoot out Your arrows and rout them**” (6)

When God came down to deliver the law to Moses, the people were terrified because lightning and thunder accompanied His coming down; How would the adversaries feel when the Lord comes down to condemn the devil and his hosts?!

According to **St. Jerome**, God flashes forth His lightning on the haughty souls, not to destroy them, but to scatter them; like what He did to those who attempted to build a tower in which to take refuge from the wrath of God, when He confused their language and scattered them over the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11: 9); ... which was, through God’s wisdom, for the benefit of mankind, to set many nations in diverse locations.

And according to **St. Augustine**, as David did when he put five stones in his pouch to strike Goliath; By such praises, the believer seeks

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps., homily 54 on Ps. 143 (144).

<sup>3</sup> مز 14 : 7 هنا السؤال يحمل فساد الشعب اليهودي فيسأل النبي طالبًا خلاصًا.

<sup>4</sup> مقال 7 : 12

from God to flash forth His lightning and shoot out His arrows, to disturb those who practice vanity, and who set snares for the souls.

- ❖ The lightning and arrows, here, do not refer to those we are familiar with, but refer to other kinds of punishment. ... If you cannot endure the lightning, which God did not send as a punishment, what can you do when He does?!

Now, the arrows of God are the famines, pestilences, torrent floods, tornadoes, and so on of the diverse kinds of punishments<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ “*Shoot out Your arrows and rout (disturb) them*” . I wish the unsound get wounded by the arrows of Christ, to become sound, and be in the church, the body of Christ, to say, together with the church: “*I am faint with love*” (Songs 2: 5 LXX) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

**“Stretch out Your hand from above; Rescue me and deliver me out of great waters, from the hands of foreigners” (7)**

What is the hand of the Father, but the Son, which He stretched through His incarnation, for the sake of our salvation?

The psalmist cries out to God to deliver him out of great waters; which, according to **St. Jerome**, are the heresies and their vain baptism, by which they produce children of foreigners, and not children of God; Instead of those waters, we seek the living fountain, namely the one baptism and one faith (Ephesians 4: 5).

- ❖ The Savior of the body is Himself the Hand of God.

The rescue from great waters; namely from many peoples.

What peoples, other than the nonbelievers, the foreigners (the heretics) who attack us from outside, or set snares for us inside; ... “*from the hands of foreigners*”.

Listen carefully, O brethren; Among whom are you living?, And from whom do you seek to be rescued?: ... From “***Those whose mouth speaks vain words***” (8) <sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

- ❖ The power of God is ready, not only to punish, but also to rescue.

Here, He stretches His hand to rescue and to help.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

By “*great waters*” he refers to the vicious attack of the enemy which causes much confusion.

And by “*the foreigners*”, he probably refers to the sojourners from the truth; For we count those who care for the truth as friends and kinsmen<sup>1</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

**“*Whose mouth speaks vain words, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood*” (8)**

The “*Hand of God*” in the Old Testament, used to refer to the incarnate divine Word, sent by God the Father to consummate salvation from the devil and his servitude, and to liberate the believers from the hosts of darkness; those foreigners from mankind who have submitted them.

If the right hand refers to goodness, namely the work according to the will of God; that the true believers will appear standing on the right hand of God on the day of judgment; Yet the right hand of the wicked is a right hand of falsehood; namely, they use even the holy things to the account of evil practice; like those who use the name of God in divination, the psalm in sorcery, or the edifying gifts to the account of corruption.

Eli the priest’s two sons had such a right hand of falsehood. Before the ark of the covenant of God, the river Jordan split open, and the priests with the people crossed over to the promised land; But when the wicked priests, like Eli’s sons carried it, the people were defeated and the ark itself was captured by the enemy. ... By the name of Christ, and the power of His cross, the disciples of the Lord performed signs and wonders; Yet, when the sons of Sceva, whose right hand was a right hand of falsehood, used the name of Jesus Christ to drive out the evil spirits, the evil spirits attacked and overpowered them (Acts 19: 14)... It so happened, as well, with Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, with his right hand of falsehood, who benefited nothing from having Elisha’s rod with him; not for anything wrong with the rod itself, but with its bearer who lacked the grace of God.

According to **St. Jerome**, the heretics, claim to have the right hand; yet being wicked, they have a right hand of falsehood; for “*The accuser (the devil) stands at the right hand of the wicked*” (Psalm 109: 6).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144.

❖ The “*foreigners*” are those who live in sin and oppression; who utter foolishness and nothing of benefit. They could be easily recognized by their talk and works; as, according to the Lord Christ: “*By their fruits you will know them*” (Matthew 7: 20).

Their right hand is that of falsehood. What could be worse than to turn what we are given to help us, instead to deceive us? We already have the right hand to defend ourselves and others against oppression, to take away evil, and to be a haven and refuge for those harmed. What would be the excuse for those who use it, not for the salvation of others, but for the destruction of themselves and the others<sup>1</sup>?

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“I will sing a new song to You, O God, on a harp of ten strings, I will sing praises to You” (9)*

The salvation of God grants us a daily joyful experience, that of the work of the Holy Spirit of God in our life; turning it into a symphony of love, perpetually renewed, never to become lukewarm, nor boring.

What is this new song, but the New Testament we aim against the devil, to destroy him, and not to let him lead us to perdition. That was the stone used by David by his sling to strike the forehead of Goliath.

According to **St. Augustine**<sup>2</sup>, the psalmist here, connects between the new song and the harp of ten string. As we, in our battle against the devil, use the New Testament (the new song), that consummates the Old Testament (the harp of ten strings – a reference to the ten commandments), the way love consummates the law.... Those without love, cannot use the new song, nor the harp; namely the Holy Book with its two testaments.

And according to **St. Jerome**, the psalmist uses the future tense, saying, “*I will sing a new song to You*”; For, when man gets the perfect conquest, he sings a new song.

❖ Having said “*Stretch out Your hand, and rescue me*”, ... he proclaims that the new song **he will sing to God** is just a payback for His help; which would be nothing, compared to His great goodness.

We, if we seek a payback for doing good to those in need, who possess nothing except thanksgiving and praise, it would be for the sake of our self-esteem and good reputation; While the great goodness done by God, on the other hand, is not for His own benefit, but to provide

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

those who praise Him with good reputation; namely, He does them an additional goodness.

*“On a harp of ten strings, I will sing praises to You”*. In those days, they used musical instruments to sing praises; but now, we use our own body for this purpose. We can sing with the eyes, and not just with the tongue; and with the hands and feet, etc.... When we practice good deeds, we honor and praise God; ... When our eyes do not look at unbecoming scenes; ... when the hands do not stretch to steal, but to give; ... when the ears are used to hear psalms and spiritual songs of praise; ... when the feet walk to the church; ... and when the heart does not produce intrigues, but love; the diverse body members transform into a harp of ten strings, and sing a new song, not by words, but by works, as well<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

When the poor get a gift from the king, they cannot pay him back with what fits His majesty, other than to sing him praise. So David did, when he got from God a new and magnificent salvation; He attempted to sing to Him a new song on a harp with ten strings; every string of the harp representing one of the ten commandments of God, by which David sang.

We, of the new covenant, as well, sing to God, a new song, not by irrational musical tools, but by our souls and body members. We praise Him with our vision and hearing, if we keep them from enjoying worldly pleasures;... We praise Him with our lips and mouths, if we make them chaste, and if we keep them from uttering what is unbecoming, and preoccupy them with prayers and divine praises. ... We praise Him with our hands, if we stretch them to give alms to the poor, and to do good deeds; and by our feet, if we hasten with them toward the houses of God.

This new praise, we present to God who saves the kings and their hosts; He saves us as well, and makes us a holy nation and royal priesthood.

He still is a savior of those who reign and prevail upon their body lusts.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“The One who gives salvation to kings; who delivers David His servant from the deadly sword” (10)*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144.

He does not mean here, the earthly kings, but the pious, about whom the wisdom proclaims: “*By me kings reign*” (Proverb 8: 15).

Here, **St. Augustine** discerns between the deadly and the good sword. The sword of the wicked is their deadly, evil, and vain word; Whereas

God’s double-edged sword is His good word.

We have already dealt with the vain mouths of the wicked, and their right hand of falsehood (8).

❖ “*Deliver me from the sword of bad intention*”. As it is not enough to say: “*Deliver me from the sword*”, he adds: “of bad intention”.

There is, no doubt, a sword of good intention, about which the Lord said: “*I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*” (Matthew 10: 34). He came to separate the believers from nonbelievers; the children from the fathers; and to cut off all the evil bonds. While cutting the sick members off, the sword healed the members of Christ.

The good intention is a sharp double-edged sword: the Old and the New Testaments; telling the episodes of the past, and giving promises of the future. The other sword is the vain sword. God uses the sword of good intention, when He speaks the truth<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*Who gives salvation to kings*”. Not by armies, soldiers, and guards, but by the grace of God.

“*Who delivers David His servant*”. After talking in a general way, the psalmist talks about what concern him, not saying. “who delivered him”, but “*who delivers*”, showing God’s perpetual and unceasing divine care<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### A DECEPTIVE ENEMY:

“*Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouth speaks vain words, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood*” (11)

❖ What we are committed to search for, and seek from the Lord God, is **happiness**. Many have entered into debates concerning the nature of happiness. But, as far as we are concerned, happiness is expressed by the concise and true word of God, saying: “*Happy are the people whose God is the Lord*” (Psalm 144: 15). The goal of God’s commandment is love from a whole pure heart, good conscience, and

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 144.

true faith. We can enjoy contemplation in God, and in the everlasting life together with Him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### WHY DOES GOS ALLOW FOR THE OPPOSITION OF THE ENEMY?

*“That our sons, in their youth be like plants full grown; that our daughters may be as pillars carved to adorn a palace” (12)*

After talking about how the devil, the evil enemy, uses the mouths of the wicked like a sword of bad intention, and even the right hand, as a right hand of falsehood, the psalmist intends to put the believers’ hearts at ease; saying that those evils instigated by the enemy, when opposed by the believers, they will enjoy the many blessings, mentioned in verses 12-14, which are:

- a- Sons, in their youth, like full grown plants (12).
- b- Daughters with spiritual beauty, like the adornments in the house of the Lord (12)
- c- An abundance of produce of every kind (13).
- d- Productive sheep that fill the streets (13).
- e- Well-laden numerous cows (14)
- f- Peace, and no outcry in our streets (14)
- g- A blessed life, as a deposit of heaven (15).

The fruits of the heretics, may look like new plants; yet they disregard the prophets and the apostles, to present new teachings of their own, although they quote texts from both the Old and the New Testaments; They see everything new, for the sake of being new; and reject the Truth, on account of that – according to them – truth is old-fashioned, and does not suit the time.

In reference of the daughters who bear outer adornments; the heretics depend upon deceptive words, and glittering philosophies that do not bear the power of the Spirit.

According to **the scholar Origen**, the faithful believers enjoy sons, as a symbol of the works of the Spirit, and daughters as a symbol of those of the body. Being sanctified, man enjoys spiritual fruits of both the soul and the body, both working together in harmony under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God; that the works of the Spirit become like full-grown plants, or spiritual trees in a heavenly paradise; and the works of the body become like holy pillars; that man would become a temple holy for God, where the Spirit of God dwells.

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 130: 12: 24.

❖ O children of light, children of peace, children of the church, members of Christ; Take notice of those whom he calls “*foreigners*” (7), and “*deadly swords*” (10). I beg you to take notice of that. ... Dwelling among them, you are in trouble; ... Because of their tongues, you are in war against the lusts of your body; ... Because of their tongues, you enter into a battle against the devil, who uses them as his hand.

[The St. introduced the texts of verses 12 to 14]; then said:

I ask the children of the kingdom; ... the seed of the perpetual resurrection; ... the members of Christ; the temple of God. ... Would it not be happiness, to have sons of peace, beautiful daughters, full barns; thousands of sheep; no breaking or outcry in our streets, but tranquility and peace, goods and abundance in everything, in houses as well as in cities? ... Would it not be happiness to have all that<sup>1</sup>!?

(St. Augustine)

***“That our barns may be full, supplying all kinds of produce; that our sheep may bring forth thousands, and ten thousands in our fields” (13).***

By the work of the Spirit of God, man would become the field of God; his barns would be full of every holy produce; and his sheep would produce thousands and ten thousands in the fields of the heart, to offer unceasing sacrifices.

The (barns) of the heretics are full of every kind of vain debates; Whereas the men of God “*open their mouth wide, and the Lord Himself fills them*” (Psalm 81: 10). The Holy Spirit dwelling in the man of God, fills him with the divine grace, and grants him the Word, capable of action in due time.

The sheep of the heretics may also bring forth thousands and tens of thousands, but would bring them forth in the streets, and not in the house of God. They draw many, not to bring them forth to the heavenly life, but to wonder loosely in the streets.

***“That our oxen may be well-laden; that there be no breaching of walls, no going into captivity; no cry of distress in our streets” (14)***

Together with goods pouring with abundance in the depths of man, of holy crops and produce, Peace will fill his soul, to work perpetually to the account of the kingdom of God; and no evil enemy will be able to destroy his inner peace.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144 (143).

***“Happy are the people who are in such a state; Happy are the people whose God is the Lord” (15)***

The people of God come to discover the exalted care of the Lord their God, through the continuous battles, to experience the blessed life, the deposit of heaven.

❖ As the life of the body is the soul, the blessed life of man is God; And like it is written: *“Blessed be the people who God is the Lord”*.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Do you see the virtue of that man (the psalmist)? ... How, after mentioning all those kinds of wealth by name, he moved to bless the true treasure, In other words, he says: [While others proclaim blessing for those who acquire those good things, I proclaim that the true blessing is for the people whose God is the Lord.

By that he concentrates on the fact that their abundance and riches are their enjoyment of the Lord their God.

While the other things, like the children, the flocks of cattle, the fortresses, and the vineyards, will eventually pass away and disappear, this blessing of the Lord will perpetually hold fast; promises wealth, security, and peace<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 144.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 144  
IN THE MIDST OF THE BATTLE, I PRAISE YOU, O MY  
AMAZING LEADER**

- ❖ The devil prepares a perpetual battle for my perdition;  
With Your goodness, You allow for that battle, for my edification;  
In the midst of the fighting, I hide in You, O Rock of ages;  
You protect me against the deadly strikes of the enemy;  
And train my weak hands for battle against the ruler of the darkness.  
By Your Holy Spirit, You grant me love;  
And by love, I present works of mercy, And You will have mercy on me.  
By the works of mercy, the devil will be burned, for he endure neither love nor mercy.  
You are my weapon, conquest and crown;  
What can the devil and his hosts do to me?  
By You all his evil plans and hopes will be destroyed;  
The battle will be for my benefit, as long as I hide in You.
- ❖ You grant us an amazing weapon;  
You grant us prayer, together with the harp of praise and thanksgiving;  
Nothing is a more active and a deadly weapon against the denier devil,  
Than a thanks-giving heart, exultant of his God.  
You are the Mighty One;  
Allowing for the battle, You grant conquest to Your children;  
You grant us the spirit of praise and joy;  
To aim it as a deadly arrow toward the denier devil;  
As David aimed a little stone with his sling;  
And struck by it the forehead of the mighty Goliath.  
Let us aim joy against the forehead of the enemy of joy and exultation;  
Let us destroy him by our Christ, the Source of joy.
- ❖ For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood,  
But against principalities in the heavenly places,  
Our weapon is not of this world,  
It is Your cross, the destroyer of the hosts of darkness.  
Our enemies are not of our human nature;  
Our enemies never sleep nor get calm;

Our enemies are experienced in vicious battles;  
Yet our Trainer for the battle is You, the Savior of the world;  
You keep training us, and will never forsake us.  
You grant us Your divine commandment;  
You present to us Your grace, working in us;  
You plant Your cross in our hearts;  
Your fiery Holy Spirit works in us;  
I enter into the battle armed with Your divine promises;  
I resist the devil while being in Your unconquerable bosoms;  
You are an amazing Fortress;  
And a high tower from which I can perceive the dimensions of the  
battle;  
By You ,we overcome, and You set us kings, O King of kings;  
You lift us up, and count us as one of the heavenly ranks;  
You grant us authority to enjoy freedom on an eternal level;  
By Your grace, I get rid of my enemies and all their opposition;  
And enjoy an inner peace;  
To become by You a king, and all my energies and talents work  
together by Your Holy Spirit.

- ❖ I marvel; Who am I, that You come down from Your heavens;  
To incarnate for my sake;  
To enter into a battle against the devil, to grant me, by, and in You;  
the conquest over him;  
How great is Your love for me, and Your amazing ordinance for my  
salvation;  
You are perpetually preoccupied with me;  
You take knowledge of me, not as You know any other of the billions  
of Your creatures;  
You know me intimately;  
You make me a member of the household of God;  
You know me as a son of the Father; having granted me the spirit of  
adoption;  
You know me as a living member of Your holy body;  
You know me as a holy temple, in which Your Holy Spirit dwells;  
You know me, and inscribe my name on Your palm;  
You call me by name to inherit the eternal glories;
- ❖ Indeed, without You, I am no more than dust and ashes;  
My days are like a passing shadow, full of labor and trouble;  
But by You, my depths exult even in the midst of troubles;

I look forward to the day of Your second coming, to live forever with  
You;  
You bowed the heavens and came down to us;  
You granted us salvation from our sins;  
And raised us from the eternal death;  
You flashed forth Your divine light on us, and lightened our souls;  
You aimed Your arrows, and destroyed our enemy the devil;  
Your coming restored us to life, and opened up the gates of heaven  
before us;  
Come forth again over the clouds in Your glory;  
To carry us together with You to Your heavens.

- ❖ By Your coming You presented to us an amazing heavenly harp;  
You even set out of our souls Your own harp;  
You gave me the New Testament as a harp that plays with the spirit  
of joy;  
You gave me the spiritual concept of the Old Testament , a harp with  
ten strings;  
You would entrust no one to play on it, other than Your Holy Spirit;  
To play a symphony of love;  
My heart flares with the divine love, as well as the brotherly love;  
My heart opens up wide for the dwelling of the Holy Trinity;  
And my depths turn into a joyful divine throne;  
No disturbance nor anxiety would enter into my heart;  
But only the exultation of conquest, a heavenly crown, and a  
magnificent glory;  
You pour Your splendor inside me, to become fit for a kingdom;  
And carry a touch of Your amazing beauty;  
All my body members sing to You;  
Becoming sanctified, they consummate their mission in harmony  
from exultant depths;  
We praise and thank You by silence, by work, and by talk.
- ❖ You came down to our earth, not to put an end to the battle;  
But to turn it for our edification and glory;  
Through the battle, You set out of us kings of authority;  
You grant us blessings in this world, as well as in the everlasting life;  
To enjoy the works of the Spirit, as well as the holy works of the  
body;  
Our depths would turn into a paradise with new fruition;  
And into a temple of magnificent beauty;  
We would have sons of peace, and daughter beautiful in the Lord;

Our barns would be filled with the fruits of the spirit;  
And our pastures with a multitude of flocks;  
Peace would fill our depths; and good things would fill our whole  
being;  
Our Savior would never let us lack any thing;  
But would grant us more than what we seek;  
Glory be to You, O who turn the field of battle into new experiences  
with You.

## **PSALM145**

### **A CALL TO PRAISE LORD**

The mainline in this psalms is the rejoice in the greatness of God and His love. It confirms the royal authority of God on earth and in heaven; and calls upon us to praise Him every day and forever.

The order of the verses of this psalm came according to the Hebrew alphabet. And in the ancient Greek and Syrian texts, it was mentioned: “The Lord is faithful in all His words, compassionate in all His works.

The Jews used to praise the Lord by this psalm three times a day in the synagogue: in the morning, noon, and evening. And, according to the Babylonian Telmud, it was used in praise thrice a day, and will have a prominent place in the life to come<sup>1</sup>.

Every day I will bless Him (2); for His greatness (3 – 6); for His goodness and mercy (7 – 10); for His majesty (11 – 13); for His salvation (14): for His care (15 – 17): for He is near to us (18); for hearing our supplications (19 – 20); and I shall praise Him forever and ever (21).

<b>1- An opening glorification</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>
<b>2- The wholly majestic Lord</b>	<b>4 - 7</b>
<b>3- The Philanthropic Lord</b>	<b>8 - 13</b>
<b>4- The Lord King upholds the fallen</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5- The Lord and the divine care</b>	<b>15 - 16</b>
<b>6- The Lord is gracious in all His works</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>7- The Lord is near to all who call upon Him</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>8- The Lord hears our prayers</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>9- The Lord preserves those who love Him</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>10- A conclusive glorification</b>	<b>21</b>

#### **The title:**

A song of majesty and love.

A praise of David.

❖ The title says: A praise of David. Although He who came of the seed of David is called David; yet His is our King who reigns on us, and who brings us to His kingdom ... According to the flesh, Christ,

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<sup>1</sup> Berakoth, 4b.

being the Son of David is David; But according to His divinity, He is David's Creator and Lord<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## 1- AN OPENING GLORIFICATION:

The psalmist often glorifies the Lord through His dealings with him and with the people. But here, the psalm begins by a glorification of the Lord, the heavenly King; for all creation glorify and praise Him.

***“I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever” (1)***

The church sing verses 1 and 2 of this psalm on the morning following the feast of the cross (the 18<sup>th</sup> of the Coptic month of Thout); on account of that the cross, in truth, is the throne of glory of love of our Lord Jesus, the King of kings, who sets the hearts as His kingdom. It is as well, the secret of entry into a personal relationship with Him; that every believer sings: *“I will exalt You, my God, O King”*. And the cross is also the source of joy and gladness of the human soul.

❖ ***“I will exalt You, my God, O King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever”***.

Praising God starts here in this life ... Start praising God. If you wish to praise Him forever.

He who does not praise Him in this mortal age, will be silent in the age of ages<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ When you say: *“I will exalt You, my God, O King”*, you reveal the intimate relationship between you and God; Then He would say about you what He said about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: *“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”* (Exodus 3: 6). I mean to say that when you say: *“I will exalt You, my God, O King”*, and you say it, not just by words, but you present a testimony of this love, He will, in His turn say about you: “My servant, faithful in all my house” as He said about Moses (Exodus 12: 7)..

***“And I will bless Your name forever and ever”***. Do you notice how he also refers to the life to come?

By saying, “I bless (praise), he means that he practices it, not only by words, but by work as well; which is the right way to glorify and

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

praise God. That is what He commands us to say in our prayer: “*Hallowed be Your name*” (Matthew 6: 9), namely, be glorified<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Your exaltation, O God, is Your nature, and not got from another. You are not getting more exalted by our praise; for the heavens tell about Your glory, and the stars proclaim Your high status.

If day after day, Your majesty is proclaimed, and Your greatness is testified by all Your creation; How much more should I do, with all the good things You have done to me? I exalt You, bless Your name, glorify, and give You thanks, O King!

That is what I do in my life, and in the age to come.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

*“Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever”* (2)

❖ Praise, therefore, the Lord your God every day, so that once the present days pass away, and the day with no end will come, you go from praise to praise, and from strength to strength (Psalm 84: 7).

No marvel that, on the day of your joy, you bless God. How about when you have a day of sorrow, which is natural in the circumstances of our mortal life, full of troubles and abundance of temptations? Will you stop blessing God? Will you stop praising Him<sup>2</sup>?

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Yes, my God, every day I will bless You, in my joy, as well as in my sorrow; I will praise Your name forever and ever.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ *“Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever”*. This is the feature of the pure spirit; which, once liberated from the preoccupations of this world, is dedicated to praise God forever and ever.

It is written: *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech; and night unto night reveals knowledge”* (Psalm 19: 1-2). The sun, the moon, and all the celestial bodies, proclaim their Creator.

It is therefore a shame for man, who is granted reason and more privileges than all creation, to praise Him less than them. It is not only

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

shame, but ridiculous, when all the other creatures day unto day, and even hour unto hour, present praises of thanksgiving to their Creator.

We are greatly indebted to God for creating us from nothing, for making us what we are; and for His care for us day unto day, general and personal, secret and manifest, in what we perceive, and in what we do not.

What can we say about the seen things He created for our sake? about the services He presents to us? about the formation of our bodies, the exaltation of our souls, His daily provisions, and about His diverse care?

Yet, the summit of those goods, is that He did not even spare His only-begotten Son for our sake; the gifts he presented to us in baptism, and the Eucharist ... Actually, if we count everything He granted us, we shall drown in an unfathomable ocean blessings... Therefore, you see that it is befitting of us to perpetually praise, bless him, and give Him thanks, and unceasingly worship Him<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

*“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable” (3)*

❖ You may start by a wish to praise Him, and may assume that you are able to reach an ultimate end of praising Him, whose greatness has no end. You should never assume that He, whose greatness has no end, could be praised enough. ... As there is no end of His greatness, let His praise, as well, be of no end<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ He means to say: Having such a great Lord, extol yourselves; rid yourselves of the preoccupations of this world; adopt for yourselves a goal, more exalted than the meanness of the present time; not to become haughty or arrogant, but to have high and great intellect. For haughtiness and greatness are completely two different things: the haughty boasts of the things of the world, and despises his fellow servants; whereas the great is the one with humble thoughts, who counts all the things of this world as nothing<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

## **2- THE WHOLLY MAJESTIC LORD:**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 146.

***“One generation will praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts” (4)***

According to **St. Augustine**, this phrase could be interpreted that it is befitting of every generation to praise God; And it could also mean that we praise God in this life, as well as in the life to come.

**St. Augustine** often interprets the expression “*one generation to another*”, that the talk concerns the first generation, namely, our life in his world; while the second generation is our life in eternity. It is as though the praise extends over all the days of our sojourn, as a deposit for the eternal life, then continues in our eternal life, together with the heavenly hosts. In the present generation, we praise Him for the beautiful creation that he brought into existence for our sake; While there, we praise Him, on account of that He is the beauty itself, the Creator.

❖ By saying: “*One generation will praise Your works to another*”, he probably means” (every generation).

Or he means to say, that we are here the generation of God’s children; whereas there we shall be the generation of those of the resurrection.

If you are impressed by the beauty of the creation; How would you be by that of its Creator?

If the benefits of the created things are to be praised, How would it be of Him who created them?

If exaltation is to be praised, What would be more exalted than Him, by whom all those exalted things were created<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ There is no time that does not bear a sign of His divine care ... God will never cease to care for the progress of our nature, on every aspect, and perpetually all along the generations<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works” (5)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “*On the greatness of the majesty of Your glory, they talk; and on Your wondrous works, they proclaim*”.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 146.

With every appreciation and thanksgiving, the psalmist meditates on the exalted greatness of God, as proclaimed by the amazing works of His salvation.

❖ Anyway, look at how that man meditates in God's works; ... how he moves from the Worker to the works; ... how he goes from the Creator, down to the things He creates;.... how he made the things created, a step by which to climbs up to the Creator. ...

For if you love those things more than you love him, you will never be worthy of acquiring Him..

What would be your benefit if you are overwhelmed by the works, if the Worker Himself forsakes you?. ... You are truly committed to love him more; to love Him for His own sake.

He does not give promises, without giving threats as well;.... Without giving promises, there will be no encouragements. And without threats, there will be no reform.

Those who praise You, O God, talk unceasingly as well about the awesome and exalted works of Your hands, that chastise and also punish; They do not proclaim Your eternal kingdom, and be silent about Your eternal Hades.... By praising God, you proclaim that He is to be loved, and to be feared as well<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ After referring to God's "might", he shows how this might is not normal, but amazing in its kind; It does not work haphazardly or by chance; it consummates everything in an amazing and glorious way that surpasses the limits of human nature. ... As examples, meditate in what happened in Egypt and Palestine in the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph; in what happened in Egypt in the days of Moses; in what happened in the wilderness, and on entering into the promised land .... All those proclaim the might, glory, and greatness of the Creator, that instigate great marveling and awe<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***"Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts; and I will declare Your greatness" (6)***

While men speak of the awesome acts of God, the psalmist goes on to declare His great love and care, which, according to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>3</sup>, are proclaimed through His compassion, as well as His

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 146.

chastisements. He sees that clearly in the creation itself. For God who created the world for our sake, with all its exalted beauty, He Himself, allowed for the existence of fearful things like lightning, thunder, volcanoes, snow storms, floods, wild fires, etc. All those are used by God's care to exhort us to Him, to wake us up from our slothfulness, and to lead us to the life of watching.

❖ When the apostle Paul wrote to the church of Corinth about His heavenly vision, he was not sure if he saw it only by his spirit, or by his body as well. And he testified: *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead”* (Philippians 3: 13). It is clear that Paul alone, knew about what is beyond the third heaven, that was not mentioned by Moses himself, when he talked about the creation, and the origin of the universe.... Paul did not cease to exalt, after what he heard of the unutterable secrets of paradise; and did not allow the exaltation he reached to come in the way of his desire to exalt higher and higher.

Paul confirmed that our knowledge of God is limited; for God's eternal nature is limitless, and far more exalted than what we do know. ... Yet, those who unite with God, will have their fellowship with Him grow and increase in the eternal life, which conforms with the words of the Lord Christ: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”* (Matthew 5: 8). They will see and know God as much as is allowed by the understanding of their limited minds; But God, the Infinite, and the Immeasurable, will always be beyond human perception.

As testified by the prophet: *“God's greatness is unsearchable”* (Psalm 145: 3). And He will continue to be, whenever we meditate in His exaltation.

The great David attempted with all his heart to lift his mind up to the high reaches, and *“went from strength to strength”* (Psalm 84: 7); and cried out to God: *“You, Lord, are on high forever more”* (Psalm 92: 8).

It is thus clear that he who runs toward the Lord, would become greater, the higher he gets, and would grow in goodness, the higher level he reaches. This happens all along the eras; ... God is the highest and most exalted, now, and forever; He so perpetually appears to those who approach Him; but will always be higher and more exalted than the capabilities of all who attempt to rise up<sup>1</sup>.

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عظة 8 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.<sup>1</sup>

(St. Gregory, bishop of Nyssa)

*“They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness. And they shall sing of Your righteousness” (7)*

Men will testify to the greatness of God’s goodness, as they find in his righteousness an instigation to joyful praise.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>1</sup>, Whenever we mention the fearful things that the divine care uses for our benefit, it is befitting of us, as well, to mention the good things, like the seasons, the gardens, the pastures, the fresh water, the rain, the fertile soil, the diverse fruits, the rays of the sun, the splendor of the moon and of the stars, the tranquility of the night, the flocks of sheep, etc.... All those things presented by God, even to the unworthy.

While often talking about God’s love, compassion, long suffering, and about the gates of hope He opens before the sinners for the sake of their repentance and reform; **St. Augustine**, at the same time, does not disregard God’s fear, awe, and His chastisements in this world; And he also confirms the existence of the fire of Hades, for those who do not accept His love, and do not respond to His chastisement.

While using the fearful things for chastisement, God some other times, uses an abundance of good things to let us get in touch with His love and care. By the former He chastises, and by the later He draws us toward Himself.

Commenting on the threat of Hades, **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>2</sup> says: [He threatens us by Hades, not with the intention to let it be our destiny, but to keep us from falling into it; ... He actually prepared it for the devil, according to His words: *“into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matthew 25: 41).

Having prepared the kingdom for men, He showed His intention not to cast men in Hades].

### **3- THE PHILANTHROPIC LORD:**

*“The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and great in mercy” (8)*

Great is the Lord, not only in His might and works, but also in His compassion, longsuffering, and mercy.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 146.

❖ He did not say “merciful”, but said “*great in mercy*”, showing that His mercy is not only immeasurable, but surpasses all human counting<sup>1</sup>.

❖ God intends to be called: “*Gracious, full of compassion, slow to anger, and great in mercy*” (LXX) Actually, God’s mercy covers the whole earth; “*His tender mercies are over all his works*” (Psalm 145: 9). It saves all men, and if it was not for it, everything would be destroyed..

“*When we were enemies, we were reconciled*” (Romans 5: 10), It presented so much blessings; It exhorted the Son of God to become a servant, and to empty Himself of His glory, for our sake.

Let us then compete with all zeal to have mercy; For by it He saved us. ... Let us love it. ... Let us prefer it over all riches and wealth. ... Let us have a merciful soul; as nothing distinguishes the Christian like mercy<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ We should watch over our thoughts, and keep them under control all the time. ... We should not become victims of despair, which is provoked by the enemy. ... Let us know that all temptations are allowed by God to let us recognize our weaknesses as humans, and to make us more experienced...We should wail and mourn if we become deceived, yet we should not despair, “*For God is gracious and full of compassion*” (8); He knows our weakness, and has compassion on us<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Maccari the Great)**

“*The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works*” (9)

What is translated here as “*good*”. **St. Augustine** translates as (sweet).

God’s goodness extends over everyone without partiality; All His creation get in touch with His mercies.

❖ Do not say: “Tomorrow I shall return; tomorrow I shall please God; All my works today and in the past will be forgiven” ... Yes, what

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Heb., 32: 7.

<sup>3</sup> رسائله المكتشفة حديثاً عن مجلة: Recherches Augustiniennes, 1999 – 31, p. 104-135: رسالة 5:6 (فردوس الأباء).

you say is true: God promised forgiveness, but He does not like delay, nor postponement from day to day (Sirach 5: 7) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ In His goodness, God does good to both the righteous and the wicked. He shines His Sun, and pours His rain on all. He sends His help to all. Even His punishment on the wicked would bring forth good things; as it puts an end to bad behavior, and become an example for others.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ By saying “*all*”, he means, not only the righteous and those who repent, but also the sinners and those who live in iniquity.... He was good, not only to Abel, but also to Cain; not only to Noah and his sons, but to those who perished in the great flood. All things happened through His compassion.

He delivers “all” to chastisement, which is actually meant to reform rather than to punish them; to purify man from practicing sin, and to make him an example for the others to learn by his suffering.

The term “all” applies, not just to the cases we mentioned, but to all the seen creation, both the rational and the irrational, and even to the unseen angels and the archangels up there, where there are great goodness, and an enjoyment of deep compassion<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Isn't God good? ... Remember how he fed thousands in the wilderness by the food of the angels; when the multitudes did not have to work to earn their sustenance. They enjoyed that luxury for forty years, and even their clothes and sandals were never worn out.

Isn't He good? .... He brought the earth up to heaven; that as the stars reflect the splendor of His glory in the sky like a mirror, the choir of apostles, martyrs, and priests glitter like stars, and emit their light to the whole world.

He, therefore, is not only good, but far more!

He is a good Shepherd for His flocks of sheep... “*and the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep*”.(John 10: 11).

It is for my own benefit to believe that God is good; that “*It is good to trust in the Lord*”; and that “*It is good to confess that He is the Lord*”; for it is written that “*Praise the Lord, for He is good*”<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Exposition of Christian Faith, 2: 23-25, 27. ترجمة الدكتور نهى عزت

***“All Your works shall praise You, O Lord; and Your saints shall bless You” (10)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version it came as:  
***“All Your works proclaim You, and all Your saints bless You”.***

Beside bringing the creation forth from nothing, God’s exalted ordinance and care of them, represent an unutterable song of thanksgiving for

His might, wisdom, and compassion. And His saints are partners with the creation in giving thanks to God for His limitless perfections.

**St. Augustine** quotes the song of praise presented by the three saintly young men, who, while in the furnace of fire, sought from the irrational creation to partake of their praise of God.

❖ Isn’t the beauty of the world count as one sound answering you, saying: “I have not created myself; God has created me<sup>1</sup>”?

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Will all the works of God, rational and irrational, by proclaiming their perfect systems, instigate you to confess His wisdom and goodness?... The righteous bless Him by their words and good works; describe the glory of His eternal kingdom, and unceasingly proclaim His might.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ ***“All Your works shall praise You, O Lord, and Your saints shall bless You”.*** Meaning they present their praise, with and without voice. All creation without voice are created in such a way to praise through their nature, even though they may seem voiceless to men. What these creations do through their mere existence, men do through the way of their life, as is clear from the psalmist’s addition: ***“and Your saints shall bless You<sup>2</sup>”.***

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power” (11)***

It is befitting of the saints to testify to the joyful kingdom of God, and to talk of its greatness by their tongues, as well as by their inner life, and practical behavior.

❖ How great is the power of God, who created the earth!

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 146.

How great is the power of God who gave life to every creature!

How great is the power of God who provided the womb of the earth with the diverse seeds, to give forth to diverse blossoms and beautiful trees!

How great is the power of God! O saint of God, if you ask the creation, it will answer you, blessing God, and talking of His might<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom” (12)***

❖ Your saints praise *“the glorious majesty of Your kingdom”*.

If every one of Your creation has such a beauty, how great would be the beauty of Your whole kingdom?!

I wish Your kingdom does not terrify us; for its beauty gives us gladness.

I wonder how will be the beauty that the saints will enjoy, to whom is said: *“Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you”* (See Mathew 25: 34). How great is the beauty of that kingdom, where there are only angels living together with You! Let us love it before we see it, that when we do, we will remember it<sup>2</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

❖ Great is His power; Great is His glory; Great is His honor; Great, unutterable, and beyond any description and any imagination<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

***“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout many generations” (13)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions it came as: *“The Lord is faithful in all His words, and holy in all His works”*.

It is therefore, befitting of us, with perfect love, to submit to the dominion of the Lord, in this generation, as well as in the generation to come, the way the heavenly creatures submit to Him with joy and exultation.

❖ The kingdom of this age may have its beauty, but never like the greatness of that of all generations<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

❖ His dominion extends to every corner of the world, to all ages, and to all times<sup>1</sup>.

❖ After referring to that there is no end for His kingdom, and that it will never be shaken, but will endure forever; the psalmist refers to the endurance of His words; For the word “Amen” implies endurance and truth.

“Holy in all His works”. The word “holy” means (blameless, upright, and undefiled), and gives no chance for anyone to criticize it<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ “God is faithful in all His words” He tells no lies when He says: *“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: 18). The great Physician of souls, the liberator, is not ready to set you alone free, but all those enslaved by sin; He is ready to heal your sickness<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Basil)**

❖ Abraham was so faithful, having believed the word of God; And God is faithful, according to the words of David: “God is faithful in all His words”; trustworthy, and would never lie.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

#### **4- THE LORD KING, UPHOLDS THE FALLEN:**

*“The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all those who are bowed down”* (14)

The greatness of God is shown in His care for those who fall, and those bowed down, to uphold them and to restore the complete life to them.

He comes close to those bowed down because of illness, sorrow, or anguish, is compassionate to them, and inclines His ears to listen to the hidden moans of their hearts.

Praise be to the Lord who stretches His hands on the cross, to embrace the fallen humanity, raises it from the dust, and sets it upright to enjoy the fellowship of the eternal glory; That is His pleasure!

❖ Those who lose something in this world, while being holy, would probably become despised and poor after being honored and rich. However, being the saints of God, although they seem as fallen, the

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 146.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 146.*

<sup>3</sup> *Epistle, 46: 6.*

Lord upholds them; *“For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again; but the wicked shall fall by calamity”* (Proverbs 24: 16).

When evil dwells upon the wicked, they stumble and become weak; Whereas when it falls upon the righteous, who belong to Him.

*“The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all those who are bowed down”<sup>1</sup>.*

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The Lord upholds all who fall in transgressions and tribulations, if they return to Him, and cry out to Him. He raises up those crushed by sorrow, and calamities,.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ The greatness of the glory of His kingdom, is that He cares, not only for the upright, but also for the fallen, and raises up those who are bowed down. He cares for all, not for this or that person. He cares even for the isolated and needy, to bring them up from their isolation and need. Being the Lord of all, He does not disregard the fallen, or despise the wavering.

As an example, He upheld David when he fell, and made him strong; He upheld Peter when he fell, and said to him: *“Simon, Simon, Indeed Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail”* (Luke 22: 31-32) <sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ The Lord is faithful in all His words; He never lies! When he says: *“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: 18)

The great Physician of the souls, who intends to liberate, is ready to cure you of your illness; not only you, but all those captivated by sin<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Basil the Great)**

❖ *“A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity”* (Proverbs 24: 16). When evil dwell upon the wicked they become weak; whereas when the righteous fall, God upholds those who belong to Him (14); but *“God resists the proud”* (James 4: 6) <sup>4</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>3</sup> رسالة 46.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 145. 13.

## 5- THE LORD AND THE DIVINE CARE:

***“The eyes of all look expectantly to You; And You give them their food in due season” (15)***

Every shepherd wishes to satisfy his flock, and to provide them with their needs; yet, in due season, lest he may bring forth harm to them. We often wish from God to give us a certain thing, that we consider good for us; but we do not know whether it is for our edification, or for our harm. Because our heavenly Shepherd knows what suits us, and when it is the right time to have it; Let us then, look expectantly to His hands, trusting that He is loving, wise, and generous in giving.

If God allows for the existence of both rich and poor; yet He cares for all, and gives them their food in due season; He gives both the good and the wicked.

❖ ***“The eyes of all look expectantly to You. And You give them their food in due season”***. ... Yet, man often wishes to have something, and God does not give it to him right away. As a good Shepherd, He knows when it is the right time to give.

So I say, brethren, lest someone may collapse, when he asks God for something good, and God does not listen to him. He should know that when God does not respond, It would be because He knows that it would bring harm to him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its pleasant fruits”*** (Song 4: 16). It is a daring request from a zealous soul, beyond any marvel... Who is He, whom the bride invites to her banquet, to eat her favorite pleasant fruits? ... It is, *“Of Him and through Him and to Him are all things”* (Romans 11: 36); ... It is He, *“Who gives everyone his food in due season”* (Psalm 145: 15);...It is He, who open His hands up, and fills every living being with goods.; ... It is He, *“The bread that came down from heaven”* (John 6: 41); ... It is He, who gives life to the world, and let water flood from His own spring to give life..... That is the One for whom the bride prepares her banquet; the garden that produces living trees..

The living trees symbolize us; and our faithful souls refer to the food presented to Him.

The Lord said to His disciples: *“I have food to eat, of which you do not know”* (John 4: 32); which is the consummation of the holy will of the God His Father; who *“desires all men to be saved, and to come to*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

*the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2: 4). This salvation is the food prepared for Him. Our free will gives the fruit to God, namely our spirits, to pluck from its little branch.

The bride, at the beginning, enjoyed the apple fruit of sweet taste, saying: *“His fruit was sweet to my taste”* (Songs 2: 3); Then she, herself, came to be the sweet and beautiful fruit, presented to the Shepherd to enjoy<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

❖ The optional poverty is good for those of good behavior; For, once they decide to do without all the un-necessary possessions, they bring forth to the Lord a sign of their pledge, while singing with purity the inspiring verse: *“The eyes of all look expectantly to You; and You give them their food in due season”* (Psalm 145: 15).

**(St. Mother Snekletiky)**

❖ Those who become children, and enjoy the spiritual food, have the right to glorify their Father, according to the words of the Holy Book:, that it is befitting of the son to honor his father, and a servant his master (Malachi 1: 6). You have become His son, and you enjoy the spiritual food; You have communion of the body and blood, that grant you a new birth<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

*“You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living being”* (16)

The Lord opens His hand, and, satisfying every living being, He fills him with joy and gladness. He provides every one with what suit him.

❖ The signs by which we come to know God, are the same signs by which the son is committed to see in his relationship with his father. *“He opens His hand and satisfy the desire of every living being with joy”*; ... *“He relents from doing harm”* (Joel 2: 13); *“God is good to all, and His anger on us is not every day”*;... *“The Lord is upright; there is no unrighteousness in Him”* (Psalm 92: 15 LXX).

That is how the relationship between fathers and their children should be<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Gregory of Nyssa)**

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 10 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Addrws on Religious Instruction 40.

❖ All beings look with a kind of longing and unutterable love to their Creator, who grants them graces, and the possibilities to work; according to what is written: “*The eyes of all look expectantly to You*”; and “*You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living being*”<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

## 6- THE LORD IS GRACIOUS IN ALL HIS WORKS:

“*The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works*” (17)

It is befitting of us to perceive that the Lord is so great in His righteousness and compassion, that he keeps nothing from His creature. But, if He, sometimes, allows for troubles, or what we may call calamities and tribulations; He does nothing without wisdom; He is just in all His ways, righteous in all His works..

❖ Whether He strikes, or He heals, He is righteous, and there is no evil in His ways.

When His saints are put in the midst of affliction, they first praise Him, then seek His blessings.

They first say: [Whatever You do, O Lord, is upright].

So, have Daniel and other saints said: [Righteous are Your ordinances; Yes, we may suffer, but we deserve to suffer]. They never refer evil or injustice to God.

Praising His chastisement, they come to perceive His care<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Here, he calls His guidance and care, “His ways”, which covers everything<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 7- THE LORD IS NEAR TO ALL WHO CALL UPON HIM:

“*The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth*” (18)

The climax of His gifts -- according to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>4</sup> -- is that He is near to those who call upon Him; namely, He condescends and attaches Himself to those who faithfully call upon Him; He cares for

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<sup>1</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit*, 2: 91.

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 145 (144)*.

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 146*.

<sup>4</sup> *On Ps. 146*.

them, provides them with the greatest level of divine care, mercy, and compassion; and proclaims to them His goodness in an exalted way.

❖ Many call upon Him, but not in truth. They may seek something, but never seek Him, Himself.

You may say: [I love God, For He made me well]. Which is true!

Someone else may say: [I love God, for He gave me a rich spouse, when I have been penniless before]. Which is also true!

God is good when He gives you what you have got. How more blessed will you be if He gives Himself to you?

You desired all those things from Him. I beg you to desire Him as well. For all those things could never be better than Him; and could never be compared to Him in any way.

He, therefore who prefer God, Himself, to all the things he may get from Him, is truly calling upon God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The expression “*The Lord is near*”, has long preoccupied many fathers of the church. He is everywhere, and there is no place without Him, Yet He is near to him who gets attached to Him, and who leans upon His chest; to be counted as His favorite, as though one of the divine household.

Now, as the Word of God incarnated, He calls us beloved and brethren, and grants us the sonhood to God the Father.

In the Old Testament, God referred Himself to His pious servants; He called Himself “*The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*”. In the New Testament, however, He gave us the daring to call God in all our personal and collective prayers, saying: “*Our Father who are in heaven ...*”.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Let your journey be toward Jesus. To consummate it, you do not have to travel a long distance, to cross vast seas, nor to climb high mountains.... If you prove your piety and perfect remorse, you can see Him without leaving your home; You can even bring down all walls, and take away all obstacles, and make your journey shorter<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

## **8- THE LORD HEARS OUR PRAYERS:**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On the Incomprehensible Nature of God, Hom. 6: 34.

***“He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them” (19)***

He, who is pious and fears God, finds his pleasure in God Himself; And God, in His turn, does what pleases him in due season and proper time for his benefit. Those who fear God find their pleasure in the will of God; And God, in His turn, fulfills their desire according to His wisdom.

How great is His righteousness (17), He does nothing wrong, He is great in His salvation for those who fear Him and call upon Him; who approach Him in faith, and with a remorseful heart.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>1</sup>, Paul sought from Him to let the angel of Satan leave him; namely, the temptations and the afflictions; but God did not respond to his request. He actually did what is good for Paul, saying to him: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness”* ..... *“Therefore, I take pleasure in my infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distress, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Corinthians 12: 8-10).

❖ He will definitely save (19); yet He will do it in the way He promised;... How? ...That we, ourselves desire it, and listen to Him; As He does not give promise to wooden blocks<sup>2</sup>!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ ***God fulfills the desire of those who fear Him***”. He consummates it, albeit not right away; yet He will eventually do.

If you indeed fear God, consummate his will. You will see Him serving you. You will see him consummate your will!

***“He will hear their cry and save them”***. That is how a physician needs to listen to his patient, to be able to diagnose his infirmity and cure him. Listen to the apostle Paul saying: *“For we were saved in this hope; but hope that is seen is not hope, for why does one hope for what he sees?”* (Romans 8: 24) <sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ **Father Parsnovius** was asked by a brother: [I beg You to tell me from where do the licentiousness of the body and heart come to me? And why am I not able to abide perpetually to the same ordinance?]

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on 2 Thess. 3: 1.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

The elder father answered him, saying: [Brother, I am actually astonished and marvel, how the people of the world, disregard the vicious beasts, the snares of the highway robbers, the dangers of the sea, and even death itself, for the sake of getting the riches and wealth they desire to have, with their whole hearts; although they are not sure that they will ever manage to have them. While we, the miserable cowards, who have got the authority to trample on “*the serpents, the scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy*” (Luke 10: 19);... We, who hear Him saying: “*It is I, do not be afraid*” (John 6: 20); ... We, who know for sure that we are not wrestling by our own strength, but by that of God; ... I wonder how would we surrender to licentiousness and depression?!

It is because the fear of God is not nailed in our bodies; and because the cry-outs of our groaning are not true, and loud enough to make us forget to eat our bread (see Psalm 102: 4, 5); Hence, we turn from side to side, and from an ordinance to another; for we are not holding fast tightly to the fire that the Lord came to send on earth (Luke 12: 49), which can destroy and consume the thorns and thistles of our spiritual field.

The living Son of God testifies for me, that I know somebody in this blessed monastery – and let no one say that I mean myself; for I count myself as nothing whatsoever – I know him, who can stay without food, drink, or clothing, until the Lord visits him. In all that he needs nothing at all; for his food, drink, and clothing are the Holy Spirit.

Now, if you so desire, Compete with him, Long to be filled of the fear of God; who will fulfill your desires, for it is written: “*He fulfills the desire of those who fear Him*” (Psalm 145: 19).

Actually, I, who am nothing, because of the commandment, am doing my best; But it is God from whom I draw the steadfastness, the liberation, the consummation of good work , the avoidance of evil, and the ordinance of salvation in His kingdom. ... Glory be to Him. Amen].

**(Garden of the fathers)**

## **9- THE LORD PRESERVES THOSE WHO LOVE HIM:**

***“The Lord preserves those who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy” (20)***

The Lord is also great in watching over those who love Him, whom He calls to cast all their worries on Him.

Great is He in His justice; He forsakes the wicked who persist on their evil; and lets them drink from the cup of corruption which they fill through their own evil will.

❖ He will save all those who trust in Him, namely, all who believe in Him; all who fear Him; and all who call upon Him in truth.

*“All the wicked He will destroy”*. ... Who are the wicked, but those who persist on their sin; those who dare to put the blame on God, and not on themselves; those who debate daily, opposing God; those who despair of having the forgiveness of their sins, and, accordingly they accumulate them; those who promise themselves the forgiveness in a corrupt way; and, accordingly, they never forsake their sins and evil ways<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

## **10- A CONCLUSIVE GLORIFICATION:**

*“My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever”* (21)

Seeing the greatness of God in everything, the psalmist with his heart, tongue, and his whole being, meditates with praising Him; And experiencing the sweetness of praise, he calls upon all men to partake of this joyful experience.

❖ Do you see how, in His befitting ordinance, God calls -- not only those who enjoy His goodness, but also those who suffer His punishment; not just the humans, but even the irrational animals; all the elements and lifeless things – to enjoy His goodness<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 145 (144).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 146.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 145**  
**GRANT ME NOT TO BE DENIED PRAISING YOU**

- ❖ The psalmist looked at You, and got in touch with Your exalted greatness;  
Great You are in Your goodness;  
O You, who turn the troubles into comfort;  
O You, who take our corruption away from us;  
To enjoy Your goodness in our life.
- ❖ Great You are in Your mercy and compassion;  
O You, who forgive sins and save from corruption.
- ❖ Great You are in Your kingdom;  
O You who set my heart a throne for Yourself;  
Great You are in your awe;  
Which You pour into me, to make me bear the image of Your splendor.
- ❖ Great You are in Your wonders;  
You raise us out of the trash;  
To sit together with the heavenly hosts;  
You uproot from us our nature of dust;  
To grant us to dwell together with You in Your heavens
- ❖ Great You are in Your longsuffering;  
You open the gates of hope before everyone;  
Great You are in Your care;  
You uphold those who fall, and raise up those who are bowed down;  
Great You are in Your guarding and watching;  
That no enemy can crawl and snatch anyone out of Your hand.
- ❖ Great You are in Your salvation;  
To bring us forth into Your heavenly glories;  
Great You are in Your righteousness;  
By which You clothe us, to become righteous by You;  
Great You are, O Holy One;  
Who make us saints.
- ❖ Your greatness makes us praise You from generation to generation;  
We praise You day unto day;  
We praise You in heaven together with the heavenly hosts, forever;  
We praise You, and rejoice for those who join us in praising You;

I wish all flesh experience the sweetness of praising You.

## **PSALM 146**

### **A LIFE OF PRAISE**

The last psalms in the Hebrew version (146 to 150) are considered as psalms of praise, or of 'Hallil', like the Egyptian Hallil psalms (113 to 118), and the great Hallil psalm (136). Each of the five psalms begins with a call to praise the Lord, and ends with the word "Alleluia" or (praise the Lord). In them we do not hear struggles, sufferings, or troubles. There is no moaning, but only joyful praise and thanksgiving for the salvation of God. What preoccupies the psalmist is the rejoicing of the saints in the glory of God.

#### **A key for the psalms of praise:**

The word "praise" and its derivatives or likes, are the key for these psalms.

In psalm 146, it came in verse 1 and 2.

In psalm 147, it came in verses 1, 7, and 12.

In psalm 148, it came in three verses.

In psalm 149, the word "sing" came in verse 1, and "praise" in verse 3.

In psalm 150, it came twice in every verse.

Saying "*As for me, I am a song of praise for God*", the psalmist binds praise to all the aspects of his life.

1- **No life without praise** (1 – 2). Wishing to let his life be a preparation for eternity, the psalmist intends not to cease praising God while he lives. All what is in heaven is praise; whereas Hades knows nothing about it, there it does not exist. On earth, man has the choice to praise or to cease praising.

2- **Praise motivates man to believe and trust in God** (3 – 4). He who trusts in the nature of the Heavenly One, will never cease to praise Him in his depths, as well as before the others. Praising God, man's faith in Him grows more and more. While he who does not trust in the nature of the Heavenly One, and only trusts in those of authority or temporal possibilities, will either praise God just a little, until he stops altogether..

3- **Praise instigates hope** (5 – 7). Praise fills the soul with joy, and instigates hope in the Lord. Let us, therefore, praise God in all situations.

4- **Praise instigates love for God and men** (8 – 10).

It is as though praise is connected to life itself, as well as to faith, hope, and love.

On the liturgical aspect, this psalm may be divided into five divisions:

<b>1- A call to the people to perpetually praise the Lord</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2- A priestly advise to the people not to trust in men</b>	<b>3 - 4</b>
<b>3- A priestly blessing</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4- A call to the people to proclaim faith</b>	<b>6 - 9</b>
<b>5- A conclusive song</b>	<b>10</b>

### **The title:**

The happiness of those whose help is the Lord ; Praise the Lord

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version it came as: A decree Of Alleluia of Haggai and Zechariah.

Father Onesimus of Jerusalem believes that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah used to praise the Lord by this psalm after the return of the Jews from captivity.

### **1- A CALL TO THE PEOPLE TO PERPETUALLY PRAISE THE LORD:**

*“Praise the Lord, O my soul” (1)*

The psalmist begins this psalm by an enjoyable conversation with his soul; calling it, in the midst of his sufferings and affliction, to praise the Lord.

Before calling others, it is befitting of man to call his own depths to praise the Lord. On one aspect, the believer perceives, and confirms to himself, his perpetual relationship with God; On another aspect, praise, according to **St. John Chrysostom**, is the most effective weapon against the devil; And on a third aspect, the believer becomes a practical role model to those around him.

According to **St. Augustine**, the speaker here is not the body, giving an advice to the soul; for, it is the soul that gives advice and commands to the body, and not the other way round. He likens the soul to gold, and the body to lead. The gold, even if it is rusty, is more precious than the lead, even if the later looks pure and glittering. ... Here, the soul gives advice to herself.

❖ It is the voice of someone encouraging his own soul to praise God, saying: *“Praise the Lord, O my soul”*. For, sometimes, amid temptations and afflictions in this world, our souls may become disturbed, whether we like it or not.... To take such disturbance

away, the psalmist suggests the 'joy'; not as a true actuality, but in hope; and says to his soul, while disturbed, anxious, and sorrowful: "Have hope in God, for to Him I confess" <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ The psalmist does not say: Praise the Lord, [O my body], but says: "*Praise the Lord O my soul*" Not that he condemns the body, but he rather condemns its works.

The soul zealously encourages herself; It is as though the psalmist says: [Praise the Lord, O David<sup>2</sup>!]

(St. Jerome)

***"While I live, I will praise the Lord; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being" (2)***

The word "Jehovah" or "God", or "the Lord" came three times in the two verses 1 and 2; the same way it came three times in the blessings given by the priest (Numbers 6: 24 – 26); For the praise is presented to the Holy Trinity; and the Trinity in turn, presents the blessing to the people, as well as to the believer.

If Christ is our life, by getting attached to Him and acquiring Him in our depths, we enjoy life, and our souls become filled with joy. Let us then Praise Him all the time.

Getting preoccupied with sin, and attached to it, we are counted as dead and non-existent; We shall not be able to praise, even if our mouths and lips utter the words.

- ❖ When your mind say to your soul: "*Praise the Lord, O my soul*"; ... Having slid down, having become weak and frail and unable to stand aright as it should, the soul responds to the mind, saying: "***While I live, I will praise the Lord***"; meaning; [I am now dead! ... I am weak and frail. I shall praise as much as I can!!] ... Why?

"*While we are at home in the body, we are absent from God*" (2 Corinthians 5: 6).

"***While I live***". ... If attachment to the Lord is life, sojourning from Him is death. ... What gives you comfort? Hope! ... Now, you live in hope, you swim in hope, you sing in hope; ... Your death comes from the sorrow in this life; But you live in the hope for the life to come<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146 (145).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 55 on Ps. 145 (146).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 146 (145).

❖ Notice how the soul zealously satisfies itself, and responds to that instigation coming from itself! What does it say? *“While I live, I shall praise the Lord”*.... Now, being under the pressure of sin, I am not able to praise, Whenever I try to open my lips to praise God, feeling my sins seals and close them shut.

*“While I live, I shall praise the Lord”*. The psalmist says: *“I shall praise”*, and not *“I praise”*. When I shall be together with my Lord, then I shall praise Him.

Now, being in death, I cannot utter praise.

*“While I live, I shall praise”*. My life is Christ; Let us then praise the Lord while in life....When we consummate the works of righteousness, we become alive; and whenever we sin, we cease to be<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ “Now” – as I always say – refers to praise by works (while I live); according to the words of the Lord Christ: *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven”* (Matthew 5: 16); And to the apostle Paul: *“Glorify God in your body and in your spirit”* (1 Corinthians 6: 20); And to the psalmist in the last psalm: *“Every day I will bless You”* (Psalm 145: 2); Here he says: *“While I live, I shall praise the Lord”* (2) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## **2- A PRIESTLY ADVICE TO THE PEOPLE, NOT TO PUT THEIR TRUST IN MEN:**

*“Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help”* (3)

The Holy Spirit calls us to praise God all the days of our life; and a sign of this praise, is not to put our trust in men, whatever are their position, authority, or possibilities; for man cannot present salvation to himself, as well as to those around him.

The rest of the psalm tell us why it is God alone, and not man, in whom we should put our trust. It is befitting of us not to lean upon the arm of man, even that of rulers, for, if they cannot realize their own salvation, how could they save the others?

❖ Through a kind of weakness, the soul of man, entering into anguish, and despairing God, it chooses to put its trust in man.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 55 on Ps. 145 (146).*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 146.*

If it is said to someone fallen into a kind of sorrow: [There is a great person who can help you], he would smile, and rejoice,. But if it is said to him: [The Lord will help you], he keeps a cold silence, because of despair filling his soul.

You rejoice when you get a promise from a mortal man; How could you be sad when you get a promise from the immortal God?

You exult when you get a promise to be liberated from someone in need to be liberated just like you; Now, you are getting a promise from the divine Liberator, who is in no need to be liberated, and yet you despair as though His promise is of no value to you!

Woe to such thoughts, in which there is great sorrow and death<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ **“Do not put your trust in princes”**. How could we forsake our God who has compassion on us, and put our trust in men, mortal like us? although we know for sure, that by losing them, we would lose their protection as well; we would lose our interests; and we would probably bring upon ourselves harm from the enemies of the deceased, because of referring ourselves to them..... Now, what keeps us from reconsidering our faults, regaining our reason, and putting our trust in our God?

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Being already done with the protection of our parents<sup>2</sup>, we would, as well, do without the services of rulers, who would be delighted to give us free services. Yet, subsisting on their riches, we may cease to worry any more about preparing our own food, but we shall bring upon ourselves the curse of the prophet, saying: *“Cursed is the man who trusts in man”* (Jeremiah 17: 5); and of the one saying: *“Do not put your trust in princes”* (Psalm 146: 3)<sup>3</sup>.

**(Father Ibrahim – to monks)**

❖ By saying: **“in whom there is no help”** he means that they have no control even on their own salvation, and cannot defend themselves; If death strikes them, they will become as lifeless as a rock.... Now, How can someone so helpless to defend himself, protect others?

Such trust is shaky and unsound, as shown by nature itself; hence the apostle Paul, speaking about hope in God, says: *“Hope does not*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146 (145).

<sup>2</sup> أي الذين هم في مناصب كبيرة ويودوا أن يقوموا للرهبان خدمات لأجل راحتهم... فإنه لا يليق بالرعبان أن يتكلموا عليهم في كسل.

<sup>3</sup> Cassian, Conferences 24: 2.

*disappoint*” (Romans 5: 5). Human things, on another aspect are weaker than a shadow... Do not say to me; ‘He is a prince’, for a prince is nothing more than a sojourner, who, like everybody else, vulnerable to any unseen danger.

We cannot lean upon man, whatever are his position, capabilities, or possibilities. On one aspect, all these are not perpetual; and on another aspect, even a prince or a ruler could even be betrayed by his own guards..... If he cannot protect himself, how can he protect others?... If he is prone to death and perdition, how much more frail and perishable his promises would be<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

***“His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish” (4)***

Far from it, to compare the arm of man to our Christ, the Arm of God! ... When men die, their bodies return to dust; Whereas, when our Christ died, His body was not corrupted; He granted us the resurrected life here, and will raise our bodies up on His second coming.

The great men of this world are helpless to give support to anyone, particularly after their spirit departs from their bodies, when all their threats come to nothing, as well as all their dreams.

❖ Many put their trust in a ruler, who may be here today, but will not be tomorrow; ... He may be preceded by an army today, but this very night he may lie alone in his tomb<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ Through death everything are no more; Listen to the prophet say: *“In that very day his plans perish<sup>3</sup>”*.

❖ Concerning our souls, the Scripture says: *“His spirit departs, he returns to his earth”* (Psalm 146: 4); And: *“(The Lord) forms the spirit of man within him”* (Zechariah 12: 1).

About the angels, it is written: *“Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers flames of fire”* (Psalm 4: 4).

About the winds, it is written: *“When You break the ships of Tarshish with an east wind”* (Psalm 48: 7);

And about the good teaching, the Lord Himself says: *“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6: 63), The Holy

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 55 on Ps. 145 (146).

<sup>3</sup> On Eph. Homily 13.

Spirit is unutterable by human tongue, for it is a living Spirit who grants wisdom in words, talking and preaching by Himself<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

- ❖ The plans we speak about are those concerning this world, of houses, possessions, parents and children, commercial dealings, etc. All these will perish, once the spirit departs from the body; nothing will be remembered, nor be considered<sup>2</sup>.

(Father Dorotheos of Gaza)

### 3- A PRIESTLY BLESSING:

*“Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God” (5)*

Leaning on the God of Jacob is the way to happiness, help, and hope.

- ❖ What should we do, if we do not put our trust in men, nor in princes?  
*“Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help”*. Not this or that man, but the God of Jacob for his help.

Jacob, becoming ‘Israel’, namely, (the vision of God), all his troubles, sighs, and worries, came to an end; to be followed by happy (blessed) songs of praise<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ We have One Helper, with the authority to save. *“His hope is in the Lord his God”<sup>4</sup>*.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ Having counseled them not put their trust in men; Now he refers to the secure Refuge, and to the mighty Tower. He presents to them the best advice that surpasses all, for it leads man away from the untrustworthy way; to take the strong way; to destroy all what is vain, and set what is dependable; to forsake what is deceptive, and set what is of benefit<sup>5</sup>.
- ❖ Yet, I counsel you, not to leave everything to God, while you go to sleep, deeply and slothfully.... I also counsel you, when you diligently strive, not to assume that it is, by own efforts, all works were realized. ... God does not want us to be lazy, and let Him

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 13 :16

<sup>2</sup> *On Fear of Punishment.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 146 (145).*

<sup>4</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 55 on Ps. 145 (146).*

<sup>5</sup> *On Ps. 146.*

consummate all the work alone. And He, as well, does not want us to do it all by ourselves, disregarding His support<sup>1</sup>!

- ❖ No one practices a good life, and worries about the future.... Can we owe our good present to hope? Yes we can! Yet, it is not human hope, which would most probably become vain, and only leave confusion in its wake. Our hope is in God; hence it is sure and steadfast<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### **4- A CALL TO THE PEOPLE TO PROCLAIM FAITH:**

*“Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all what is in them; Who remains faithful forever” (6)*

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: “... *Who keeps righteousness forever*”. And to St. Augustine’s interpretation as: “... *Who keeps truth forever*”.

The psalmist presents to us the reasons, why we should lean upon God; foremost of which, is that He is the almighty Creator. If He has created heaven, earth, and the seas, and all what in them, What can’t He do?

And, being faithful in His promises, true, and trustworthy in His love, He would never lie, retract His promises, or fail to realize them.

If heaven and earth have endured all those long centuries; how much more would their Creator remain faithful in His promises forever?!

- ❖ We have, O brethren, a great God; Let us bless His Holy name; He who has graciously condescended to acquire us as His own.

If you marvel at the creation of the world; How could you not marvel Him who created it?!

If You look up to heaven and marvel;... If you meditate in the earth, and become in awe; .... When will your minds accommodate the width of the sea?!

It is your God who created all.... Put your trust in Him, to become happy<sup>3</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ Compared to heaven, earth, and the sea, we, humans, in our creation, would be not more than tiny insects! ... Would it be reasonable that

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Matt., 82*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Romans. Homily 9.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 146 (145).*

He who created heaven, earth, and the sea, has no authority to save man whom He created?!

**“Who keeps His covenant forever”**. ... If we are crushed by vanity and deception, let us then be sorrowful.

The Lord is He who will eternally keep the truth.

If the liar is believed more than us who tell the truth, we should not despair, for **“God keeps the truth forever”**.

He keeps the truth in His storehouse, and will restore to us what He has kept.

**“Who keeps truth forever”**. Christ is the Truth; ... **“(The Lord) executes justice for the oppressed”** (Psalm 146: 7). Even though justice may come late, do not ever lose hope, for He will surely come, present salvation, and **“execute justice for the oppressed”**.

Christ is the Truth... Let us then utter the truth; For the Truth will guard the truth for us”<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ If God’s works endure, He, Himself, is Perpetual, and Might; ... And to prove it, His works demonstrate His might<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ **“What man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?”** (Matthew 7: 9-11).

But, how could the “evil” give good gifts?1... He called them “evil”, for they, until now are sinners, and love the world. He called the gifts “good”; Although they are “good” according to their nature, yet they are temporal, concerning this frail life.

Yet the gifts given by the “evil “ are not their own; for **“the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness”** (psalm 24: 1); **“He who made heaven, earth, the sea, and all what is in them”** (146: 6).

Therefore, if we, “the evil“ know how to give our children what they ask from us, and we would never deceive them, How much more would be our hope in the Lord, to give us, when we ask good things from Him<sup>3</sup>?!

**(St. Augustine)**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 55 on Ps. 145 (146).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on Mount, 2: 73.

***“Who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners” (7)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: ***“The Lord loosens the chained”***.

As the psalmist says: *“He who keeps the justice or the truth forever”*, **St. Augustine** wonders, what is the truth that the Lord keeps? And where does He keep it? ...The answer to which came in the following phrase.

He defends those who are unable to defend or protect themselves; He counts their cases as His case personally.... Although it so seem that the mighty waves are against them, and that the winds are about to destroy them; Yet the conquest for them is sure, and will come in due time.

He sustains the hungry and satisfies the thirsty, spiritually and physically. He invites us to His banquet, and brings us forth into His heavens, to enjoy the bread of the angels.

**St. Augustine** discerns between two different kinds of the hunger. To the regular hungry, God gives the material food; but to those hungry for righteousness, He provides them with special kind of food that would satisfy them.

He is the Liberator of the captives from the human pressures, the shackles of sins, the hold of the world, the bondage of the devil, and even from the humiliation of selfishness that destroys our hearts.

**St. Augustine** clarifies the meaning of the *“oppressed”* here. For, not all those who suffer troubles are counted as *“oppressed”*, to be defended by God. ... He rather defends those who suffer from injustice, and not because of something wrong they, themselves, have committed. ... The wicked, like the robbers, the adulterers, the deceivers, for example, may suffer from many things, yet they are not *“oppressed”*, those whom God defends.

❖ ***“Who executes justice for the oppressed”***. He avenges the truly oppressed. ... Here, we hear the voice of the apostle, saying: *“In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?”* (1 Corinthians 6: 7). ... He instigates you not to be disturbed, ... for not every disturbance is counted as *“oppression”*.

You should care for what you do, and not for what you suffer from. If you do something upright, you are “*oppressed*”, but if you do something wrong, you, then, deserve to suffer<sup>1</sup>.

❖ It is befitting of us to be hungry to God<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Our body has been an adornment for us; but having sinned, it has got certain limitations, put on us.... These limitations are our corruption<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ That is His role; That is His nature; That is His personal attribute; He does not disregard the harmed, and would never forsake the sorrowful; He raises His hand to the benefit of the victims, against the wicked; ... He perpetually does all that<sup>4</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*Though it (justice) tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come; it will not tarry*” (Habakkuk 2: 3). God brings forth salvation; “*He executes justice for the oppressed*”. ...

“*He gives food to the hungry*” ... He gives it to the hungry, and not to the violent. Let us then, be hungry for Christ, He will give us the heavenly bread.

“*The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners*”. If the bread He gives, the divine word, and the heavenly teaching, refresh the soul; He also liberates our feet from their chains.... He liberates the captives. ... Lazarus was bound, hand and foot, with grave clothes; and the Lord commanded them to “*loose*” him and let him go (John 11: 44). The Lord looses the chains<sup>5</sup>.

❖ As the Lord “*gives freedom to the prisoners*”, and finds comfort in “*him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at His word*” (Isaiah 66: 2); ... He may say to me, I, who lie in the tomb of sin: [Jerome! Come forth! <sup>6</sup>].

(St. Jerome)

“*The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; The Lord raises those who are bowed down; The Lord loves the righteous*” (8)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146 (145).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 146 (145).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 146 (145).

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 55 on Ps. 145 (146).

<sup>6</sup> Letter 4 to Florentius, 2.

God cares for the blind, both spiritually and physically. .... Some lose sight or insight from birth; some through accidents, and some by their own choice. Yet, nothing is impossible for Him. He rather wishes to open the insight to behold Him, saying: “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Matthew 5: 8).

God raises up all those who are bowed down, because of what dwelt upon them of despair and depression, under the burden of anxiety, troubles and sorrows. He proclaims His love and embraces for the righteous who keep his commandment, and find pleasure in His will.

❖ Saying: “*The Lord opens the eyes of the blind*”, It should not be understood to concern the physical eyes; the way the Lord opened the eyes of the man born blind, and healed him.... Here the Lord refers to a kind of wisdom by which the blind is enlightened<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*The Lord opens the eyes of the blind*” .... According to the Greek and Hebrew versions, it came as: “The Lord makes the blind wise”. If the psalmist was talking about the physical eyes, he would say: “The Lord gives sight to the blind”, but his words are: “The Lord makes the blind wise”

The lord says: [Our hearts become blind because of the darkness of sins. ... That is why, when our hunger is fed, and our feet are liberated of their chains; By the eyes of our hearts we will start to see the light which we have lost, and will grow in wisdom].

What after we become wise? ... “*The Lord raises up all those who are bowed down*” (Psalm 145: 14).... Even if you stay cast down on the ground, albeit in peace, the Lord will stretch His hand to raise you up.

“*The Lord loves the righteous*. He Lord loves the righteous, the perfect, and protects the stranger who did not have the chance to enter into the ministry of the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ After saying: “*The Lord loves the righteous*”, it is so obvious that He helps many, on account of that they are passing through a kind of misery: He gives food to the hungry, because of their hunger; He gives freedom to the prisoners because they are chained and

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146 (145).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 55 on Ps. 145 (146).

miserable; and gives sight to the blind because of their helplessness; and not for the sake of any virtue in any of them all<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ No one who practice a good life would worry about the future ... Does our goodness truly give hope? Yes it does; but not a human kind of hope that would eventually become void, and would leave confusion in its wake. Our hope, being in God, it is sure and steadfast<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ As it is God the Father who is “alone wise”, according to the apostle Paul; God the Son is His wisdom. “*Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Corinthians 1: 24).

And as the Son is “the Wisdom”, by receiving the spirit of wisdom, we shall have the Son in us, and by Him we become wise; according to the words of the psalm: “The Lord makes the blind wise” (Psalm 146: 8). ... And being given the Holy Spirit, God becomes in us, as according to St. John: “*If we love one another, God abides in us; ... by this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit*” (1 John 4: 12-13). ... And when God the Father comes to be in us, the Son, as well, will be in us; For the Son Himself says: “*(The Father and I) will come to Him, and make our home with him*” (John 14: 23).

And as the Son is life, for He said: “*I am the life*” (John 14: 6), We, therefore, live by the Holy Spirit; for, according to the apostle Paul: “*He who raised Christ from the dead, will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you*” (Romans 8: 11). And when we live by the Holy Spirit, Christ Himself will be living in us; For, Paul says: “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*” (Galatians 2: 20).

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

- ❖ The Lord will always be Philanthropic, and will always intend to uphold those who fall, as David sings in his psalm. But the deniers, not wishing to hear the voice of the Lord; and not enduring to see the Lord, confessed by all, to be God and the Son of God; They, being so miserable, wander like blind bats, searching for excuses for their atheism, together with the devil, their father<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on Romans 8: 14.

<sup>3</sup> Four Discourses against the Arians, 3: 67.

❖ What does the Lord mean by commanding us, saying: “*O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?*” (Jeremiah 4: 14). While the prophet seeks from Him: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, ... Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow*” (Psalm 51).?!

What is it, being said: “*Sow for yourselves (the light of knowledge)*”<sup>1</sup> (Hosea 10: 12); and about God: “*He who teaches man knowledge*” (Psalm 94: 10); and “*The Lord opens the eyes of the blind*” (Psalm 146: 8); And what we say in our prayers by the prophet: “*Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death*” (Psalm 13: 3)?!

In all that, there is a proclamation of both the grace of God, and the freedom of our will; that when man intends to walk along the way of virtue, he seeks the help of God. He cannot enjoy the good heath, or free himself of weakness, by his own free will; unless he is so granted by God, who provides us with life itself.

It is clear that, through the exaltation of nature, granted to us by the goodness of the Creator; the beginning of good will is, sometimes stirred up in us, which we cannot realize practically, or consummate without the guidance of the Lord; as testified by the apostle, saying: “*For I know that in me (that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells; for to will is present in me, but how to perform what is good, I do not find*” (Romans 7: 18)<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Sherimon)**

❖ He, therefore, gave us mercy, and cured us from such a serious infirmity. .... Let us hear Him saying to us: “*See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you*” (John 5: 14). ... I wish we become humble in all things; for the humble lies on the ground; and he who lies on the ground, where will he fall?... It is obvious that it is he who is high up, who easily falls. ... If we have returned, and corrected ourselves; “*By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2: 8); For it is written: “*The Lord upholds all who fall*” (Psalm 145: 14); and “*opens the eyes of the blind*” (Psalm 146: 8)

**(St. Parnovius)**

**“The Lord watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and the widows; But the ways of the wicked He turns upside down” (9)**

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<sup>1</sup> النص البيروتي: "ازرعوا لأنفسكم البر".

<sup>2</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 13: 9.

The Lord cares for the strangers, in particular the captives; He comforts them to let them feel that in Him, they would find their comfort, wherever they are. He supports those who have no one to help them, like the fatherless and the widow. Whereas the wicked, who count themselves above the law, and that no one has authority over them; He, although He may suffer long, waiting for them to return to Him, and to forsake their evil ways; their wickedness will snare them, and their life will end up with perdition.

❖ Every church of the Gentiles is a stranger; for she came to the fathers, though she is not of their seed according to the flesh; but became their daughter through following their example; She will be kept by the Lord, and not by anyone else..

**“He relieves the fatherless and the widows”**. No one should assume that the Lord will support the fatherless by restoring his inheritance; or support the widow by providing her with a job. Indeed the Lord supports them, as He does to all mankind; .... In a certain way, we are all fatherless, not because our father is deceased, but because he is absent (from our life).

**“But the ways of the wicked He turns upside down”**. What is the way of the wicked? ... Despising the things we say, like “the kingdom of heaven”; the punishment of Hades, etc. ... as Christian nonsense. They say: [What I say, I live; “*Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die*” (1 Corinthians 15: 32)

Beware, lest those kind of people may draw you to a life of slothfulness. I wish they do not enter into your hearts through your ears.

...

Listen instead to the Lord your God, who says: “*Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go by it*” (Matthew 7: 13). Such a way will be turned upside down by the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ **“He supports the fatherless and the widow”**; The fatherless who lost God the Father through sin, and the widowed soul who lost Christ, her Bridegroom.

**“But the way of the wicked, He turns upside down”**. The psalmist did not say that the Lord destroys the sinners...If Christ is the

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 146 (145).

Way of the righteous, the way of the wicked is Satan; whom the Lord will turn upside down<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ (In a message of condolence to a widow, St. John Chrysostom wrote):

You have been enjoying honor and care when your husband was with you. Now, that God has taken him for Himself, He is taking his place for you. This I do not say on my own, but it is also said by the blessed prophet: “*The Lord relieves the fatherless and the widow*” (Psalm 146: 9); and “*(The Lord) is Father of the fatherless, and a Defender of the widow*” (Psalm 68: 5). God cares with great zeal for this category of humanity, as is mentioned in many parts of the holy Scripture<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 5- A CONCLUSIVE SONG:

***“The Lord shall reign forever – Your God, O Zion, to all generations” (10)***

The psalm is concluded by instigating the spirit of hope in the life of the pious man who praises Christ, and attaches himself to the eternal One who reigns in heaven, to enjoy the joyful eternity.

According to **St. Jerome**, the expressions “*to all generations*”, and “*from generation to generation*” in the whole text of the Holy Book symbolize the two peoples: the Jews and the Gentiles.

❖ Destroying the way of the wicked, the Lord shall reign forever. The psalmist did not say that the Lord will reign in the present world, but will reign forever.

As long as we walk along the way of the devil, Christ will not reign in us.

By giving place in my soul, for anger against my brother, I walk along the way of the devil, and Christ will not reign in me<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ The Lord destroys the way of the wicked; How about us? ... He will say to us: “*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you*” (Matthew 25: 34).

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 55 on Ps. 145 (146).*

<sup>2</sup> *Letter to a young widow, I.*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 55 on Ps. 145 (146).*

*“The Lord reigns forever”* ... Do not think that eternity is bound by limited words....When you love eternity, and Christ is your goal, you will reign forever with Him<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ If God reigns forever, and endures forever, there is no place for guessing ... It is, in truth, the way by which we live our present life in security, and gain the unutterable good things, giving thanks to the grace and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory, and the dominion, with His Father -- who has no beginning; and the Holy Spirit -- the Grantor of life, forever and ever, Amen<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 146 (145).*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 146.*

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 146  
AS FOR ME, I AM A SONG OF PRAISE FOR GOD**

- ❖ Grant me, O Son of David, to bear the spirit of praise;  
To follow the lead of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel;  
His whole life, he has been praising the Lord, even amid his tribulations;  
His guitar, harp, and psaltery, were always ready;  
His whole being was transformed into a harp, on which Your Holy Spirit played;  
By the spirit of praise and thanksgiving, he was qualified for the purity of heart ;  
And by Your grace, his life was qualified to become a joyful song of praise.
- ❖ Let me proclaim, together with the psalmist::  
“Praise the Lord, O my soul!”  
I call all my depths to turn into a choir of praise;  
To be prepared for the fellowship with the heavenly hosts;  
And by grace, to enjoy the deposit of heaven;  
For heaven is the place for praise, and Hades is the dwelling place of denial;  
He, whose depths praise the Lord, his heart will be lifted up to heaven;  
Hades will not let him enter into it;  
As it rejects the true thanksgiving Christians.
- ❖ I shall praise the Lord while I live;  
O my God, You are my life, and by You, my soul exults;  
By You, I present an unceasing sacrifice of thanksgiving;  
Without You, I would die, and present denial and disturbance;  
I would bear the smell of death and darkness, Praise would escape from my heart;  
As long as I live by You, I shall experience the resurrected life;  
My soul will be filled with exultation, and will instigate the spirit of joy in all my beloved;  
Say a word; to let me come out of the tomb of sin;  
That the bonds of the enemy would be loosed, and I would breathe freedom;  
That my whole being would set forth to praise You, until the time comes to encounter You face to face;

I do not know a particular time for praising You;  
My depths would dissolve with love and joy by Your presence in me;  
When You set the kingdom of joy within me;  
When grumbling and denial find no place in my depths;  
I would sing together with the psalmist, saying:  
*“I shall praise my Lord, while I live”* .

- ❖ My soul will perpetually praise You;  
For the sake of the amazing harp You granted me;  
And for the sake of Your Holy Spirit who plays on it;  
He plays on the strings of my senses, emotions, and thoughts;  
He kindles my talents, possibilities, and energies;  
They are Your gifts to me – precious spiritual strings;  
On which no one but Your Holy Spirit can play;  
To compose a heavenly symphony that gives pleasure to God the Father;  
That brings marvel to the heavenly hosts, and destruction to the hosts of darkness;  
How amazing! ... You Holy Spirit *“brings, out of the eater, something to eat”*;  
And out of me -- the dust and trash, someone to sit together with the elites of Your people;  
This is the song of praise, that no human can sing;  
For it is a song, the cost of which is Your precious blood.
- ❖ As the psalmist has turned into a unique praise of thanksgiving;  
His mind, heart, and all his senses were lifted up;  
He no longer puts his trust in princes, nor on any man;  
You, O my Savior, became his hope, salvation, and joy;  
He praises You, for You are the Eternal, the Grantor of the resurrection and eternity;  
Whereas men are mortal, their spirits will eventually exit, and they will return to their dust.
- ❖ Let me praise You, O my Creator; For you are forever faithful;  
My soul may get disturbed for some time;  
On account of that the world often believe in lies;  
Yet, I shall not be terrified, but will praise You, for You are the Truth;  
Let me be attached to You, to walk in truth, namely, in You;  
You keep the truth forever!

- ❖ I praise You, for You execute justice for the oppressed;  
 You received oppression to embrace the oppressed, and to set them  
 exultant by You;  
 You give food to the hungry;  
 You became the bread that comes down from heaven; and brings us  
 forth into Your heavenly banquet;  
 Grant me to get hungry for you, and thirsty for Your Holy Spirit;  
 I acquire You for free, get satisfied by You, and never hunger for the  
 world;  
 And drink from the fountains of Your Holy Spirit.  
 You set the captives free;  
 You liberate us from the humiliation of being selfish, that would  
 destroy my heart by its bitter chains.
  
- ❖ I praise You, God of the impossible;  
 I was blind because of the defilement of sins;  
 Losing the light of truth, I became in pitch darkness;  
 Open up the eyes of my heart to see the light;  
 When I see You, O Light of the world, I can see all in, and by You;  
 Indeed, You give wisdom to the blind, dwelling in us, O Wisdom of  
 God;  
 I praise You, for You look over my soul, bowed down to dust;  
 You alone can raise me up from the burden of fear and despair;  
 You alone can destroy the despair and depression, and grant me the  
 joyful hope;  
 What shall I seek from You, who Love the righteous;  
 Grant me to fear You, to enjoy the warmth of Your divine bosom;  
 Sanctify me by Your Holy Spirit, to taste the sweetness of Your love.
  
- ❖ I praise You, Who watch over the strangers;  
 Keep me, until I encounter You, and unite with You;  
 Comfort me in my sojourn, until I return to my heavenly home;  
 I praise You, who support the fatherless and the widow;  
 You are the inheritance of the fatherless, and the companion of the  
 widow;  
 Support me, until I return to the house of my heavenly Father;  
 Support me, until I enter into the secret place of the wedding;
  
- ❖ I praise You, O my King and my God, to all generations;  
 I praise You in this generation as a son of Yours;  
 And praise You in the generation of eternity as a son of resurrection.

- ❖ My God, let me get attached to You, For You are my life;  
 Exultant by You, my depths praise Your holy name;  
 My body may groan amid the affliction;  
 But my soul meditates in Your love;  
 To exalt over the sufferings of the body;  
 I have nothing better to do than to praise You!  
 For You are my life and joy;  
 I praise You every day, as long as You dwell in me;  
 Your joyful kingdom lifts me up above all events;  
 It draws my heart, mind, and all my depths to You;  
 I live as though among the heavenly hosts;  
 Anxiety would find no place in me.
  
- ❖ I praise You by dwelling in Your bosom;  
 I put my trust in no man, whatever are his possibilities;  
 And I would not seek the emotion or compassion of any man;  
 Who may give me today, and oppose me tomorrow;  
 Who may open his storehouse to me now;  
 And I do not know where he will be tomorrow;  
 He may die, and his body may return to his dust;  
 I may seek him, and find him nowhere;  
 But when You embrace me to you;  
 By You, I challenge death itself.  
 By You, the gates of heaven are opened to me eternally;  
 I praise You, for You are my Almighty Helper.
  
- ❖ My soul praises You, and exults in You;  
 If oppression dwells upon me;  
 You alone executes justice for the oppressed;  
 You alone satisfy the needs of both my soul and body.  
 You present to me the food of angels;  
 And cares even for my material bread;  
 You liberate my soul of every bondage;  
 For You grant me the authority to trample on the serpents and  
 scorpions;  
 You open my insight, to see the heavens with their amazing splendor;  
 By a word, You heal every perversion in me;  
 Amid my sojourn, You keep me company on the road;  
 My soul is comforted by Your company;  
 I often suffer from humiliation;  
 I sometimes count myself as fatherless;  
 And sometimes I feel like being a widow;

You are my heavenly Father;  
And the eternal Groom of my soul;

- ❖ I praise You perpetually, and forever;  
My soul is filled with joy by You;  
My soul longs to encounter You face to face;  
To You, be praise and thanksgiving, O my God, and my King.

## **PSALM 147**

# **THE PRAISE AND THE NEW JERUSALEM**

In the Septuagint version, psalm 147, according to the Hebrew text, is divided into two psalms: the first is psalm 146, including verses 1 to 11; and the second is psalm 147, including verses 12 to the end of the psalm.

This psalm in the Hebrew, and the Chaldean versions, as well as the Volgata, came without a title. And in other versions, it was referred to Haggai and Zechariah the prophets.

Some scholars, like **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>1</sup>, believe that this psalm was written while the Jews were preoccupied with the re-building of the city of Jerusalem after the return from captivity, as is clear from the two verses 2 and 13. The Jews returned gradually, and Jerusalem was rebuilt. But that was actually realized by the Lord Himself, who “*stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia and Mady*” (Ezra 1: 1), for the benefit of His people (2).

1- Praise pours pleasant spiritual beauty on the people of the Lord (1; 27: 4; 29: 2; 149: 4).

2- By praise, the Lord draws the far away souls (the captives of Israel), to build by them the higher Jerusalem, holy in Him, and unite them together (2).

3- By praise, the Lord heals the inner man (3).

4- By praise, the Lord raises up the meek souls as though to heaven; Whereas the wicked who deny Him, will go down.

5- By praise, we enjoy the life of fellowship with the Holy One, who presents to us the water of His grace working in us.

6- Praise is a true fountain of the divine blessings (14 – 20).

<b>1- Praise is good and pleasant</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2- Praise and the ecclesiastical building</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3- Praise is a healer of the soul</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4- Praise and the stars in heaven</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>5- Praise and the enjoyment of the divine power</b>	<b>5- 11</b>
<b>6- Praise and the fellowship with God</b>	<b>12– 18</b>
<b>7- Praise and the enjoyment of the divine commandment</b>	<b>19 – 20</b>

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147.

## **The title:**

Praise to God for His word and providence.

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came like the last psalm as: “A decree of Alleluia; of Haggai and Zechariah the prophets.

## **1- PRAISE IS GOOD AND PLEASANT:**

***“Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is fitting” (1)***

Everyone was exultant when Jerusalem was rebuilt after the return from the Babylonian captivity. ... So it is befitting of the believer, while enjoying in his depths the work of the Holy Spirit, who sets the city of God in his heart, to experience the exultant heavenly life in his heart, and to enjoy the sweetness of singing praise to the King of kings.

Out of a daily experience in all his life, the psalmist says: “*Praise is pleasant*”; namely, it grants sweetness within the soul, and satisfies it with joy and gladness. At the same time he says: “*Praise is fitting*”; as it is befitting of every rational being to recognize His Creator and King, the Merciful, who loves His creation. “*It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High*” (Psalm 92: 1-2)

❖ “*Praise the Lord*”; This was told to us, as well as to all peoples

❖ We may wonder: Why should we praise God; The psalmist answers: “*For praise is befitting*”

Your tongue may praise. Yet only for some time; Let your life perpetually praise. For then, the psalm will be good.

The psalm is a song; yet it is not like any other song. It is a song on the ‘psaltery’. Sing the psalm, not just with your voice, but use a ‘psaltery’, a musical instrument, to accompany your voice.

Do not sing a psalm by your voice alone, but let your works be in harmony with your voice.

Do not let your heart be silent, nor bear deception; for you are singing a psalm to the Lord.

Whatever you do, do it reasonably and without exaggeration. Sing a psalm; and Listen to the words of the apostle: “*Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all in the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10: 31).

When you lie in your bed, let your matrimonial bed be pure; do not defile it; do not surpass the limits allowed by the law of God; do not let your lust be out of control; honor your wife, for you are both members

of Christ, who created, and renewed you by His blood. Let the purity of your bed be a praise to God<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The psalm is good, pleasant, and fitting to praise the Lord, if it lifts the mind up to him, and keeps the soul away from the earthly things.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ What does he mean by saying: “*For it is good to sing praises to our God*”....To be well-received by God, singing the psalm should go hand in hand with a pious life and an upright behavior<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Beside being good in itself, the psalm presents many good benefits. It separates the mind from down to the earth, and provides the soul with wings, to fly up high; The apostle Paul says: “*Singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord*” (Ephesians 5: 19). There is need for praise, for the sake of one’s own life, prayer, and harmony<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ By saying: “*It is good to sing praises to our God*”; the psalmist means to say that singing praise should not be only by the voice but also by the heart. There are many, with nice voice, yet, being sinners, their praise is not well-received by God. He, who praises by the heart, praises good; for he praises Christ by his good conscience<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

## 2- PRAISE AND ECCLESIASTICAL BUILDING:

“*The Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers together the outcasts of Israel*” (2)

According to St. John Chrysostom, this verse shows that this psalm was written during the return from captivity; as the psalmist longs to re-build the city of Jerusalem, and to gather together the outcasts of Israel.

It is not Cyrus who issued the decree to allow the Israeli captives to return; It is actually the work of the Lord Himself, who “*stirred up his spirit*” (Ezra 1:1)..

Beside being taken into captivity, the Jewish people were humiliated, above everything, by losing Jerusalem, the city of the great King. That is what sin does; It denies us the enjoyment of the heavenly

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 147.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 147.

<sup>4</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 57.

life, and humiliates our soul. We will not be able to re-build our inner Jerusalem in the depths of our souls without a divine intervention.

It so seem that the psalmist enjoyed seeing the people return from Babylon, and gather together to re-build Jerusalem. Nehemiah might have started by building the city (Nehemiah 2: 5); then built its walls (Psalm 147: 13; Nehemiah 3: 1; 6: 15); But it was actually God who built it, by stirring up the heart of Nehemiah and the others; according to the words of the psalmist: “*For the Lord shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory*” (Psalm 102: 16)

“***He gathers together the outcasts of Israel***”; according to His divine promise (Deuteronomy 30: 3; Isaiah 11: 12; 56: 8). He actually brought the captives back from Babylon.

Some may wonder: What has the calling to praise God, to do with building Jerusalem, and gathering together the outcasts of Israel?!

There is no way to enjoy building the inner Jerusalem, and to experience the deposit of the heavenly Jerusalem, and the liberation from the captivity of the devil, like the true inner life of praise.

Having presented a call to all nations to praise God, not only by the tongue, but also by behavior, even by the way of eating, drinking, and sleeping; Now, the psalmist reveals to us the main reason for this perpetual praise; which is God’s building of Jerusalem, and gathering together the outcasts of Israel.

**What does the psalmist mean by Jerusalem and Israel here?**

a- The people of the Old Covenant felt the condescension and the love of God; who granted them the city of Jerusalem, the holy city of God, as His dwelling place among His people.

b- Looking inside his depths, the believer finds that his heart became a holy temple of God; and his depths the new Jerusalem.

c- By a futuristic look, filled with hope, the believer concentrates his eyes on the higher Jerusalem, where he shares with the heavenly hosts their eternal and unceasing praise to God.

As to Israel, according to **St. Augustine**, it means “the vision of God”. It is as though, the believer, seeing God, his soul exults, and he will perpetually praise Him.

❖ The psalmist, as he always does, addresses his words, not to the city but to its inhabitants. He perpetually exhorts and advises them to give thanks to God, not for the sake of the nice buildings and the secure strongholds, but for the sake of His divine care, and His gifts<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ The people of Jerusalem are themselves the people of Israel.

The eternal Jerusalem in heavens, the great and exalted heavenly city; Its citizens, the angels rejoice for seeing God, and concentrating their eyes on him. We, on the other hand, have gone astray from it because of our sin, and corruption; We live there no more, and will never return to it.

Looking at our miserable condition, God reformed the fallen location; namely, “He built up Jerusalem”.

He sent His own Son as a Savior to our captivity, saying to Him: Take a suitcase, and put in it the price of the captives. He took on Himself our mortal body with the blood which He delivered for our salvation; By that blood “*He gathered together the outcasts of Israel*”.... Look at Him, whom we praise; ... Look at Him, to whom we are indebted to praise our whole life<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

### 3- PRAISE IS A HEALER OF THE SOUL:

*“He heals the broken-hearted, and binds up their wounds” (3)*

By building Jerusalem, God heals the broken hearts of those who were taken into captivity, because of their sins and those of their fathers, tasted the bitterness of humiliation, and suffered the feeling of God’s wrath upon them.

The Lord Christ came to build, by Himself, His Jerusalem in us, to bring us back from the captivity of sin, to take away our reproach, and to grant us the glorious freedom of the children of God.

If sin has embittered the life of man, and has broken his heart by the spirit of anxiety and disturbance; The sound praise, by the joy of the spirit, heals the broken heart, and gives it back the true peace.

❖ The psalmist parades the calamity, and the usual way of God, granting comfort to the humble; about which the apostle Paul says: “*He who gives life to the dead, and calls those things which do not exist as though they did*” (Romans 4: 17); And the psalmist says: “*He heals the broken-hearted*” (3); showing that, even though we are not worthy; yet, being the work of His hands, He will never forsake us. Paul also says: “*Nevertheless, God, who comforts the downcast ...*” (2 Corinthians 7: 6); and: “*who revives the spirit of the humble, and revives the heart of the contrite one*” (Isaiah 57: 15). And the

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

psalmist also says: “A broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51: 17). If you, therefore, intend to have comfort, be humble and contrite of heart<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*He heals the broken-hearted*”. Now you know how Jerusalem is rebuilt. “A broken heart, God will not despise”.

“*He binds up their wounds*”. You wound your heart, and the Lord binds up its wounds.

The Samaritan, who was on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho, bound the bleeding wounds, and anointed the bruises of him who was cast on the highway. That is whom the Holy Book means by saying “*He heals the broken-hearted, and binds up their wounds*”<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

#### 4- PRAISE AND THE STARS IN HEAVEN:

“*He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name*” (4)

If praise grants the soul the two wings of love: God and men; to set forth free to practice the almost heavenly life;...It makes the believer what is like a star shining in the sky of the spirit, that bring pleasure to God Himself, as well as to His heavenly ministers. God cherishes His children, and grants them the spirit to challenge the darkness of vanity.

If God is preoccupied with counting the number of the irrational stars, and calling them all by names; How much more Would He care for those who believe in Him, as stars shining on an eternal level; He knows their number, and would never deny any of them His care; unless he rejects God’s work. ... He calls us by name: “*Thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine’*” (Isaiah 43: 1-20; “*That you may know that I, the Lord, who calls you by your name*” (Isaiah 45: 3); And in admonition filled with love, He says: “*I have even called you by your name; I have named you; though you have not known Me*” (Isaiah 45: 4); The Lord Christ says about Himself: “*He calls His own sheep by name*” (John 10: 3).

**St. Dedymus, the blind**, says: [God’s knowledge of everything is not strange; but, for the sake of His care, He proclaims that He counts the number of the stars, as well the number of the hair on our heads<sup>3</sup>. He

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 57.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Commentary on Job 5: 9: 10.

cares for what seem to us as worthy of counting, like the stars; and also cares for what seem to us as unworthy of that, as the number of the hair on our heads.

According to some fathers, the “stars” refer to the true believers who shine with the splendor of Christ dwelling in them. And as said by the prophet Daniel: *“Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever”* (Daniel 12: 3). Those are counted before God, and are known by name.

When some happen to lose their hope in salvation from sin, and in the re-building of the inner soul, they look up to God the Almighty, who knows the stars by name, and who sets forth their laws, systems, and movements.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, God who counts the uncountable stars, and moves them according to fixed systems, gathers together His people from everywhere, and cares for every single one of them, knowing everyone by name.

❖ The stars are certain lights in the church, supporting our nights, about which the apostle Paul says: *“in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”* (Philippians 2: 15). Those stars are counted by God; and will reign together with Him; Those all are gathered together in the body of His only-begotten Son; counting, and recounting them; whereas those unworthy, He does not count .

❖ The psalmist shows that praise is good in itself, and the psalm is able to present to him many blessings. It isolates his mind from the earth, gives two wings to his soul, grants it light, and lifts it up.

I wish that everyone of you is counted as giving light in the darkness, or refuses to be led astray by the dark iniquity of the world. If he is not led astray, and not defeated, he would become as a star among those already counted by God<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ The book of Numbers does not count the impure and the unsanctified who perish, but those who are saved.

If you want a proof that the number of saints are counted by God; Listen to the words of the prophet David about the stars of heaven: *“He*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

*counts the numbers of the stars, He calls them all by name*” (Psalm 147: 4).

The Savior, not only fixed the number of the disciples He has chosen, but also said that “*the very hairs of their head are all numbered*” (Matthew 10: 30).... By that, He does not mean the hairs which we cut by a pair of scissors and then cast into the trash ... but he means the strength of the soul, and the diverse thoughts that emerge from the power of will and the understanding<sup>1</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ After healing their wounds, He transformed them into stars, which He counted.

They are actually great in number. A multitude have sinned, and are healed.

“*He counts the number of the stars*”; not the number of the wounded, but of those who became stars.

The Lord counts the number of those who are worthy of Him, calling each of them by name.

He supports the humble, and transforms them into stars. The prophet Daniel says: “The righteous will shine like stars forever and ever; and the wicked will be cast to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12: 2,3) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

The Lord counts the saints according to a certain spiritual system. It is said: “*He counts the numbers of the stars, He calls them all by name*” (4) <sup>3</sup>.

❖ Plato, the famous unchristian philosopher, in His work ‘The republic of Plato’, says: [The sun in the sensed world, is like God in the mental world. ... It gives light to the eye, as God gives light to the mind. ... The sun is the most exalted of what is seen by our eye; and God is the most exalted of what is perceived by our mind].

The poets said that the sun never weakens, never ceases to give birth to life, and to move in its orbit.

How does the sun make a day on one side of the earth, and a night on the other side? Who establishes, and keeps the steady system of the day and night? Who fixes the beginning and the end of the seasons of the year?

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<sup>1</sup> In lev. Hom. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 57.

<sup>3</sup> Evagrius of Pontus: Scholia on Ecclesiastes 6: 1: 15.

How about the moon? Do you know its nature, the measures of its light, and the system of its orbit?

Do you know how the moon controls the sky of the night, as the sun controls that of the day?

Do you know how the moon gives the daring to the beasts of the wilderness; and how the sun motivates man to wake up, ready to work?

In the Holy Book we read: “*Can you bind the clusters of the Pleiades, Or loose the belt of Orion?*” (Job 38: 31). It is God who does all that, He “*counts the number of the stars, and calls them all by name*” (Psalm 147: 4) <sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory the Nezianzen)

## **5- PRAISE AND THE ENJOYMENT OF THE DIVINE POWER:**

***“Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite” (5)***

Being the mighty Creator; He, not only created those uncountable stars, but counts their numbers, and calls them all by name; as though He cares for every one of them.

Someone may ask: [I do not deny the greatness of the Creator, nor His exalted might; but, where is His care for me, when I suffer such multitude of afflictions? ... Together with Aristotle, I know that He has created the world, established its natural laws; and set them in movement. Yet, He then forsook it, to dwell in His heavens, with no relationship between Him and His creation].

To this the psalmist responds by saying: “***He counts the number of the stars, and calls them all by name; His understanding is infinite***” (5). ... No creature can perceive His secrets and plans. And as it came in Isaiah: “*Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints, nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable; He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might, He increases strength. ... But those who wait on the Lord, shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint*” (Isaiah 40: 28, 31).

It is not only that the Lord is great and mighty, but He makes those attached to Him great and mighty as well; He grants them what may seem impossible. And as the goodness of God is shown in turning what

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<sup>1</sup> العظة اللاهوتية الأولى: عظة رقم 27 عظة تمهيدية ضد أتباع يونيموس، 30.

seems to be evil into good and goodness, He turns us from being humanly weak into mighty men of valor.

By the spirit of meekness, we trust in His promises, and enjoy the power of His salvation. The apostle says: *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His Judgments, and His ways past finding out. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?”* (Romans 11: 33-34)

❖ ***“How mighty is His power, and how infinite is His understanding!”***.

He who counts the number of stars, He, Himself is infinite” How can we interpret this? Who is qualified, even to imagine the meaning of *“His understanding is infinite”*... Things may be infinite to man, but it is not so to God, it is countable, even to the angels.

God’s understanding surpasses the capability of any made-made calculator or computer... Where has God created all those things? ...To whom was it said: *“You have arranged all things by measure and number and weight”* ? (Wisdom of Solomon 11: 20). Who can count, measure, or weigh, the measures, the numbers, and the weights themselves?!

Let all human voices be muted; and all human thoughts calm down; I wish they cease to attempt to describe indescribable things<sup>1</sup>.

❖ Do not ask: [How can God gather His people together? As *“Great is His power”*]; and *“His understanding is infinite”*. (3). *“His knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, I cannot attain it”* (Psalm 139: 6); and *“His judgments are a great deep”* (Psalm 36: 6).

God, being so great, mighty, and unperceivable; ... Do not be, therefore, a busybody, and dare to ask; [How could this be? <sup>2</sup>].

❖ After learning the secrets of the hidden wisdom of God, the psalmist says that His wisdom is unperceivable and unreachable, ***“Great is our Lord and mighty in power, His understanding is infinite”*** (5); Namely, there is no way to perceive them<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

***“The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground”*** (6)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 147.

<sup>3</sup> On the Incomprehensible Nature of God, homily 1: 26.

Our Christ who came to set the kingdom of God in us, grants it to us if we walk with the spirit of humility and weakness.

*“He desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth”* (1 Timothy 2: 4). He who confesses his weakness, and walks with the spirit of humility, will be lifted up by the Lord, as though by the two wings of a dove, and will fly as though up to heaven. Whereas he, who persists on his evil, will sink under the weight of sin, together with Pharaoh and his army, to the bottom of the sea like a stone (Exodus 15: 5).

Saying *“He casts the wicked down to the ground”*, the psalmist means that, because the wicked persist on their evil ways, God allows for them to go down under the weight of their sins, to the ground; not to be able to stand aright, or to set forth toward heaven; as He did to Pharaoh, who, when he persisted on opposing the divine truth, He allowed for him to practice the cruelty of his heart.

According to **St. Augustine**, this phrase came after saying: *“His understanding is infinite”*; so that, feeling his inability to understand the divine secrets, it is befitting of man to honor the Holy Bible, the word of God, even if it may seem not clear to him; and by the spirit of humility, he should wait for God to grant him the understanding, without daring to criticize the vagueness of the word, or accuse the Book of having contradictions.

If God allows for some vagueness in the holy Scripture, it would be to motivate us to knock, on the divine door, to open it to us.

❖ Lest someone may foolishly ask: [What would be the benefit of knowing that God has an accurate knowledge of the stars?] The psalmist refers to the great care that God gives to humans. He does not say: “The Lord helps the humble”, but say what is greater: *“The Lord lifts up the humble”*; as though he refers to a loving father to his children.

The term *“lifts up”* implies the infinite reward, the exaltation, and holding the hand.

Do you notice the greatness of His power to work in all circumstances? ... How He lifts up the humble, and casts down the wicked<sup>1</sup>?

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ The words said by the bride of the song: *“Let my beloved come to his (garden)”* (Song 4: 16), refer to the freedom of choice, the same way

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147.

the two expressions: “*Hallowed be Your name*”, and, “*Your will be done*” do. The prayer of the bride of the song refers to God, the Grantor of virtue, and to the coming down of the Groom, for the sake of His love for humanity.

We cannot be lifted up to the height of heaven, without Him coming down to “*lift the humble*” (6). That is why the soul which is lifted up calls on the infinite God, and prays to Him to come down from the height of His greatness, to enable those who live on earth to approach Him.

To the bride of the song, the Lord responds, saying: “*Here I am*” (Isaiah 58: 9). Hearing what goes on in her mind, the Lord granted her the desire of her heart, and came to her garden, as the south wind was blowing, plucked the fruits of her spices, satisfied Himself with the fruits of virtue. And talking of His banquet, He says: “*I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends, drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones*” (Songs 5: 1).

Do you see now, how the gift of the Groom surpasses the request of the bride?... The bride desired to have fountains of spices in her garden; that the south wind would blow on her plants at mid day; and that the Care-taker of the garden would get the fruits at his choice; ... The Groom, on the other hand, let the trees produce the bread which He mixed with His honey, instead of the chosen fruits<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

**“*Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; Sing praises on the harp to our God*” (7)**

It is befitting of us to talk to everyone in his own language. He who intends to talk to God, the Fountain of the heavenly joy, is committed to learn the language of thanksgiving, together with the singing of praise. The thanksgiving heart opens wide on God, and about it, will be said what was said about Moses: “*The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*” (Exodus 33: 11). Whereas the grumbling heart will not be able to hear the voice of God; and even if he does hear it, he will not understand Him; and consequently, will not be able to enter into a debate of love with his Creator and Savior.

❖ “***Start by confession to the Lord***”. If you wish to reach a clear understanding of the truth, you should start by confession.

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<sup>1</sup> عظة 10 على نشيد الأناشيد ترجمة الدكتور جورج نوار.

If you wish to cross over from the way of faith, to reach the truth, you should start by confession.

Start by accusing yourself, then praise God...Let the good works follow the confession: “*Sing praises on the harp to our God*” ; ... *Namely, not only by talk, but by works*<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ After referring to the achievements of God, the psalmist instigates men to praise Him, saying: “*Cry out to the Lord by confession (by thanksgiving)*” with great zeal<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ “*Sing praises on the harp to our God*”. The harp has many strings; if one is broken, you cannot play on it. So is the good man; even if he is a saint, if he lacks one single virtue, he cannot partake of presenting praise to God<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

“*Who covers the heavens with clouds, Who prepare rain for the earth, Who makes grass to grow on the mountains*” (8)

The clouds in the Holy Scripture, often refer to the saints, who being forgiven their sins, their souls do not weigh them down to earth, or let them sink deep like a stone, but fly toward heaven, and raised from glory to glory.

In His love for humanity, God prepares rain for the earth, to turn the barren wilderness into fruitful gardens. This rain is nothing but His divine grace that descends on our hearts, to set a divine garden within us.

“*Who makes grass to grow on the mountains*”, to clothe them with beauty, and to make them become green pastures for the flocks of sheep, that give joy and gladness to their shepherds. ... So God works in the life of His children, set out of them holy mountains, that become green pastures, on which a multitude of souls find the word of God, as spiritual food that refresh them.

In the previous phrases, **St. Augustine** clarified that oftentimes, in the Holy Book, something may seem vague, until you knock on the divine door, then God would grant you the understanding, to enjoy joyful goods. He clarified, as well, that God raises up the meek who, by the spirit of humility seek the understanding from God, instead of taking the position of criticism, with a spirit of haughtiness and pride.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 147.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 57.

Now, the psalmist presents a practical analogy:...When covered with clouds, the sky disappears and may seem as vague, until they pour rain on the earth, to produce fruits as food for men and beasts.... The clouds here, refer to the vagueness of certain prophecies in the Holy Book; But once they are realized, the believer perceives the divine secrets, and receives the rain, namely, the understanding presented to us from high above, to make our earth fruitful and exultant.

- ❖ Look at how the psalmist wisely referred to the good things, presented for the general benefit, and for every one of us; closing shut the mouths of the wicked by the same abundance presented by God....In other words, if God presents such a great care even to the non-believers, preparing for them clouds, sending rain, and granting vitality to the earth; How much more would He do for the benefit of His own people<sup>1</sup>!?
- ❖ Lest someone with little sense would ask: [How could I benefit from heavens?] He hastens to refer to the need of humanity for the clouds to provide the rain that makes the grass grow, ... God sends rain for you to drink, and to provide the earth with vitality and gladness. ... And It is more for your benefit, you who are called His own people<sup>2</sup>!

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ ***“Who prepares rain for the earth”*** ....The earth is in need of rain, the fountain of divine teachings, to produce fruition.

*“Who makes grass to grow on the mountains”*. The Holy Book call Abraham ‘a holy mountain’, and so it calls Isaac, Jeremiah, and the rest of the prophets. These mountains produce grass for the beasts, and crops for men<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry” (9)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: ***“He gives to the beasts its food, and to the young ravens that call Him”***.

Having created the beast for the sake of humans, God cares for them, by sending rain to make grass grow on the mountains, to provide them with food.

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 147.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 147.*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 57.*

God's care also extends even to the young ravens, that seem of no benefit to us, Yet God with His compassionate and loving nature, hears their cries, and sends them food. ... If He so does to the young ravens that are of no benefit to man, and are helpless to fend and provide for themselves; not disregarding their cries that no one may hear, How much more would His care for men, and particularly for those who praise Him, being His own?!

The beasts, in general, are not able to talk, Yet God, knowing what they seek, and what they need, provides them with their food , as He does to the hungry young ravens.

According to **St. Augustine**, this phrase bears a symbolic concept. The flock of beasts, whom God provides with food, refers to the rational flock of Christ, whom He provides with spiritual food to satisfy their souls; ... The ravens, on the other hand, refer to the Gentiles, who, for long, have been worshipping idols, and opposing the divine truth. Yet the (young) ravens called upon God to save them; the Gentiles have forsaken their idol-worshipping fathers, and called upon God, who provided them with the living faith, food for their souls.

Referring to the abundance of the exalted care of God, **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>1</sup> says: [If He cares to bring clouds to send rain on the earth, to make the grass grow on the mountains, to provide food for the beasts, also for the benefit of man, and cares as well for the young ravens that seem of no benefit for anyone; Will He not care for men whom He counts as His own?! ... *“But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine’”* (Isaiah 43: 1).

❖ He says: *“Look at the birds of heaven”*; He does not say: ‘because they are not preoccupied with things of this life, and do not set markets for trade’, but He says: *“They do not plant, nor gather crops”*.

Lest someone would say: [What then? Shall we stop planting crops?] ... God does not mean for us to stop planting, but to stop being narrow-minded, and confused with unwarranted worries.

David, as well, from the old, and in a secret way, says: *“You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing”* (Psalm 145: 16); and also says: *“He gives to the beasts its food, and to the young ravens that cry”* (Psalm 147: 9)<sup>2</sup>.

(**St. John Chrysostom**)

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 147.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 57.*

❖ ***“Who covers the heavens with clouds; ... and gives to the beasts its food”***....If you are a man, you will be given the spiritual understanding of the Holy Scripture; But if you are like a beast of burden, you will be given only its letter<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“To the young ravens that cry”***. He did not mention any other bird beside the young ravens, not even the adult ravens.... The adult ravens will not be saved; only their young ones; ... We are young ravens, for we were born to idol-worshipping parents. We read the wise words of Solomon, saying: *“The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out”* (Proverbs 30: 17); Here He says “the ravens” and not the “young ravens”; for he who likens the ravens, or has its features, will not be saved. ... The raven that Noah sent from the ark did not return to it; It was among the other creatures in the ark during the great flood; yet, after it came to an end, it was sent away.

We, therefore, the young ravens, cry out to God, and will be saved<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

***“He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man”*** (10)

God works, both with the few, as well as with the plenty. To save, He needs no military provision of horses, nor human provisions *“the legs of men”*; But will save by His divine might, and His exalted love for men.

❖ ***“He does not delight in the strength of the horses”***; The strength of the horses refers to pride. Actually a horse has a kind of neck, that symbolizes haughtiness. ... I wish men would not feel haughty, as though they are worthy of boasting; nor would think that they are privileged with exalted features, like horses<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ Having been weak, unarmed, and had nothing, the terrified Israelites were given assurance by God, saying: *“He does not delight in the strength of horses; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man”*<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 57.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 147 (146).*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 147.*

<sup>4</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 57.*

❖ ***“He does not delight in the strength of the horse”***. ... In the psalms it is written; and somewhere else, it is written: *“The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea”* (Exodus 15). The divine commandment was given to the king of Israel not to raise horses; Yet Solomon did import horses from Egypt; and we all know what he ended up to.

***“He takes no pleasure in the leg of a man”***. God takes pleasure in the pious, those who fear Him.... One kind of fear casts away many kinds of fear. ... Is it not better to have fear of One, and not to fear many; than to fear many, but have no fear of the One<sup>1</sup>?

(St. Jerome)

***“The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him; In those who hope in His mercy”*** (11)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: ***“The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him; In those who trust in His mercy”***.

They do not trust in what they have of military power ***“the strength of the horse”***, nor in what they enjoy of physical strength ***“the leg of a man”***; But they trust in what they bear of the power of sonhood to God; walk in the piety of the children, and enjoy the divine possibilities from their heavenly Father.

As a Father, God cares, not only for the material needs of His believers; like He does with the beasts and birds, even for the hungry young ravens; But He also takes pleasure in them, embraces them. He delights in their piety, and their love for Him. That is the secret of their strength and inner beauty.

According to **St. Augustine**, the psalmist binds between the fear of God, and the hope in His mercy. For fear without trusting in God’s mercy, would destroy man with despair.

❖ The thief is feared; the wild vicious animal is feared; the oppressive man of authority is feared.

***“The Lord takes pleasure in those who hope in his mercy”***. ... Judas, who betrayed the Lord, feared the Lord, but he did not hope for His mercy.

It is very good to fear the Lord, yet only if you trust in His mercy; ... Judas, in despair, hanged himself.

With wisdom, fear the Lord, by trusting in His mercy<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 147.

## 6- PRAISE AND THE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD:

*“Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!”*

(12)

*Starting here to follow the Septuagint version of psalm 147*, we find that its title is: “A creed of Alleluia of Haggai and Zechariah”

Looking through the spirit of prophecy to those returning from captivity to Jerusalem, he calls on Jerusalem to do her main work, namely, to praise the Lord. Returning to Jerusalem from captivity implies responsibilities and commitments on everyone: the leaderships, the priests, the Levites, and the people. But their main work, nevertheless, should be to praise and give thanks to the Lord, by their tongues, their thoughts, and their holy emotions; as well as by their love for God, and for one another.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>1</sup>, the foremost of God’s goodness, and the greatest among them all, is that God refers Himself to His people,

Saying: “**Your God**”. This expression embraces all the divine goodness; counting His people as His own and heirs.

❖ In some detail, the great benefits of this reference are:

1- First and foremost of all is His saying “*your God*”, an expression that embraces all those privileges together, choosing you as His own, and making you His inheritance; and preferring you, although He is the Lord of all.

2- Establishing the city with security (13)

3- Increasing their number (13)

4- Giving them rest from wars and disturbances; not only in the city. But also among themselves (14).

5- Providing their land with fertility and abundant fruition<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ This psalm includes a prophecy about the return of the Hebrews from their captivity, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

❖ Saying: “**Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem, Praise your God, O Zion**”, the psalmist does not mean the city with its buildings and walls, but its inhabitants. The same could be said about the words of our Lord: “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her*” (Luke 13: 34)

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147.

<sup>2</sup> The city of God 1. 9: 11, 13.

❖ His saying here, applies to the high and free Jerusalem, the mother of all believers, and Zion, namely, the holy church, “*the congregation of the firstborn, written in heaven*”, according to the words of the apostle. As to the strengthened “*bars of your gates*” (13), these refer to the upright teachings and dogmas that bring us into her. ... And the blessing of the Lord is in the increase of the number of her children who cover the earth, and the spiritual gifts that would satisfy them.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ We could say that peace, like the eternal life, is the ultimate goal of all what we do; For the city of God, for which we have dedicated our talk here, was addressed in this holy psalm. Saying: “***Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem, Praise your God, O Zion; for He has strengthened the bars of your gates; He has blessed your children within you; He makes peace in your borders ...***” (12-14). Peace is the main goal for this city; it has its magic and is cherished by all.

Peace of the body is the ordinance of its members ; Peace of the irrational soul is the calming down of its lusts; Peace of its rational soul is the harmony between the mind and the behavior.

Peace between the soul and the body is the controlled life, and the wellbeing of man as a whole.

Peace between the mortal man and God is the obedience according to the commands of the eternal law by faith.

Peace among the people is the conformity by good ordinance.

Peace in the household is the conformity of ordinance among those living in it.

Peace of the heavenly city is the perfect ordinance in harmony among those in fellowship, with those enjoying God, and their satisfaction among themselves with God.

All this peace is to ordain all things, to put them in their befitting place<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “***Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem, Praise your God, O Zion***”. ‘Jerusalem’ is (the vision of peace). Wherever there is meditation in God, praise Him.

Glorify the Lord, O church, for you started to believe in Him, and to acquire peace; to behold peace; For ‘Jerusalem’ is (the vision of peace).

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 57.*

Truly enjoying of knowledge, and the stronghold of meditation, I say: “*Praise the Lord, O my soul*”<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

**“For He has strengthened the bars of your gates, He has blessed your children within you” (13)**

In verses 13 and 14, the psalmist presents to us four blessings enjoyed by Jerusalem through its rebuilding; and by our souls, being the city of God:

1- **Security of the city** (13), through strengthening the bars of its gates against any invasion. Here is a reference to the believer’s care to sanctify his senses, praying to God to set guard on them, lest sin would crawl into the depths of his soul.

2- **The inner happiness** (13) for its inhabitants, through the blessing dwelling upon them.

3- **The national peace** (140)

4- **Abundance and blessing on the crops** (14).

Being called to perform her main work after the return of the captives, namely, to praise the Lord with great joy, it is befitting of Jerusalem, to strengthen the bars of her gates. Why?

To close the gates; as it was told in the parable of the wise virgins, who after entering into the wedding, the gates were closed before the foolish virgins.

By closing the gates, on one aspect, evil would not be allowed to enter; and on another aspect, the bride would stay with her Groom, as though in the king’s secret place.

Let our heavenly Groom enter into our hearts, His new Jerusalem, and let no sin would be allowed to crawl to where the Holy One is.

❖ Do not allow anyone to enter or exit; for we rejoice, and we fear the Lord.

You alone, will be allowed to enter, for you are counted among the wise virgins who carry oil with them<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The prophet says: O, you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and Zion, Praise the Lord your God, for He strengthened the bars of your gates, so that no enemy can enter your city; and He blessed your people and children.... As to saying: “*in your borders*” (13), it means that their

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 147.

increase will not be while they are scattered and sojourned, but within their borders, and in their land. That is where their security and peace will be.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ By saying: “*He has strengthened the bars of your gates*” (13), he means that He makes them secure, and un-conquerable<sup>1</sup>.
- ❖ By saying: “*He has blessed your children within you*” (13), he means that He gives growth, not to those scattered everywhere, but to those gathered together “*within you*”<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ “*The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob*” (Psalm 87: 2) We already talked about “the prophets” as the gates of Zion ... Let us now see what are the bars of those gates. The prophets are truly the ‘bars’ of the church, No body can enter into the church except through them.

‘Mercion’ rejected the Old Testament. Yet without it, we cannot enter into the New Testament.

Let us, therefore, accept the prophets, and enter through them ...

The Lord Christ says: “*All those who came before Me are thieves and robbers*” (John 10: 8); Unless they are granted the privilege to be a “bar” in the gates of Zion<sup>3</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

“*He makes peace in your borders, and fills you with the finest wheat*” (14)

God, in His love, “*makes peace in your borders*”. *He makes the city secure.*

He, does not just give you blessings, but “*fills you*” with an abundance of the “*finest*” gifts – “*the finest wheat*”.

He “increase your numbers”.

He will perpetually give you rest from any more wars and disturbances; not only in the city, but among yourselves

- ❖ How could you all exult?

Love peace, O brethren! ... When the love of peace cry out in your hearts, your hearts will exult tremendously.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 57.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

Love peace, O children of the Kingdom; ... O citizens of Jerusalem; ... For “Jerusalem” means (the vision of peace).

All those who love peace are happy to live in it. Its gates are opened to let them enter, then are closed, and their bars are strengthened..

That is what you long for, and love to have in your homes, work places, for your spouses, children, servants, and friends.

You were crying out before, out of thirst for peace, and not out of being filled.... But there, (in heaven), will be the perfect righteousness, where there is the perfect peace<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The active will double up His crop, fill up his barns with all goods, and his inner storehouses with treasures. He will help the needy in the time of need; those who eat his bread will be satisfied with the finest wheat; and those who drink from his cup, will lack no joy. They will enjoy all his goods forever<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John the Deliaty)

❖ “*He fills you with the finest wheat*: .... Does Jerusalem have the finest wheat? Answer O Jews! ... If not, by necessity, you have to resort to the spiritual interpretation to understand the rest of this psalm.

The word of God is an increasing riches; ... It includes all gladness; ... In it you will find whatever you need; as it was the case with the children of Israel when they ate the Manna in the wilderness. Everyone tasted the kind of food he likes to have, whether it is bread, meat fruit, or vegetable.... In the body of Christ, the word of the divine teaching, or the interpretation of the holy Scripture, We, likewise, will find the manna, according to our desire. If you are a saint, you will find in it spiritual refreshment.; and if you are wicked, you will find anguish in it<sup>3</sup>.

❖ “*He makes peace in your borders*”. He who is not in peace with his neighbor, in not within the borders of Israel<sup>4</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Again, he instructs them here not to refer their blessed crop to the kind of soil or weather, but to the divine care<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> الرسالة الحادية والأربعون، 2 (ترجمة الرب سليم دكاش اليسوعي)

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 57.*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 57.*

<sup>4</sup> *On Ps. 147.*

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly” (15)**

By so saying, He confirms His love for all mankind. His exalted care embraces the whole earth, through sending His word, namely His commands, to run very swiftly to it.

At the time of creation, according to father Onesimus of Jerusalem, God commanded men, to reproduce and increase, which happened very swiftly.

As to the recreation, the Lord commanded His disciples to *“make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 28: 19). That command ran more very swiftly than the first command. The preaching of the gospel filled the whole world with the Christians, sons of the new Adam, born free of corruption, and granted the life not followed by the eternal death.

❖ Speaking of the evangelic preaching by the apostles, he hastens to add: *“His word runs very swiftly”*.

The word was heard, and the teachings of the apostles reached every corner of the earth, east and west<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ After saying: **“Praise your God”** (12); lest any foolish person may think that he only means “God of the Jews”, after saying: **“He sends out His command to the earth”**, he hastens to add: **“His word runs very swiftly”**, to show that God’s care is not only for the Jews or for the city of Jerusalem, but extends to the whole world<sup>3</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

**“He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes” (16)**

Having come down to the earth incarnate, the Word of God gathered together the whole mankind, to set out of them His body, namely the (catholic) church, and made it a garment, white as snow, as it happened on the day of His transfiguration (Matthew 17: 2). *“He presented her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle”* (Ephesians 5: 27).

At the same time, He presents to humanity, that is sanctified in Him, a garment of righteousness to be clothed in.

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<sup>1</sup> *Life of Moses*, 186.

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Ps. Homily 57*.

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 147*.

❖ When men were non-believers, cold (in love), and slothful, He made for them a garment of wool.

He let her (the church) be stretched on the cross, to be washed of defilement, purified by faith, and without any spot or wrinkle<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The word of God runs very swiftly, extends like snow, which, itself, is like wool.

Cast out, O Lord, my defilement; ... Take away from me, everything mean; ... Grant Your snow, Your purity, to the minds of all Christians; Namely, let them be clothed with Your garment.

Christ is our garment; if we intend to put it on, we have to be pure like snow<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ As to “*scattering the frost like ashes*”; It is because ashes are connected to repentance and humility. According to **St. Augustine**, he who intends to learn and to encounter God, should confess that he is in darkness, as though in frost; and in need of repentance in the spirit of humility.

❖ In case man is called to learn about God, he is told: “Receive the truth”. And once he starts to desire to receive the truth, he finds himself helpless; as though in a kind of darkness, because of which he could not see.

Do not wander in the frost, but follow faith.

Seeking to see, and finding yourselves helpless, Repent your sins, so that frost in you will be scattered like ashes.

Repent for having been opponents to God; and for following your evil ways. which made it difficult for you to see paradise. Then, frost in You will be scattered like ashes by God.

You, yourselves, are still frost, and even ashes; for those who repent so testify, saying to God, as the righteous ‘Job’ did: “*He has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes*” (See Job 30: 19 Vulgate). Talking to God, Abraham said: “*I who am but dust and ashes, have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord*” (Genesis 18: 27). That is the humility of a repentant<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps. Homily 57.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

(St. Augustine)

***“He casts out His hail like morsels; Who can stand before His cold?” (17)***

After likening the church to the glorious garment of Christ, like snow, without spot or wrinkles; Here he likens the believers to ice, which is very solid, crystal-like, and would not melt as easily as snow. ... Yet, despite its solidity, ice could turn into hail, like morsels of bread. As an example, **St. Augustine** presents to us St. Steven the martyr, who confronted his persecutors like crystal solid ice, and endured with joy to be stoned even to death<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“Who can stand before His cold?”***. It is written that in the last days, the love of many would cool off ... I wish God will not allow cold to crawl into our hearts; For we would not commit any sin until our love gets cold. The apostle says: ***“Be fervent in spirit. Our God is a consuming fire”***; ... Our God is a fire to consume the cold of the devil.

By nature, the dead is cold; and by nature, the living is warm. ... In case someone gets cold, and spiritually dead, God sends His word to him to melt his (cold)<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

***“He sends out His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow” (18)***

❖ ***“He sends out His word and melts them”***. I wish we, the snow, the ice, and the hail, would not despair.

Out of snow, as of wool, he makes a garment.

And out of solid ice, He brings forth security through repentance.

He also calls those who, for a long time, were as solid as ice, through pride; They would not be solid before the mercy of God, who: ***“sends out His word and melts them”***.

As an example, let us hear the apostle Paul: saying: ***“I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man”*** (1 Timothy 1: 13). But, in order that the ice would not despair, God caused it to melt: ***“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: 16). Through Paul, God sent out His word to the Gentiles, to melt their ice.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps. Homily 57.

*“He causes His wind to blow, and the waters flow”*. ... The snow and ice melted and turned into water that flowed... *“Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters”*(Isaiah 55: 1).

While being solid like ice, Saul persecuted Steven even to death. Now, turning into (Paul), he calls the Gentiles to come to the Fountain of living water (Christ) <sup>1</sup>.

(St, Augustine)

❖ Here, the psalmist presents the power of God, the un-opposable, and with no limits, to produce things out of non-existence; and to change them to realize His will.

He sometimes changes the things themselves; and other times, He moves them to do different jobs, which may be contradictory .to the first.

That is what He did to the furnace into which the three saintly young men were cast; when its fire turned into pleasant dew (Daniel 3) Andwhen He turned the sea into dry land, on which the children of Israel walked to safety.

And when He let the solid ground under the feet of Abiram, Dathan, and those who followed them, swallow them like the water of the sea (Numbers 16).

And When He let the solid wooden rod of Aaron, sprout, put forth buds, produce blossoms and yield ripe almonds (Number 17)

And when He made the dumb donkey of Balaam, rebuke her master, and talk more sense to him than any rational human being.

And when He let the lions show the prophet Daniel more compassion than any sheep could show. Although It kept its vicious nature, yet it changed its behavior<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## **7- PRAISE AND THE ENJOYMENT OF THE DIVINE COMMANDMENT:**

*“He declares His word (His righteousness) to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel”* (19)

❖ What is “righteousness”? And what are the “judgments”? ... What humanity suffered -- as previously stated – when it was snow, hail, and ice, was because of its pride and haughtiness against God.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 147.

Let us go back to the origin of our fall, to see the blessed David say in psalm 119: “*Before I was afflicted I went astray*” (Psalm 119: 67); and to see him say as well: “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes*” (Psalm 119: 71).

Such righteousness, Jacob learned, who wrestled with God Himself, who came to him as an angel; when he managed to hold fast to God with a great effort. ... God allowed to be held, out of mercy, and not out of weakness.... Jacob wrestled and prevailed; And when he saw as though he prevailed, he asked God to bless him (Genesis 32: 24), etc.).

I wish man strive to hold fast to God as Jacob did..... Those were the judgments declared by God to Jacob and Israel<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

***“He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His judgments, they have not known them. Praise the Lord!” (20)***

According to **St. Augustine**, our Lord Jesus Christ declared Himself to Saul of Tarsus who was as solid as ice; And melting him down, he (as Paul) preached to the solid ice, namely to the Gentiles, to let them melt as he did.

And according to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>2</sup>, the psalmist started His psalm by talking about God’s gifts to His people, then moved to His care for the world as a whole, being a lover of all mankind. Now, he goes back to talk about God’s care for His own people.

Then **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>3</sup> presents a symbolic spiritual interpretation of this psalm, looking at Jerusalem as a symbol of the Higher Jerusalem; and to Zion as a symbol of the church of the New Covenant.

❖ Notice how the psalmist goes back again, from dealing with the general issues, to talk about the privileges given to the Jews, in an attempt to exhort them to have a greater zeal. After starting the psalm by talking about the material things that were for the benefit of their bodies, for their security, prosperity, and peace; he now, raises his talk to a higher level, referring to giving them the law as a personal privilege, to draw them away from evil, to lead them to virtue, and to enlighten their minds.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147 (146).

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 147.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 147.

That is why, talking about each of these aspects, the psalmist David, quoting the words of the prophet Moses: “*What great nation is there that has God near to it, as the Lord our God is near to us?*” (Deuteronomy 4: 7); he says: “*The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses; His acts to the children of Israel*” (Psalm 103: 6, 7) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 147.

## AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 147

### LET ME PRAISE YOU WITH MY WHOLE BEING

- ❖ Fill my life with heavenly joy;  
Let me experience the sweetness of praise;  
My tongue shouts loud for You;  
My heart, emotions, and all my senses sing for You;  
I sing with my tongue and lips;  
And with all my body organs and energies;  
As is befitting of every organ;  
To testify to Your majesty, and to experience the fellowship with You;  
My whole being turns into a harp;  
On which, Your Holy Spirit plays a song of love;  
I sing to You by my voice, as well as by my silence, and by my work.
- ❖ Praise grants me two wings;  
By which my soul flies as though to heaven;  
By praise, I enjoy Your love, and that of my brethren;  
I experience the deposit of heaven, and the fellowship with the heavenlies;  
By singing praise, my souls isolates herself from the love of temporal things  
And sets forth free, to enjoy the heavenlies.
- ❖ Grant me the life of the true inner praise;  
To be qualified to have Jerusalem built in me;  
Set Your kingdom in my heart;  
And enlighten my eyes to behold Your glory.
- ❖ By praise and thanksgiving I show You my wounds;  
Which are the product of my evil will;  
The fruit of my slothfulness and sins;  
You are the good Samaritan;  
Who bandage the wounds of my soul;  
And fix my broken bones.
- ❖ Our hearts rejoice when we watch the stars in the darkness of the night;  
And You, O my God, find pleasure in seeing Your believers as shining stars;  
Grant us by praise to glitter, in the night of afflictions;

Let the darkness of the night become darker, that the splendor of  
Your children may increase;  
To count them as stars known to You;  
You give each of us a name that You cherish;  
The darkness of sin will not be able to spoil Your splendor shining in  
our depths;  
Your grace sets out of us stars, that no darkness of vain could hide.

- ❖ My soul praises You, O Mighty Goodness,  
Amid the afflictions, You comfort my soul;  
You turn my bitterness into exalted sweetness;  
My depths silently anticipates;  
For You are God of the impossibilities; Your greatness has no limit.  
Grant me the spirit of meekness, to trust in You;  
Lifting my depths up to You, they rejoice in Your works;  
I knock on Your door; and You grant me understanding of Your  
wisdom, and peace for my heart;  
You hold my hand, and carry me on Your shoulders;  
You come down to carry me to Your heaven.
- ❖ You are my true weapon;  
You are the Grantor of conquest in every battle;  
Grant me not to trust in my human strength;  
Nor boast of vain possibilities;  
Hiding in You in the time of affliction;  
I feel secure, and my soul exults by You;  
In Your divine bosoms, my soul finds comfort, and praises You;  
By the spirit of piety, I fear and love You;  
I do not want to bring You grief by my sins;  
Yet, in case I fall, I trust in Your mercies;  
Praise will never cease in my depths;  
For You find no pleasure in my perdition, but in my return to You.
- ❖ By Your mercies, You have chosen me to be among Your own;  
You set Your city in me;  
A city exultant by You;  
Her foremost work is to praise You; And her law is the true peace;  
Peace between the soul and the body, being both led by Your Holy  
Spirit.  
Harmony between the mind and the emotion; and between the mind  
and the behavior;  
Peace with God and men.

- ❖ Out of my depths, You set a new Jerusalem; namely the vision of God;  
I see You; and I meditate in You, and praise you;  
My soul longs and thirsts for You;  
Glorifying You, she seeks to have more recognition of You.
- ❖ Your dwelling in my soul, and being exultant by You, flood amazing blessings on me;  
Enjoying security, I do not fear the wars of the enemy;  
Enjoying peace, there will be no place for inner controversies;  
Experiencing happiness, I feel as the happiest being on earth;  
You turn my depths into a paradise bearing the fruits of Your Holy Spirit.  
Your entry turned my depths into a joyful wedding.
- ❖ Come and dwell, O my Savior, in my depths;  
Take my defilement away from me;  
Grant me to wear the garment of Your righteousness;  
By Your presence, I discover that I have been in ice-like darkness;  
I need repentance with the spirit of humility;  
I perceive that, although I am as solid as ice;  
Yet, Your word can melt it;  
Your dwelling inside me, floods my inside with the water of Your grace;  
Your presence inside me, moves everything for the edification of my soul;  
Praise be to You, O You who truly love me.

## ***PSALM 148***

# **THE AMAZING CHOIR OF PRAISE OF THE WHOLE CREATION**

Psalms 148, 149 and 150 occupy a special place in the Coptic church, being the fourth 'Hos' (praise) in the daily vespers and the midnight prayers.

This psalm has no title; and is referred to the two prophets Haggai and Zechariah, according to the Septuagint, Syrian, and Ethiopian versions. It is considered by some as the most magnificent of all psalms, as it calls upon the heavenly hosts, humans, and all creatures to praise God.

All mankind care for making singing choirs, whether in the world, or in the religious congregations. But we never heard of a choir, called to praise, like the one mentioned in this psalm; which includes incalculable rows of the rational creation that fears God, the irrational creation, and even the lifeless one. ... All feel indebted to the Creator who takes care of them; ... And all proclaim their admiration and love for this amazing Creator.

This psalm reveals to us the commitment of all beings to glorify God; each according to its possibilities, capabilities, and talents. The heavenly hosts testify to Him by their exultant holy life; The sun, by the splendor of its rays of light, as well as by its heat, important for the plants, the animals, man, etc; The moon, by its splendid light that serves us during the night; The stars, by their beauty, testify to the work of God, the Supreme Artist. ... That is concerning what is manifest; while what is hidden is far greater.

Being familiar with the sweet taste of praise, the psalmist calls upon all the heavenly and the earthly creations to partake of praising their Creator:

1- **The heavenly creation** (1 to 6). Starting with the angels, followed by the celestial bodies, then the clouds.

2- **The earthly creation** (7 to 10). Whether in the depths of the seas and oceans, or on the high mountains, the winds, and the fruitful trees.

3- **Humanity**: Having been created in the image of God; men and women are committed to praise God more than all.

Enjoying salvation, and having more perception of God's exalted love, they praise Him more and more.

❖ We are committed, to have the object of our meditation, in this present life, to praise God; because the perpetual exaltation of our life to come, is His praise. ... No one would be prepared for the life to come, unless he practices it now!

Our praise should be characterized by joy; and our prayers by sighs. The later to be practiced during temptations and afflictions in the present life; while the former concerns the life to come, in the eternal comfort in heaven<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

### **Nature praises the Lord:**

❖ Nature would never cease to praise God, as, by Him, they all move to praise.

It is easy for the stones and wood to praise Him; because His hidden symbol moves nature to praise Him.

All kinds of creatures sing His praise: both the uttering and the silent.

By its light and heat, the sun sings praise, moving in its orbit (Psalm 148: 3).

By its shining, and changing phases, the moon praises the unchangeable Lord of all times (Psalm 148: 3).

The outer space with all its stars of light, praise their Maker day and night (psalm 148: 3).

The earth, the seas, the high mountains, and all things that move in them, partake of praising God (Psalm 69: 34).

All the forests with their fruitful trees, and all the cedars, praise Him daily with amazing admiration (Psalm 148: 9).

Heaven and earth, as is written, are full of His glory (Isaiah 6: 3).  
Everything created, sing praise to its Creator<sup>2</sup>.

❖ Behold, all creatures of different kinds, sing Your praise, I, as well, open my mouth to praise Your might.

Behold, the days and nights, open and close to proclaim Your news to the whole earth.

The mornings wake men up from their sleep to praise you.

The summers and winters, proclaim to earth, that You are the One who changes their phases.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>2</sup> الميمر 18 على أحد الشعانيين (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني)

The cold and hot weather that come and go in due time, proclaim how You are particulate in Your works.

The hours of the day, and the four phases of the night, all raise up high praises for Your Might.

The sea with all its ships, storms, and waves, preach in amazement, how fearful are Your working might.

The mighty waves, together with the high winds, sing Your praise, saying how amazing is Your might.

Leviathan and all the dragons, trust in You within their borders in the depths of the seas.

The whole earth, with all its hills and mountains praise You, while You carry them lest they fall.

Behold, heavens, together with the outer space, proclaim Your handiwork, and how mighty You are.

Behold, the great tent, woven by Your exalting might, and spread over in all directions, sing Your praise.

The sun and the moon, with their shining rays, wake the world up to praise You<sup>1</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

### **No one perceives how creation praise their Lord.**

❖ All creation sing praise, each by its own tongue: ... How? No one knows!

The divine Truth testifies that all His creation praise Him; ... How? No one knows!

No one knows by which mouth, and by which sound, the earth sings praise to its Creator<sup>2</sup>!

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

### **David talks about the praise by natural elements..**

❖ David testifies that they actually praise, when he calls upon them to do (Psalm 148).

The great sea creatures and all the depths; fire and hail, snow and clouds, stormy wind, mountains and hills (Psalm 148: 7-8).

David exhorts all of them to praise, as a tax on the creatures to praise their Creator.

He would not exhort the winds and the storms to praise, unless he knows for sure that they can.

<sup>1</sup> الميمر 12 على ذلك الابن الذي يدد أمواله (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

<sup>2</sup> الميمر 12 على ذلك الابن الذي يدد أمواله (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني).

Moved by the Holy Spirit, David, in his turn, moved the heavenly and the earthly creations to praise.

The sun, the moon, and all the stars in heaven, together with the earth, mountains, hills, and trees; David waked them up, and said to them all: “*Praise the Lord*”, knowing for sure that they can do (Psalm 148: 1).

How can they praise? Do not ask me, for I do not know!

There are hidden secrets between God and His creatures; He hears them when they praise!

When stones are called upon to shout praise to Him, He, alone, hears and understands their language!

While He was riding on the donkey and entering Jerusalem, it was ready to praise His humility!

As the little children held branches from the trees to praise the Lord, there was no need for the stones to partake of praising Him!

And when the Jews sought to stop them, He proclaimed to them: “*The stones will cry out to Him*”.

But even if those kept silent, the stones would immediately cry out, and praise the King in fear! (Zechariah 9: 9; Matthew 21: 5; Luke 19: 40).

All those would cry out indeed; For it is not possible for the creation to stop praising their Creator<sup>1</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

1- A call to the heavenlies to praise	1 - 2
2- A call to heaven to praise	3 - 6
3- A call to the earth, with all what are on it, to praise	7- 10
4- A call to the rulers to praise	11
5- A call to the people to praise	12
6- The motives behind praising God:	13- 14
a- His great name	13
b- His glory fills earth and heaven	13
c- His care for His people	14

## 1- A CALL TO THE HEAVENLIES TO PRAISE:

“*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights!*” (1)

According to the Chaldean version, it came as: “*Praise Him, O holy creatures from heaven*”.

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<sup>1</sup> الميمر 18 على أحد الشعانيين (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام سوني)

Calling the whole creation to exult praising the Lord, the psalmist starts by calling the first row of the choir, saying: “Alleluia. *Praise the Lord from the heavens, Praise Him in the heights, Praise Him all His angels, Praise Him all His hosts*” (1, 2). The procession of praise starts by the inhabitants of heaven, those in the heights; the angels with their sweet and gentle voice<sup>1</sup>.

Becoming heaven, the believer will have the kingdom of God set inside him, and his soul, with all its energies, will set forth toward the heights to join the heavenlies in praising the Lord.

❖ Now I shall parade before you the different stages of prayer: **the supplication, the thanksgiving, and the praise.**

In the supplication, man asks God for mercy for the sake of his sins. In the thanksgiving, he presents thanks to His heavenly Father. And in the prayer of praise, he praises God for the sake of His divine works.

When you are in affliction, present a supplication to God.

When God gives you good gifts, Give Him thanks.

When your mind exults, praise God.

Present your prayers to God with discernment.

Listen to David when he perpetually say: “*At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments*” (Psalm 119: 62).

And in another psalm he says: “*Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights*” (Psalm 148: 1).

And in another psalm he says: “*I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth*” (Psalm 34: 1).

That is why, you should not use one kind of prayer, but use all kinds at different times<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Afrahat)

❖ Praising God will be by three categories:

a- **The irrational (non-uttering)** creatures, and the lifeless elements, praise God, merely by the beauty of their appearance, that moves the onlookers and instigate them to praise the Creator.

b- **The rational (uttering)** creatures praise God by their words and good works, to glorify their Father in heavens.

c- Parading **the different creatures**, he did not mention the Son and the Holy Spirit, to mute the blasphemers who claim that the Son and

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<sup>1</sup> *Sifre 1: 58.*

<sup>2</sup> *Demonstrations, 4: 17 (On Prayer).* ترجمة الدكتور صفوت منير.

the Holy Spirit are among the creatures. By not mentioning them, he confirms that they are One God with the Father.

The word “*the heavens*” in Hebrew, came in plural, and is sometimes translated as “*the heaven of heavens*”, to distinguish it from “heaven”, namely, the “*firmament*”, created by God on the second day. Sometimes air is called heaven, as when we say: ‘birds of heaven’.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Praise God by your whole being; Namely, not only by your tongue and voice, but also by your conscience, life, and works.

Now, we are gathering together in the church to praise God. Once we go out to work, it may seem as though we stop praising God.

I wish we continue praising God by living a good life.

Man’s works would never be evil if his thoughts are good, for works emerge from the mind; Namely, man can do nothing, except by a command from the mind.

As all what you see done in the provinces, are according to what the king commands from his royal palace. It is the same thing with man, commands come from his mind -- considered as the center of thoughts, as the heart used to be considered the center of emotions -- If the mind and heart are good, and give good commands, man would do good works.

Where Christ dwells, what would come out except what is good?

And where the devil dwells, What would he command but evil?

You have the choice, who will dwell in your heart and mind: God or the devil. Once you prepare the place, it will be obvious who will dwell there.

Oh brethren; To praise God, do not use just your voice, Praise Him with your whole being; Praise Him by your tongue, as well as by your life and works.

“*Praise God from the heavens*”. Seeing in heaven, those who enjoy peace by praising God, the psalmist exhorts us to get up and praise the Lord.

He first says: “*from the heavens*”, then he says, “*from the earth*”, For God whom we praise is the Creator of both. All those who are in the heavens enjoy peace, perpetual joy, no death, no sickness, nor any source of affliction; There, the blessed, perpetually praise God.... We, on the other hand, who are still down on earth, when we think how God is praised up there, our hearts will be lifted up. No wonder the priest cries out, saying: “Lift up your hearts!”.

Let us lift up our hearts, so as not to become corrupted on earth.... Being pleased by what the angels do up there, we intend to do the same down here, with the hope to do it in truth when we go up there. Therefore, *“Praise Him in the heights<sup>1</sup>”*.

(St. Augustine)

***“Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts” (2)***

As the Gnostic followers of ‘Mani’, believe in two worlds: a spiritual world, the work of the “Exalted Being”, and a material evil world, the work of the “Creator”, who is of a lower level than the “Exalted Being”; ... Commenting on this psalm, **St. John Chrysostom<sup>2</sup>** says: [it is befitting of us to believe that there is only one creation, part of which is perceived by the senses, like the matter; and another part which is perceived by the mind, like the spiritual beings, or the heavenly hosts. Yet all of them gather together to form one choir to praise the One God, the Creator of all].

According to **St. Jerome**, as the psalmist starts by the heavenly hosts praising God, he count this as a call addressed to everyone of us, to become as one of them, and praise the Lord; For he, who opposes God, like the devil, will not be able to praise.

❖ He who is an angel, let him praise; But he who is a devil, will not be able to praise<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ ***“Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him all His hosts”***. And lest it could be said: “Why should they praise Him?”; he added: ***“For He commanded, and they were created”*** (5).

It is not something strange for the works to praise the Worker, and for the creatures to praise their Creator!

Here we see a reference to the Lord Christ, although we do not hear His name.

By whom were they created? By the Word (John 1: 1-2). ... This psalm shows that everything was created by the Word<sup>4</sup>: ***“For He commanded and they were created”***.

(St. Augustine)

❖ If you wish to know something about the Cherubim and the Seraphim, listen to the secret praise they utter: *“The whole earth is*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 58 on Ps. 148.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 148.

*full of His glory*” (Isaiah 6: 3); And David says: “*Praise Him, all His hosts*” (Psalm 148: 2)

You will find that the only work of the heavenly hosts is to praise God.

How is it possible for the created nature to see the un-created Nature?

If we cannot, by any means, see any spiritual being, even the created ones, like the angels; How much we would not be able to see the un-created spiritual Essence? .... Hence the apostle Paul says: “*Whom no man has seen or can see*” (1 Timothy 6: 16) ... Does this apply only to the Father, and not to the Son? ... Far from it!... It certainly applies to the Son, as well. ... To know this, listen to Paul saying: “*He is the image of the invisible God*” (Colossians 1: 15)... If He is the image of the invisible God, He has to be invisible as well<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ He introduces one choir, all singing one song. He persists on the commitment to present praise to the One God by the higher and the lower creation, showing that there is One Creator of both<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ Deeply feeling gratitude, the saints so practice. While giving thanks to God, they call upon many to partake of their praise, and exhort them to gather together with them in this enjoyable liturgy.

That is what the three saintly young men did when they were in the fiery furnace; they called upon all creation to give thanks to God for the sake of the privilege He has given to them.

Here, as well, the psalmist calls upon both the higher and the lower worlds; the material and the mental, to join him in praising God.

And says: “*When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language ...the mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs*” \*Psalm 114: 1, 4).

And the prophet Isaiah did the same when he said: “*Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth!.. For the Lord has comforted His people*” (Isaiah 49: 13).

And he also says: “*Let the sky pour down righteousness*” (Isaiah 45: 8).

As you see: **As much as they felt inadequate to praise the Lord as is befitting of them, they exhort everyone to partake of their praise<sup>3</sup>.**

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<sup>1</sup> In Joan, hom 15: 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 148.

❖ **“Praise Him all His hosts”**; Here he calls upon the Cherubim and the Seraphim, the rulers, the principalities, and all the hosts.

It is a sign of the kindled loving spirit, to exhort everyone to partake of this enjoyable praise.

It is a sign of the mind, perpetually satisfied by meditation in God, always marveling before His glory, and dedicated to Him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 2- A CALL TO HEAVEN TO PRAISE:

**“Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light”**

(3)

After calling upon the first row of the choir to praise, here he calls upon the second row, Namely, the heavens, seen or almost seen by man: the sun, the moon, all the stars of light, the firmament, etc.

They all praise the Lord, being the work of His hands, revealing His wisdom, might, and goodness, as their Creator.

❖ Talking about the Deity of the Lord, the Holy Book says: *“His greatness is unsearchable”* (Psalm 145: 3); *“He is to be feared above all gods”* (Psalm 96: 4); And also says: **“Praise Him all His angels; Praise Him all His hosts; Praise Him sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light”** (Psalm 148: 2, 3)<sup>2</sup>.

(The scholar Origen)

❖ *“Joseph dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, ‘I dreamt that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to me’”* (Genesis 37: 9). ... *“His father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?’”* (Genesis 37: 10).

Who is he, but Jesus Christ, before whom His parents and brothers bowed down to the earth? Before whom Joseph, His mother Mary, and the disciples bowed, and confessed the true God in His body, And about whom it was written: **“Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light”** (Psalm 148: 3).

To what did the rebuke of Joseph’s father refer, except to the hardness of heart of the people of Israel, out of whom Christ comes according to the flesh; Up till today, they do not believe Him to be God, and are not ready to bow before Him as their Lord, on account of that

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>2</sup> عظمات للعلامة أوريجينوس على سفر إرميا ترجمة جاكلين سمير كوستي، 6: 18.

they know He is one of them. ... Although they heard all His teachings, they did not understand them; ... And although they, read how the sun, the moon, and the stars of light, praise Him, they still refuse to believe that it was said in reference to Christ.

Jacob was wrong concerning the symbol that referred to another; although he was not wrong concerning the love He embraced toward his son. ... Despite his undeniable fatherly love, yet his reaction to his son's dream, referred to the emotion of a people who were going to go astray<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Ambrose)

***“Praise Him, O heaven of heavens; and you waters above the heavens” (4)***

Among the most important blessings to which the inhabitants of Canaan looked forward for, was the rain that used to pour over their land, to produce the desired crops.

Nowadays, we hear the cry-outs of many lands because of the draught caused by little or no rain. How they look up to the clouds, hoping for rain, a blessing for which they give thanks to God, and praise Him.

- ❖ The heavens used to give rain to the earth; Now, behold, the earth gives water to heavens, when the tears of humans go up above the heavens, and ascend even to the Lord Himself. That is how we can interpret what the psalmist means by saying: ***“Praise Him, you waters above the heavens”***, by being the water of the tears of men<sup>2</sup>.
- ❖ It is possible, as well, to glorify God by the tongue, as the prophet Moses and his sister Miriam did, singing: *“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously”* (Exodus 15: 1).

That could also be done by the irrational creation, as said by the psalmist: *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork”* (Psalm 19: 1)

The creation praise Him, as well, by their beauty, greatness, benefit, service, perpetuity, and the privileges given by nature. Hence, when we say: *“Praise the Lord, all His angels;... His hosts; heavens, sun, moon, and the water above the heavens”*, we mean that all the creation are full of fearful admiration for the wisdom of the creator. ... It is as Moses said at first in short: *“God saw everything that He has made, and indeed it was very good”* (Genesis 1: 31). It is good to glorify the Creator, and to praise the great divine Artist.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph 3: 8.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Peter Chrysologus: *Selected Sermons (Frs. Of Church)*, 93.

That is why the psalmist calls upon the creation to praise the Creator, for their beauty instigate His praise; to which the apostle Paul refer by saying: “*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead*” (Romans 1: 20) <sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

**“*Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created*” (5)**

These creatures praise their Creator, because, with all their possibilities and systems, they were all created by a mere command. God was in no need of taking time to study how to create them, to set their systems, and goals, or how to keep them.

In His love for His creation, God wishes to stabilize them forever; Yet ,He set limits for each of them. The sea knows its limits, and would not cover the land and corrupt it, except by God’s permission. And the sun knows its limits, and would not get too hot to burn everything on earth.

Out of God’s love and care for His creation, He sets limits, not to show off His authority, but for the sake of the edification and the benefit of His creation.

Commenting on what came in the gospel of St. Mark, when the Lord Christ called Simon and Andrew, and both of them immediately left their nets and followed Him. And when he called James and John, sons of Zebedee, how they immediately left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and went after Him (Mark 1: 20); St. Jerome sees how the words of Christ have authority and activity, He “*who commanded and they were created*” (Psalm 148: 5) <sup>2</sup>.

❖ Christ, the Son of God, created all things ... Not that God the Father lacked the power to create them by Himself; but because He intended to give the Son that authority. ... We hear the Son, glorify His Father, saying: “*Mast assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner*” (John 5: 19); And, “*My Father has been working until now, and I have been working*” (John 5: 17). There is no controversy between them; as according to the Lord: “*All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine*” (John 17: 10).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 76 on Mark 1: 13-31.

That is what we know from the Old and the New Testaments; For He, who said: “*Let us make man in our image*” (Genesis 1: 26), was most assuredly talking to a Person with Him.

The words of the psalmist clarifies this more. Saying: “*For He commanded and they were created*” (Psalm 148: 5), It is as though the Father gave the command; and the Son made everything according to the Father’s command<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)

❖ The amazing beauty of these creatures confirm the fact that they are indeed made by a Creator, and did not exist on their own<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ The blessed David sang: “*For He commanded and they were created*” (Psalm 148: 5). It is not the same as it is with humans, when the master gives a command which a servant hasten to obey and execute. The Word of God, being both the Creator and the Executor, and He is, at the same time, the will of the Father, The Holy Book did not say that the listener heard the command, as far as how the creatures would be, and executed it; but said: “*Let it be*”, “*and so it was*” (Genesis 1: 3, 6, 11, 15) <sup>3</sup>.

(Pope Athanasius the apostolic)

***“He also established them forever and ever; He made a decree which shall not pass away” (6)***

What He made by a mere command, was to stay, and will stay for thousands or million of years.

❖ ***“He also established them forever and ever”***. Everything in heavens, and everything in the heights. ... In the heights, there is a good, holy, and blessed city, from which we were led astray, and became miserable. Now, we wish to return to it to become blessed again.

***“He made a decree which shall not pass away”***. ... What decree would you think those saintly angels in heaven would receive? ... What command has God given them; except to praise Him? ... Blessed are they whose work is perpetually to praise God! ... They do not plow nor cook, for such works are done by humans out of necessity, which is no more there!.... They do not rob or steal; .... They do not commit adultery; For all these are works of iniquity, which is no more there! ...

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 11 :23.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Four Discourses against the Arians, 2: 18 (31).

They do not break bread for the hungry, nor give clothing to the naked; or give hospitality to strangers; they do not visit the sick, or bury the dead; ... For all those are works of mercy; And as there is no more misery up there, There is no more need to show works of mercy!

How blessed are they!... Just imagine that we shall eventually be likewise... Let us then moan on our present condition now; mortal, humiliated dust and ashes! ... Let us meditate in how we shall be up there<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

### **3- A CALL TO EARTH, WITH ALL WHAT IS ON IT, TO PRAISE:**

The third row of the praising choir; are the creation, which seem as terrifying and harmful, or of no benefit to man, like the dragons, the mist, and the storms. Although we may not be able to perceive their importance, or their role in our life, yet they join the rows of those who praise God.

*“Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all the depths” (7)*

If the heavens testify to the glory of God; the earth, the sea, with all what are in and on them, testify to His wisdom. Everything is beautiful in its location, and with the nature that suits it.

Here, calling upon the terrifying creatures, like the great dragons, to praise the Lord; He also calls upon man, who behaves like a dragon, to present a repentance for what he does, to attach to God, and to praise Him.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>2</sup>, the psalmist started by the heavenly hosts up there in the heights, above the heavens (the firmament), then came down to heaven, and finally to those on earth

He did not mention the beasts, on account of that there is no doubt that they are actually beautiful and of benefit to man; But he speaks of the creation, like the dragons, the tempests, the fire, the wild animals of the wilderness, the mighty mountains, the reptiles, etc. ... which are seen by some as being harmful, that man may wonder why God, the Philanthropic has ever created them?! ... Yet, they, as well, testify to God’s care and greatness. ... Nowadays, science has discovered that some reptiles and insects, like the scorpion have some benefit for man; the poison of scorpion, for example, is now used to

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 148.

prepare medications for treating certain infirmities; And some plants and herbs growing on the mountains and in the wilderness have medicinal values for man.... With time, and every day, more benefits and blessings are discovered of creatures which we, for long, wished we could get rid of.

The fire in which the three saintly young men were cast, burned those who gloated; while turning into dew for the saints.

❖ You could see how those earthly things and creatures, which we used to see as terrifying, fearful, or corrupt, we now realize that they have their own role; and, according to their level, they consummate the beauty of nature; and how by that, they praise God. ... To those things, the psalmist turns, and exhorts them, as well as us, to partake of praising God.

We may not imagine the dragons as forming choirs to praise God! ... but when we look at them, we meditate in Him who created such great creatures; ... That is, therefore, how the dragons praise God through us<sup>1</sup>!

(St. Augustine)

*“Fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy winds, fulfilling His word” (8)*

All what go on around us, even the raging fire, winds, tempests, clouds, etc. God assigned for them diverse roles and benefits, as well as limitations. They all move according to the word of God, and testify to the might and greatness of the Creator.... So are the trees, both the fruitful, and the barren; the animals, whether wild or domesticated; the birds; and the lifeless creation, like the mountains, and the hills, ... all have all been created by the wisdom of God, And they all join man, whatever his age, ability, or authority, in testifying to God. ... In short, it is befitting of every being, whatever, and wherever he is, to testify to the Creator.

According to **St. Jerome**, despite the apparent contradiction between certain natural phenomena, like fire, and hail; and some kinds of troubles, caused by fog, and extreme tempests; yet, they are all used by God for the benefit of man; and they praise Him, by fulfilling His word.

And according to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>2</sup>, we should praise God, and give Him thanks for all His works; For, through His divine care, He

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 148.

has put Adam in the garden of Eden; and through the same care, He allowed for him to be expelled from it, when he committed sin; to realize our salvation, and our enjoyment of the heavenly paradise.

God, with His care, allowed for the existence of the heavenly paradise, as well as for the existence of hell, to exhort us to flee from evil, and, by His grace, to restore His image in us.

❖ **“fulfilling His word”**. Many men are foolishly unable to meditate, and to realize that the creation in their diverse locations and levels, are fulfilling in their movements a command from God. They wrongly assume that God only controls the higher things, but disregards, does not care for, lead, nor intend to have any relation with the lower ones. He has forsaken them, to be on their own; that whatever happen to them would be a matter of mere chance, according to the possibilities of each, and the impact of other factors on them.

**“Fire and hail, snow and clouds, stormy wind, fulfilling His word”**. Although for the foolish, all those things seem to happen haphazardly. Yet they are actually **“fulfilling His word”<sup>1</sup>**.

(St. Augustine)

❖ The bride of the song says to the south wind: **“Come, O south wind, blow upon my garden”** (Song 4: 16); for her Groom made her the mother of all gardens; and wishes that the south wind would blow upon His garden -- the church -- full of living trees, to carry from it the fragrance of her spices; ... And the psalmist says: **“The stormy wind, fulfils His word”**.

The bride is adorned as a beautiful queen; and changed the little streams, to something more beautiful; She let the sweet fragrance flow from the trees, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In such a way, we can learn the difference between the Old and the New Testaments: While the rivers of the Old Testament are full of the water of prophecy; the rivers of the gospel of the new Testament, are full of perfume. The river of St. Paul carried the sweet fragrance of Christ, flowing from the garden of the church by the Holy Spirit. The same applies to John, Luke, Matthew, Mark, and the rest of the apostles, all of whom symbolize noble plantations in the garden of the bride. When the south wind blow on it in midday, they would all become sources of the sweet fragrance of the gospels<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>2</sup> نشيد الأناشيد للقديس غريغوريوس أسقف نيصص، تعريب الدكتور جورج نوار، عظة 10.

(St. Gregory of Nyssa)

**“Mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars” (9)**

What seem to us of benefit or of no benefit, all testify to the wisdom of the Creator. The mountains and the hills which, sometimes, seem to man as obstacles; or the fruitless trees in the wilderness, which seem of no benefit; all of them present blessings to man; for from the former he digs for minerals and precious stones; and the wood of the later, he uses for construction, and for making furniture.

❖ If God shows His exalted care for such seemingly useless things, how would He not show a greater care for you, His favorite creatures?

Why does He create them with such beauty? Is it not to demonstrate to us His wisdom and might?! ; Hasn't David written in His psalms: *“The heavens declare the glory of God”* (Psalm 19: 1); and: *“Praise the Lord; .... O mountains, and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars”* (Psalm 148: 9)? For they all sing praise to their Maker; some with their fruits, and others with their might or beauty<sup>1</sup>!

It is also a sign of God's exalted wisdom; that, even the seemingly valueless things (and what is more valueless than things that exists today, to disappear tomorrow?), God gives them such a dazzling beauty..... If He gives the grass such a beauty, it does not need, How could He not give you what you need?! ... If He gives these seemingly valueless things such an exalted splendor, not because they need it, but out of His generosity; How much more would He honor you, His most valued creatures, with your necessities<sup>2</sup>?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ While the trees bear fruits for you; You do not bear fruits for God.

*“... and all cedars”*. Take the cedars as an example, and a role model; Those which go up high, as though they hasten toward heaven<sup>3</sup>!

(St. Jerome)

**“... Beasts and all cattle; creeping things and flying fowl” (10)**

According to **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>4</sup>, we use the domesticated cattle for the benefit of our bodies; And use the wild beasts for the benefit of our souls, by fearing them, and remembering our sins, and

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<sup>1</sup> عظة ربنا يسوع على الجبل.

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on Matthew, homily 22: 1.*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 58 on Ps. 148.*

<sup>4</sup> *On Ps. 148.*

those of our first parents in the garden of Eden. They reveal to us the fruit of disobedience.

❖ "... **Beasts and all cattle**". God has created all these earthly creature to serve you. And created you to serve Him.

As they obey you; follow their lead and obey God<sup>1</sup>.

(St, Jerome)

❖ If you would remember, how, when the prophet Daniel resumed his old nature (having been created in the image of God); the fearful lions became of no account for him; and how the serpent was to the apostle Paul (see Acts 28); You will acquire a plenty of zeal, and more care for yourselves.

What is equally amazing, is that God ordained for such fearful beasts to live in locations far away from the cities where man lives; mostly in the wilderness; out of fear of man, and a preference of these locations that God assigned for them from the beginning<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

#### **4- A CALL TO THE RULERS TO PRAISE:**

Having started by the rational heavenly creatures, he ended up with the rational earthly ones; calling upon all of them, with all their ranks, from rulers to elders, young men, maidens and children to praise God.... He left man to the end, being the crown of the earthly creation.

*"Kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth" (11)*

It is befitting of the believer to praise God and to give Him thanks, even for the existence of system, that seem as though created by men, like kings, princes, and judges; ... As it is the hand of God that works in everything.

According to St. **John Chrysostom**<sup>3</sup>, If you are a ruler, praise God for such a gift. And if you are a commoner, praise Him for allowing the existence of such leaderships. And even if they are oppressive and unjust, pray for them, because "*The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord*" (Proverb 21: 1).

#### **5- A CALL TO THE PEOPLE TO PRAISE:**

*"Both young men and maidens, old men and children" (12)*

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily58 on Ps. 148.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 148.*

<sup>3</sup> *On Ps. 148.*

❖ Let us, young men and maidens, old men and children, hasten, with the grace of God, to partake of the race of purity.... Let us praise the name of Christ, away from greed... And let us not deny the glory of chastity, for it is an angelic crown, and a virtue that exalts man<sup>1</sup>.

Man, created in the image of God, praises God with His whole freedom; whereas the irrational creatures unconsciously praise Him.

❖ It is thus befitting of you to sing praise to God with more discernment than those creature.

I am the only creature who chooses to praise God by my own free will.

Unknowingly, and through Your mighty power, the sun, the moon, and the stars praise You.

I am the only creature who has the free will and choice to praise, or to cease praising You..

If I choose to cease praising You, I shall be condemned by the justice (the righteousness), that seeks from the free to choose praising God.

Hence, O God, although I am not worthy, I dare to praise You..

All mouths are committed to praise You, both the worthy and the unworthy.

O Lord, it is befitting of all creation to praise you, whether those with voice, and those without<sup>2</sup>.

(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)

## **6- THE MOTIVES BEHIND PRAISING GOD:**

### **a- His great name:**

*“Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted”* (13)

The entire choir, with all its rows, were called upon to praise with the spirit of harmony, the name of the Lord, the name that surpasses, and above all names.

### **b- His glory fills heaven and earth:**

*“His glory is above the earth and heaven”* (13)

❖ I wish no one seeks to glorify his own name. Do you wish to be glorified? Submit to Him, who would never be humiliated. (14 LXX)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 12 : 34.

<sup>2</sup> الميمر 12 على ذلك الابن الذي يبدد أمواله (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام بهنام سوني).

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 148.

❖ The heavens cry out to God: “You created me; I did not create myself”.

And the earth cries out: “You created me; I did not create myself”.

How do they cry out? ... They cry out with your voice; they cry out through your eyes.

Look at the sky and the earth; Notice how beautiful they are!

They are both His handiwork; and by a nod from Him, He ordains their seasons and movements.

All those things praise Him, whether in movement or are standing still; whether up in heaven, or on earth down below.

Looking at these things, and rejoicing, you are exalted toward the Creator.

When you look at the seen objects, you will perceive the unseen thing.

You confess to Him through both the things on earth, and those in heaven.

If the things He created are so beautiful, how much more would be the beauty of their Maker<sup>1</sup>?!

(St. John Chrysostom)

**c- His care for His people:**

*“And He has exalted the horn of his people, the praise of all His saints, of the children of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the Lord” (14)*

The psalm ends by praise to God for the sake of His dealings with His people, granting them strength and glory, and drawing them near to Him.

He supports His people, and prepares them to enjoy the heavenly home, with the eternal peace.

As you can perceive, the higher Jerusalem has walls made of peace<sup>2</sup>.

(Father Caesarius of Arles)

❖ *“And has exalted the horn of His people”*. Do you see what the two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah have prophesied?

Now, the horn of His people is in the humiliation of sorrows, troubles, and temptations....

When will the horn of His people be exalted? ....

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 36: 6.

When the Lord comes, and our sun rises; not the sun seen by the eyes, which “*rises on the evil and on the good*” (Matthew 5: 45); but the sun, about which it is said to you, who listen to God: “*The sun of righteousness shall rise, with healings in His wings*” (Malachi 4: 2); and about which the proud and the sinners say: “*The light of righteousness will not shine on us, and the sun of righteous will not rise on us*”.

“*The praise of all His saints*”. Let His saints utter praise; for this is what they will ultimately get: ... an everlasting praise<sup>1</sup>!

**(St. Augustine)**

❖ Move on, you, who are privileged to praise, instead of the irrational creation; for it is befitting of you to praise!

Who can fulfill the due of the Son of God, He, who came down from heaven for our sake; ... Who can cease praising Him;

The Son of God was hanged on the cross instead of the sinners, to bring them back to repentance; And yet, they keep on sinning

His high voice, uttered on the cross, which crushed the rocks, and split the tombs open, did not terrify us.

Let us wake up to enjoy His face through repentance<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. (Mar) Jacob El-Serougi)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 148.*

<sup>2</sup> الميمر 12 على ذلك الابن الذي بدد أمواله (راجع نص بول بيجان والدكتور بهنام بهنام سوني)

## **AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 148**

### **GRANT ME TO JOIN THE CHOIR OF THOSE WHO PRAISE**

- ❖ Glory be to You, O the Source of happiness to all Your creation;  
With one word, You brought us to existence from nothing,;  
Not to serve You;  
But to rejoice in You, and for our souls to exult in Your Love;  
For You are in no need of our praise;  
But we are in need to enjoy exultation in You;  
You are the secret of our fulfillment, joy, and glory.
- ❖ Who could be qualified to praise You, except the heavenlies?  
Who perceive Your love, recognize Your compassion, and become  
glad to fulfill Your will;  
Dwell in our hearts, and renew our souls;  
To become like Your angels;  
To joyfully join their ranks;  
To have our souls flood with thanksgiving to You;  
To have our hearts and minds drawn to meditate in You  
To marvel at Your wisdom, might, and goodness.
- ❖ The sun, the moon, and the stars, which You created for our sake;  
Praise You by their wonderful work, and their submission to the law,  
You have set for them.  
They have no mouth, nor a tongue, to utter praise;  
But, through their submission to You, they never cease to praise You;  
Grant us to join, even those irrational creatures;  
And, by the spirit of obedience, we praise Your holy name;  
They praise You by working in silence;  
Grant us to praise You, when You shine in us Your light before all  
men;  
When they see Your works in us, they will glorify You;  
Let us praise You by our tongues, lips, hearts, and emotions;  
Let us praise You by our silence, together with the purity of our  
hearts;  
You are the Grantor of purity and sanctification;  
The creation praise You by their wonderful beauty;  
Let our inner man praise You by Your kingdom You set in our hearts;  
For it is the work of Your Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The sky praises You by its clouds that rain on us;  
That turn our dry land into a fruit-laden paradise;

Let the water of our tears praise You as well;  
They do not fall down from the sky on our land, but ascend from our hearts up to Your heavens;  
They pierce the clouds, and ascend to You;  
You joyfully receive and cherish them;  
You respond to them, and forgive our transgressions;  
You turn the wilderness of our hearts into Your fruitful paradise;  
It is the gift of Your grace, working in us.

- ❖ By a word, You commanded and they were created; and You will keep on caring for them;  
You created them for our sake, we, Your servants;  
And You care for them, for You are our good Shepherd;  
We praise You for Your might, wisdom, and care;  
For You are the Mighty and Philanthropic Father.
- ❖ How amazingly sweet is Your voice;  
By which You call upon us all to praise;  
Not that You are I need of our praise or ministry;  
But it is Your gladness to carry us up to Your heavens  
To join the ranks of Your heavenly hosts;  
To partake of their praise and exultation  
To enjoy, together with them, the blessed life.
- ❖ How great is the wisdom of our Father!  
Even the creatures that seem to have no benefit;  
With every day we discover more of their benefits;  
And we glorify God, for His love and wisdom;  
Everything going on around us, even the kindling fire;  
And even the terrifying dragons, and the wild beasts;  
Could serve us, and work to our account;  
Glory be to You, O the amazing Creator!
- ❖ O my God, all nature praises You;  
Even the fruitless trees present a magnificent praise to You;  
And I, in my weakness, do not glorify You;  
Let Your grace water me, to bear the fruit of the spirit;  
To bear joy and exultation, and for my whole being to utter a true praise.
- ❖ By Your love, You created the earthlies to serve me;  
Grant me, as well, to minister and praise You.
- ❖ All the irrational creation praise You;

Would it not be befitting of me, having granted me a mind and  
freedom, to praise You?!  
To praise Your great name, O my Creator?!  
Your care for Your people all along the generations;  
And Your care for me all the days of my life;  
And Your preoccupation with my salvation up till now;  
All this motivate me to praise Your holy name.

## ***PSALM 149***

# **A CALL TO THE CHURCH OF THE NEW COVENANT TO PRAISE**

There was no title for this psalm, nor the name of its author, in any version. It seems to be a psalm sung after a particular glorious conquest. Some assume it to go back to the time of the Maccabees; while others assume it to be written after the return from the captivity in Babylon, and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

According to the Syrian version, it is a prophecy about the success of preaching the gospel among the nations of the world, and that it concerns the new temple, and the congregation of the New Covenant.

God created all the rational beings, whether men or angels, love music; And, together with the mind, He granted them the heart or emotion, to think about their Creator, and to exult in Him with a wonderful harmony.

The heavenly hosts are rational beings, who enjoy the renewable and perpetually growing knowledge; and who are kindled with the fire of love toward God and His creation. They live in a perpetual heavenly feast, with no contradiction between knowledge and joy in their life.

The devil and his hosts, on the other hand, have their minds and hearts gone astray; Instead of reason, they love ignorance; are plunged in foolishness; count the meditation in the Truth (God), as foolishness, deception, and fantasy; And instead of love, they are filled with hate; and find pleasure in the suffering and perdition of others.

As far as man is concerned, he would have chosen to join the ranks of the heavenly hosts; But through the deception of the devil, his will got corrupted; his mind got perverted to say in ignorance "There is no God"; and his heart got perverted, as well, to end up losing the nature of love, and of true gladness.

Seeing by the spirit of prophecy, the Word of God coming for salvation, the psalmist calls upon the church of the new covenant to praise with a new song, where the mind harmonizes with the heart; and the congregation of the Lord becomes exultant; and in their praise, they do not use musical instruments, but everyone of them turns into a spiritual harp, on which the Holy Spirit plays.

Now, the psalmist presents to us a wonderful song, a call to praise God by the mind, as well as by the spirit and the heart, The psalmist addresses the human mind, heart, emotions, and senses,

sanctified by the Lord. It is befitting of us, as the people of the Lord, to be a praising people.

1- To praise **Him in the house of the Lord** (1 - 4); for He is our Savior (1); and our Creator and King (2). The praise gives pleasure to the Lord, and gives beauty to His people (4; Psalm 147: 1, 11).

2- To praise **Him at home** (5), even while sleeping, when we wake up, and even when ill.

3- To praise Him **in the field of the spiritual war** (6 – 9). ... The word of God is our sword (Ephesians 6: 17; Hebrew 4: 12); Praise is an amazing weapon to overcome the enemy.

<b>1- A call to the church to praise</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>
<b>2- Great privileges for the people of God</b>	<b>4 - 5</b>
<b>3- A conquest and glory for the church</b>	<b>6 – 9</b>

### **1- A CALL TO THE CHURCH TO PRAISE:**

The psalmist calls the church to exult, for the sake of the following divine graces:

- 1- For the enjoyment of a new song of praise (1)
- 2- For the enjoyment of the unique Creator and King (2)
- 3- For the enjoyment of God's pleasure (3 -4)
- 4- For the enjoyment of the inner glory (5)

***“Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise in the assembly of saints” (1)***

This call came to instigate us to sing a new song, into which no boredom crawls; perpetually renewed with practice; kindles the whole being of man, as well as of the congregation, to experience the exultant angelic life.

He, who enjoys the Spirit of God will have his youth renewed like an eagle; so will be his knowledge of the divine truth, and so will also be his heart, kindled by the fire of the divine love, which no water of the time could quench.

The people of the old covenant were anticipating the coming of the Messiah to provide them with salvation, to grant them a new heart, and to enter with them into a new covenant. Enjoying the inner renewal, the people consequently present a new song of praise.

Trusting in the true promises of God, the psalmist sings: *“Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy; for the word of God is right, and all His work is done in truth”* (Psalm 33: 2-3).

Isaiah, seeing by the spirit of prophecy, the church of the new covenant, exultant in her Savior, said: “*Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the ends of the earth*” (Isaiah 42: 10).

And, enjoying the scene of the divine throne, surrounded by the heavenlies, and the believers from all the nations, singing, St. John said:

“*They sang a new song*” (Revelation 5: 9); and again: “*They sang as it were a new song before the throne*” (Revelation 14: 3).

No one can exult in the Lord, and present a new praise, unless his heart becomes upright, as a member in the holy church. “*I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation*” (Psalm 111: 1).

❖ The old man had an old song; and the new man has a new song;

The Old Testament was an old praise; and the New Testament is a new praise;

In the Old Testament, there were temporary earthly promises. He, who loves the earthlies, let him sing the old praise; And he, who seeks the new praise, let him love the eternity.

Love itself, being new and eternal; it is always new, and will never get old.

In the new love, there is peace; a bond of the holy congregation, a spiritual unity, and a building of living stones.

Where is love? It is not in one location, but throughout the whole world, as is written in another psalm, saying: “*Sing praises to*

*God, the whole earth*” (Psalm 47). From this we learn that he, who does not sing together with the whole earth, is singing an old song, whatever are the words coming out of his mouth.

Love praises God; and non-conformity blasphemes the Lord.

The field of God is the whole world, and not a particular continent ... The church of God is, therefore, the church of the saints, and not that of the heretics.

His praise is in the “children of the kingdom”; namely, in the “*church of the saints*”<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*Sing to the Lord a new song*”. ... The spiritual meaning, is that the advent of the new covenant is a new song; All what happened was a new covenant, according to the words: “*I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel*” (see Jeremiah 31: 31). It has been a new creation, according to the words: “*If someone is in Christ, he is a new*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

creation”, and a new man; “*having put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*” (Colossians 3: 9, 10). Because of the new life, everything became new; hence is called “the new covenant”. And the author of the psalm instigates us to sing a new song to suit the new covenant<sup>1</sup>.

- ❖ “***His praise in the assembly of saints***”. Do you see how he seeks thanksgiving in life and in work; and how he draws those people to the choir who sing praise. ... It is not enough, as you can see, to thank by mere words, unless they practically go hand in hand with virtue.

By saying: “***His praise in the assembly of saints***”, he teaches us, as well; that we are committed to present our praise in complete harmony; as the word “***assembly***’ implies (gathering together)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

- ❖ He, who puts off the old man, with his deeds, and puts on the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator, as the apostle says, sings a new song of praise.

We, therefore, the children of the new covenant, are committed to put to death the man of dust; namely, the lusts of the flesh; for the same apostle says: “*Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*” (2 Corinthians 4: 16). That is why the psalmist says that the new praise should be in the assembly of saints; which means that praising should be, not just by words, but by the deeds of righteousness, as well, and with the conformity of the assembly of believers, he called “Israel”.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

***“Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King” (2)***

Of the greatest graces enjoyed by the believer, as a member in the assembly of saints (those who fear the Lord), is to exult in God, his Maker, who sets His kingdom in him. The Lord, who made us from nothing, would never disregard His creation, but sets His kingdom in them; We, therefore exult in our King, who dwells in us.

Enjoying the new covenant through the cross, the believer truly becomes the new Israel, exultant in his Savior Creator, and rejoices in Him, who reigned on a tree (on the cross); who made him join the heavenly Zion; who turned his life into an unceasing feast, and his

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 149.

language into rejoicing and gladness in God; which nothing, or no one, could take away from him.

The church does not cease to present glory to that Creator, the Grantor of existence and life, and the Source of every blessing; He, who reigns, not to submit, but to give His believers the royal life; and to pour upon them His divine joy. The church exults in her Creator and

King, who reigns by the law of love, and grants her His goodness, wisdom, and righteousness, to let her forget all about her troubles and afflictions. The prophet says: *“Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed... ;for you will forget the shame of your youth, and will not remember the reproach of your widowhood any more. For your Maker is your husband; the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth”* (Isaiah 54: 4-5).

❖ The proper way for the believers is to have a harmonious congregation, and to praise the Lord with love , gladness, and spiritual joy.

Hence the apostle wrote: *“not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting oneanother”* (Hebrew 10: 25).

#### **(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ Who is **“Israel”**? ... It is he who beholds God, rejoices in Him, who created him.

We claim that we belong to the church of the saints; ... Can we actually behold God? How could we be “Israel” if we do not?

There is an insight concerning the present time; and there will be another insight that concerns the life to come. .... The Insight which we have now is by faith; whereas the insight that we shall have later on, will be an actuality. .... If we believe, we can behold; And if we behold, Whom do we behold? ... God! ... If you ask St. John, he will say: *“God is love”* (1 John 4: 16). ....

Let us bless His holy name; Let us rejoice in God, through rejoicing by love.

He, who has love; Why would we send him afar to behold God? ... Let him look into his conscience; For there, he will behold God.

*“Let the children of Zion be joyful in their king”*. ... The children of the church are “Israel”. ... Zion, in truth, has been a fallen city, and in the midst of its ruins, saints dwell, according to the flesh. Whereas the true Zion, the true Jerusalem, is eternally in heaven (2 Corinthians 5: 1); and she is our mother (Galatians 4: 26), who gave

birth to us; the church of the saints, where we feel like living, partially in heaven, the paradise of angels; while, partially, still wandering in this world, with the hope of the righteous.

Concerning the first part, it is written: “*Glory to God in the highest*”; and concerning the other, it is said: “*and on earth peace, Good will toward men*” (Luke 2: 14).

I wish, those in this life, would sigh, long to their home, hasten to it by love, and not by their physical feet.

I wish they would search, not for ships, but for wings; I wish they would hold fast to the two wings of love: the love of God and the love of one another.

Now, we are sojourners, sighing and moaning.... We have got a message from home; Let me read it for you:

“*Let the children of Zion be joyful in their king*”. The Son of God who created us, has become one of us; and reigns on us as our King.

When He found nothing pure in man, to offer for man, He delivered Himself, a pure sacrifice, a happy sacrifice, a true sacrifice, offered without blemish.

He offered, not what we, ourselves, gave Him, but rather what He took from us;. ... He took from us the body..... How did He take it?

... In the womb of the Virgin Mary, to offer it pure for us, who are not pure; ... He is our King, and our Priest; Let us be joyful in Him<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*Let Israel rejoice in their Maker*”. He presents a general account, before referring to the individual gifts; It is as though He underscores this point by adding: [Give God thanks; He who brought you into existence, when you never did exist, and breathed the breath of life into you; which is by no means, a little gift].

Here, He refers, as well, to something more important; ... He does not just refer to creation, but sheds strong light on the relationship with Him; ... He Commands them to love Him, not only because He created them, but also because He made them His own people. ... Do You see how, by uniting them together, and binding them to God, He intends for them, not only to give Him thanks, but to do It with pleasure and joy; He intends to kindle their minds; which He made clear by saying: “*Let them rejoice*”.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

*“Let the children of Zion be joyful”* (2)...And here he adds *“in their King”*; to show that He is their King, not only on account of that He created them, but of their relationship with Him as well<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

*“Let them praise His name with the dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp”* (3)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as *“Let them praise His name with a choir”*.

Singing in a choir requires that the singers sing in unison, with one spirit and one goal, in harmony and true love.

Some scholars believe that the word *“dance”* does not refer to body movements; It came in the Septuagint version as *“with the pipe”*; Although, according to some others, actual body movements were used by certain peoples during worship, as a means to express man’s joy, with his whole being, and not just with his tongue and mouth.

According to **St. Jerome, and St. John Chrysostom**, the harp was similar to the guitar, except that the strings of the later were pulled downwards, while those of the harp are pulled upwards. It is therefore befitting of us to praise God, with our strings pulled upward; namely, by a harp, and not by a guitar.

❖ It is befitting of us not to sing romantic songs of the world, but only to sing praises to God, according to the words of the psalm:

*“Let them praise His name with the dance; let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp”* (Psalm 149: 3) <sup>2</sup>.

(St. Clement of Alexandria)

❖ *“Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp”* (3).

Some interpreters, referring to those musical instruments by a spiritual concept, say that the timbrel (or the drums), implies mortifying our bodies; whereas the harp refers to heaven; as the strings of this musical instrument are pulled upward, and not downward like the guitar<sup>3</sup>.

❖ *“Let them praise His name with a choir”*. Notice again how singing in a choir implies harmony and conformity; referred by the apostle Paul as: *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some”* (Hebrew 10: 25) <sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Paed 2: 4

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 149.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ According to **St. John Chrysostom**, the Jews, owing to their thick minds and necks, and on account of that they have forsaken the idol worship only recently, to which they used to sacrifice, using the tools of fun (music and dance); kept on that way in worshipping God....

We, Christians, on the other hand, are committed to bring to death our body lusts; ... We should not use those tools when we praise God.

❖ If we sing in a choir, let us sing together in harmony. If one's voice is out of tune, he would cause confusion among the choir.

The same could be said about the (out-of-tune) views of the heretics, which cause confusion among the choir of Christ, which give a harmonious sound from the east to the west (Psalm 113: 3).

*“Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp”*. We should not only sing with our voice, but also with our work; When the timbrel and harp are used, the hands work in harmony with the voice<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine).

❖ *“Let them praise His name with a choir”*

Wherever there is a choir, voices mix together in one song; whereas, where is controversy and envy, there would not be a choir.

We should crucify our bodies for Christ's sake; and sing praise to God with a timbrel of this kind.

A timbrel will not produce sound, unless its skin is pulled tight; and not its frame.

I wish we are not contracted by sin; but, by righteousness, are pulled tight<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Those who perceive the significance of the harmony of the one spirit, should meditate well in the counsel of the psalmist, saying:

*“Let them praise His name with the dance; let them sing praises to Him with a timbrel and harp”* (3).

The haughty knowledge puffs up some people, and separates them from the congregation. And the greater this knowledge is, the less will be the wisdom, and the more vulnerable will be the virtue of harmony in one spirit. Those people should listen to the words of the divine Truth Himself, saying: *“Have salt in yourselves, and have peace*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 59 on Ps. 149.

with one another” (Mark 9: 50) <sup>1</sup>. For salt without peace is not the fruit of virtue, but may rather be a curse..

That is why the apostle James says: *“If you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.*

*This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy”* (James 3: 14-18).

Wisdom is pure, for it thinks with purity. And it is peaceable, for it makes no dissension among the brethren out of pride<sup>2</sup>.

**(Father Gregory the Great)**

## **2- GREAT PRIVILEGES FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD:**

*“For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation”* (4)

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic versions, it came as: *“For the Lord takes pleasure in His people, and elevates the humble with salvation”*.

Another motive for singing praise to God, is the believer’s perception that God takes pleasure in His people, and that He is preoccupied with beautifying the humble with salvation, or with the eternal glory.

The believer stands in awe before God the Mighty One, the Maker of all creatures; who is preoccupied with man, as though He created everything for his sake. . He is preoccupied with renewing the nature of man, and with beautifying it perpetually, to become His living icon.

That is why the believer finds no other language to express His gratitude for His Creator, King, and Savior, except to have His whole inner being join St, John the Baptist, who danced joyfully in his mother’s womb, praising God with a timbrel and harp, namely with his body and soul.

God takes pleasure in His people, the meek and humble, presents to them His free salvation, and pours His splendor on them; and as is written: *“You were exceedingly beautiful and succeeded to royalty; your name went out among the nations because of your beauty, For it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you, says the Lord*

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<sup>1</sup> كما يحفظ الملح من الفساد، لا بد للراعي من شيء في داخله يحفظه هو ورعيته من فساد الخطيئة ليكونوا ذبيحة مسرة للرب.

<sup>2</sup>Pastoral Care, 3: 22.

God” (Ezekiel 16: 13-14); and as is also said: “*I will glorify the house of my glory*” (Isaiah 60: 7).

The secret of the beauty of the humble, is their enjoyment of the salvation of the Lord, as they bear the icon of Him who says: “*Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart*” (Matthew 11: 29).

❖ “***For God deals with His people with compassion***” ...

What more compassion than His death for the sake of the sinners?

What more compassion than to wipe out the handwritten requirements that was against the sinner, by the innocent blood?

What more compassion than saying: [I look, not at how you were, but at how you are not now].

He deals with compassion by guiding him back, who went astray; by supporting him, who fights; and by crowning him who overcomes.

“***He elevates the humble with salvation***”. The proud may be elevated, as well, but not with salvation.

The humble are elevated with salvation; and the proud with death.

Meaning that, when the proud elevate their head, the Lord will humiliate them; but when the humble abase themselves, the Lord will elevate them<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ Those, who by humility and meekness, became God’s own people, He grants them great salvation, by which He glorifies them, and honors them among men. They boast of His divine glory, according to the words of the apostle Paul: “*But 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).

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

❖ “***For the Lord takes pleasure in His people, He will beautify (elevates) the humble with salvation***” (4). Notice, once again, how the psalmist deals with the things concerning God, and those concerning human beings. Seeking from men to give thanks, he presents the things concerning God by the words: “*For the Lord takes*

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

*pleasure in His people*". Here, going back to the promises of God, he says:

*"He elevates the humble with salvation"*.

While "elevation" concerns God; "To be humble", concerns men. I mean to say that the things concerning God would not be realized, unless they are preceded by those concern men<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

Commenting on the word "*elevate*", **St. John Chrysostom** says: [He, not only liberates them from troubles, but makes them the object of marvel and fame, and grants them glory, together with salvation. That he explains that more clearly by adding: "*Let the saints be joyful in glory*" (5)].

*"Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud in their beds"* (5)

A new motive that brings to them gladness, is that their glory is not anymore something outside them, like riches, authority, beauty, temporal honors, or physical health; But it is something within them. Hence their hearts perpetually sing in all circumstances, and at all times, even while being in their beds.

The true believers live in exalted glories; ... gladness never forsakes them, for the inner glory never forsakes them; as the Lord, Himself, promised: "*I will be the glory in her midst*" (Zechariah 2: 5)..... Meditating in the glory granted to them, their souls exult; their mouths utter praise; they offer unceasing sacrifices of thanksgiving; they perpetually sing; and their inner tongues never stop singing praise, even while lying in their beds (5).

In the darkness of the night, while sleeping, the light of the Sun of Righteousness never forsakes them; but, entering into secret encounters with God, their hearts become filled with joy; and in their love of God, they sing secret songs of praise.

❖ "*Let the saints be joyful in glory*" I want to say something about the glory of the saints. Everyone loves glory; Yet the glory of the foolish includes traps of deception; that, in a certain way, and with vain glory, man seeks sometimes to live, according to what men seek, however they are, and by whatever way.

The saints do not need us to tell them how to become joyful in glory.. Listen to the words of the psalm: "*they sing aloud in their beds*";...

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

Not in play-houses nor in nightclubs, but “*in their beds*”, namely in *their hearts*.

Listen to the apostle rejoice in his retreat: “*For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves*

*In the world in simplicity and godly sincerity...*” (2 Corinthians 1: 12).

On another aspect, there is a cause for fear, that someone would be joyful in himself, namely, would seem proud and haughty with his conscience. It is befitting for everyone to be joyful in fear; for by that he would be joyful for the gift of the Lord, and not on account of his own worthiness. As there are many who are pleased with themselves, and think of themselves as being righteous.

About such people, it is written: “*Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?’*” (Proverbs 20: 9). We can say that there should be a limit for glorifying our conscience; namely, to know that our faith is true, our hope is sure, and our love is without deception<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ “*Let them sing aloud on their beds*” (5). He confirms the perfect security from troubles, and guides them to great comfort, great joy, and exalted fulfillment. He refers now to these things, to let them know that all what happened was not by their weapons or strength, but by the grace of God, and that they overcome through humility and meekness<sup>2</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

❖ The Holy Scripture says: “*The Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*” (John 7: 39).

While the psalmist says: “*Let the saints be joyful in glory*”; I say: “*Let the saints be joyful in the cross*”. And the apostle says: “*God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 6: 14)<sup>3</sup>.

❖ “*Let them sing aloud in their beds*”. This applies to the saints, to the righteous.

Who among us could sing with joy in his bed? ... Who among us do not wrestle against his own body in his bed?

When I watch myself while in bed, I do not sing with joy, but wrestle; ... I do not sigh on the kingdom of heavens, but wrestle against

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 59 on Ps. 149.

my body; ... I dampen and quench the fire of lust by my tears; For this, the psalmist says: “*I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears*” (Psalm 6: 6). The tears quench the flames of the bed of him, who is kindled with lust.

Blessed are those, about whom is said: “*Let them sing aloud in their beds*”<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ About the righteous, the psalmist says: “*Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud in their beds*” (5). Fleeing from the outer calamities, they become glorified in an inner peace in the depths of their hearts. But the joy of the heart will be consummated when the outside war of the body is no more. As the bed itself is disturbed, when the walls of the house are shaken<sup>2</sup>.

(Pope Gregory the Great)

### 3- A CONQUEST AND GLORY FOR THE CHURCH:

After parading the motives for joyful singing, from an enjoyment of a new covenant, to a perception of the work of the loving Creator, to His care for us as a King, His pleasure in us, and His dwelling in us as a Source of inner glory; Now the psalmist exhorts us to sing and exult for the sake of our continuous conquests over the devil, and all the hosts of darkness; of bearing in us the word of God, as two-edged sword, by which we would destroy evil; draw the heathens to the Savior of the world, to enjoy the gospel of the truth; and Satan would fall down like lightening from heaven, and become under feet.

The psalmist call the church to exult because of her enjoyment of the following continuous conquests:

- a- Singing praises as a weapon of conquest (6)
- b- The nations receiving faith (7)
- c- The defeat of the devil and his angels (8)
- d- An honor and a glory for those who fear the Lord (9).

***“Let the high praises of God be in their mouth; and a two-edged sword in their hand” (6)***

According to the Septuagint and the Coptic version, it came as: ***“God’s elevations are in their larynxes, and two-mouthed swords in their hands”***

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 59 on Ps. 149.*

<sup>2</sup> *Morals on the Book of Job 8: 41.*

According to some scholars, this phrase reveals the time in which this psalm was written; for the psalmist sees the people building the walls of Jerusalem, under the leadership of Nehemiah, while all of them shout heavenly praises with a loud voice; *“Those who built on the wall, ... with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other hand they held a weapon; Everyone of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built”* (Nehemiah 4: 17-18).

The Septuagint translation *“a two-mouthed sword”*; refers to that it is like a roaring lion, seeking whom it may devour.

By the spirit of prophecy, the psalmist sees our Lord Jesus Christ, girding a sword like a mighty warrior. To present the gospel of love to His people, He grants them the spirit of strength; ... He grants them Himself, as a two-edged sword, by which they can cut off evil, to have no authority over them; ... He will perpetually precede them, and *“will consume the lawless one with the breath of His mouth”* (2 Thessalonians 2: 8); ... And He will ultimately appear on the clouds, *“and, out of His mouth a sharp two-edged sword”* (Revelation 1: 16); by which He judges the world, and separates the children of the kingdom from the children of the devil. And, according to **St. Jerome**, [By it He strikes the enemies; and by it He opens up the kingdom of heaven<sup>1</sup>].

The *“elevations”* (in the Septuagint version), means rejoicing in the conquest. Their joy while in bed, is not set upon their worthiness, but upon the work of God with them. What they reached is out of His grace. They hope from Him to let them reach perfection; Having started the work, He Will consummate it with them.

The two-edged swords in their hands, symbolically refer to the word of God (Hebrews 4: 12). Putting it in pleural, is because it comes from the mouths of a multitude of saints. Being two-edged, or two-mouthed, is a reference to that the word of God deals with our temporal life, as well as touches the eternal life.

❖ *“Sharp two-edged swords in their hands”*; ... Why are they in their hands, and not on their tongues?

Saying *“in their hands”*, means that they received the word of God with authority; by which they speak wherever, and to whom they choose; they fear no authority; and they despise no one

In their hands they have a sword by which they strike wherever they choose. If the word of God is not in their hands, why is it written: *“The word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet”* (Haggai 1: 1)?.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on Ps., homily 59 on Ps. 149.*

Finally, we can understand the “*hands*” in a different way. For those who spoke, had the word of God on their tongues; and wrote it with their hands<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

- ❖ He, who screams, does not scream from his larynx, but out of his lips; Why then does he say here (according to the Septuagint and the Coptic version): “The high praises of God were in their larynxes”? When we cry out, saying “Abba Father!”, the voice crying out to God does not come from the lips, but from the heart. When the Lord said to Moses: “*Why are you screaming to me?*”; he, for sure did not utter a word.

“*and two-edged sword in their hands*”.... The swords of the saints are two-edged ... It is written about the Savior: “*Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword*” (Revelations 1: 16). Notice well, that those saints receive from God two-edged swords, and hold them in their hands. That is why the Lord gives a sword from His mouth to His disciples, a two-edged sword; namely, the word of His teachings.

He gives a two-edged sword; Namely, both the historical and the symbolic interpretations of the Holy Scripture – the letter and the spirit.

A two-edged sword, to slay the enemies; and at the same time, to protect the believers.

The two-edged sword has two heads: to talk about the present world, and about the world to come. Here, it strikes the opponents; and in the heights, it opens up the kingdom of heaven<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

- ❖ The sayings of the true teaching liken two-edged swords, for they clarify the truth, and destroy the lies and the vain; And because they overcome the sayings of atheism, and reproach the sinners among the people. These true sayings are iron chains that shackle the vain debate, and stop the torrent river of lies and deception from flooding over the progress and extension.

(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)

- ❖ “*The high praises of God are in their larynxes, a sharp two-edged sword in their hands, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the people*” (6-7). Here, he portrays the war, side by side with the music; saying that by singing and praising, they *also* overcome.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 59 on Ps. 149.

He calls for singing high praises, with tunes, psalms, and thanksgiving<sup>1</sup>.

(St. John Chrysostom)

***“To execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples” (7)***

In the book of Deuteronomy, etc. God promises His people a complete conquest on the opponent enemies, and on the heathen nations, who keep on attacking the true faith. This conquest was realized, and still does, not through the perdition of the heathens, but by *“binding their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of Iron”* (8).

Who are those kings and princes, other than the devil, and all the hosts of darkness, who think themselves as the rulers of this world, of Great authority?!

❖ Why do the saints carry such swords? ***“To execute vengeance on the nations”***. To destroy every heresy, once and for all<sup>2</sup>.

(St. Jerome)

❖ Now, brethren, behold, You see the saints armed; ... Notice the slaughter; ... Notice the glorious battles. ... For, if there is a leader, there must be soldiers; and if there are soldiers, there must be a battle; and if there is a battle, there is conquest.

What are those with sharp two-edged swords in their hands doing?... ***“They execute vengeance on the nations”***.

See, if the vengeance on the nations is realized by mere talk.

Notice how Babylon has fallen; how it paid double for what she rendered; according to what is written: *“Repay to her double, according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix for her double”* (Revelations 18: 6)

How did she pay double? ... The idol-worship is wiped out, and the idols are broken<sup>3</sup>.

(St. Augustine)

❖ ***“The exultations of the Lord in their larynxes, and a two-edged sword in their hands, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples”*** (Psalm 149: 6-7). We should notice the beauty and benefit of these diverse expressions.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 59 on Ps. 149.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 149.

It was said that the saints become joyful in their beds; and now he says that the exultations of the Lord are set in their larynxes. The meaning, here, is that they will not cease to praise, whether, in their mind, or on their tongues; they sing praise to Him, from whom they get such eternal gifts.

He then moves to describe the strength they cleverly use, by words, “*and a two-edged sword in their hands*”.

The two-edged sword is the word of the Savior Lord, about which the Lord Christ, Himself, says: “*I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*” (Matthew 10: 34).

It is a two-edged sword because the word of God includes two testaments: the Old and the New<sup>1</sup>.

**(Father Cassiodorus)**

**“*To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron*” (8)**

According to **St. Jerome**, the kings here are the authors of heresies, who lead the people astray.

❖ Do you see the flood of strength? ... They not only drive away the enemies, and cast them aside, but they also take captives, and return bearing a testimony before all about the power of God<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ We know that some kings and nobles have become Christians, and many will be.

“***The two-edged swords***” are not idle in the hands of the saints. What should we understand then, of the chains and the iron fetters by which they bind?

You know, O beloved learned brethren (I say ‘learned’, for you have been raised in the church, and are used to hear the word of God);

You know that “*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 bring to nothing the things that are*” (1 Corinthians 1: 27).

The Lord said: “*If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven*”

(Matthew 19: 21). Many nobles have done that, and have chosen to become poor in this world, yet noble in Christ. But many others, who

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<sup>1</sup> Cassiodorus On Ps. 146: 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 149.

became Christians, have chosen to retain their royal authority, or their noble positions. Those came to “be bound by chains and iron fetters”. How is that?

They were bound with “*fetters of wisdom*” (Sirach 6: 25); fetters of the word of God, that would keep them from going astray to unbecoming things. Why are they “*fetters of iron*”, and not of gold? They are of iron, for they fear; But once they love, they will become gold.

**St. John** said: “*There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment*” (1 John 4: 18) . Unless man, in worshipping God, starts with fear, he will not get love. “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (Psalm 11: 10).

The beginning, therefore, is fetters of iron; while the end is a collar of gold; For, about wisdom, It is written: “*It is a collar around Your neck*” (Sirach 6: 24) <sup>1</sup>

**(St. Augustine)**

***“To execute on them the written judgment – this honor have all His saints. Praise the Lord” (9)***

According to **St. Jerome**, the “*written judgment*” is the Holy Book. It is, therefore, befitting to deal with the heresies by the spirit of the Holy Book.

❖ He, who has this weapon will never fear that of the world ... Let us then, give thanks to God, who has such a sword, and let us bless Him forever and ever, Amen<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

❖ So great will be the conquest; and so amazing will be the memorial; It will be obvious for all, as though it is inscribed on a pillar, never to be wiped away<sup>3</sup>.

❖ “***This honor have all his saints***” .... What honor? ... The conquest; or rather, not just the conquest, but the victory, through the support of God, through the grace, from high above<sup>4</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on Ps., homily 59 on Ps. 149.

<sup>3</sup> On Ps. 149.

<sup>4</sup> On Ps. 149.

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 149**  
**A NEW PEOPLE, AND A NEW PRAISE**

- ❖ Your mercies, O God, are new every morning;  
Your Holy Spirit carries us to You;  
To get in touch with Your care, that will never get old;  
You perpetually renew our youth like an eagle;  
You continually renew Your covenant with us;  
You make us a new church;  
That enters into a new covenant with You;  
Your love will never get old, and Your grace will never get obsolete;
- ❖ You grant me a new praise, by which my depths take pleasure;  
By Your amazing love, You present to me a new praise;  
And by Your condescendence, You receive this praise as a sacrifice  
of love to You;  
It is actually a gift from You;  
And when I present it to You, You count it as though from me;  
You smell in it Your sweet fragrance;  
And count me as the subject of Your favor
- ❖ I present the praise to You in secret;  
For no one can hear the voice of my heart but You;  
Yet, my heart will find comfort in fellowship with the hearts of my  
brethren;  
Over the crystal sea before Your throne;  
There, I get together with all Your saints;  
There, the heavenly hosts stand in awe and amazement;  
When they see a choir of several millions of singers;  
All bearing harps of love;  
And all sing with one spirit;
- ❖ We praise You, O King of kings;  
We sing to you with every musical instrument;  
With our hearts, mouths, emotions, minds, and energies;  
Not from us; ... No, not from us;  
All what we present are from the flood of Your gifts;  
You pour Your splendor on us;  
To be counted as kings, filled with splendor;
- ❖ By what language shall we praise You, except by that of those high;  
Our inner mouths sing heavenly songs of praise;

And our hands hold fast to You;  
You are our peace;

- ❖ Our songs of praise, are deadly arrows against the hosts of darkness;  
We are not worthy to present these songs of praise;  
They are songs of praise for God's conquest;  
That grant us gladness and honor.

## **PSALM 150**

### **AN ECUMENICAL PRAISE**

According to the Hebrew text, this psalm (150) is the last one of the whole book of psalms. Whereas in the Septuagint Version, there is another one – psalm 151

This psalm (150) came with neither a title nor the name of its author, whether in the Hebrew version or the older ones. Being the end of the psalms, It is sung by the whole choir of singers together, using every kind of musical instrument in the temple, the dwelling place of God with men..

The book of psalms begins by blessing the man, who walks according to the divine commandment, who “*walks, not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful*”, for he enjoys the rivers of water of the Holy Spirit, “*that brings forth its fruits in its season*” (Psalm 1).

In this last psalm (according to the Hebrew text), the book ends by an ecumenical call to all mankind to partake of the exultant heavenly life.

In the introduction to the book of psalms, we said that many scholars have noticed a conformity between this book and the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch).

By psalms 1 to 41, the church sings, as though with **the book of Genesis**, where man enjoys salvation.

By psalms 42 to 72, the church sings, as though with **the book of Exodus**; where the believer enjoys the ecclesiastical membership, as a way to unify with the Savior.

By psalms 73 to 89, the church sings , as though with **the book of Leviticus**, where the believer is impressed by seeing the holy new temple, set in his depths.

By psalms 90 to 106, the church sings, as though with **the book of Numbers**, where the body is sanctified to be together with the soul in a journey toward the bosom of the Father, by the Holy Lord Jesus Christ.

And finally, by psalms 107 to 150, the church sings, as though with **the book of Deuteronomy**, where the believer takes pleasure in the word of God working in him.

The fifth book of psalms, with the last five psalms (156 to 150), are psalms of praise, where every psalm begins with a call to sing praise to the Lord, and ends with Alleluia (Praise the Lord)... In all of them, we do not hear moaning, nor any hint of going through sufferings or

troubles ; but you only hear unceasing joyful songs of praise and thanksgiving on the salvation of God. ...

This final psalm, in the Hebrew text, is a call to praise the Lord, where the word “*praise*”, came 13 times.

1- **Where do we praise God?** On both the local and the ecumenical level; in the temple, and in heaven (1); We praise Him wherever we are, as long as we long to enjoy the deposit of heaven.

2- **Why do we praise Him?** For the sake of His works with us; and for His own sake as well. For, the more we recognize Him, and His works, the more we take pleasure in praising Him.

3- **How would we praise Him?** By the voice (the mouth), as well as by the musical instruments, which refer to our members, and even to our whole being, both the physical and spiritual.

4- **Who will praise Him?** Every being that has breath (6); and even the creatures without (Psalm 148: 7-9). We, humans, as the breath of our life is from Him (Acts 17: 25), we are committed to use it to praise His name.

The breath is the weakest thing in us; but we can dedicate it for the greatest thing we can present, to praise God

**St. Clement of Alexandria**, interpreted psalm 150, which the church sings during the distribution of the Holy Mysteries, in a beautiful symbolic way, in which he presented the church, risen from the dead, together with her Groom, as a living musical instrument, on which the Holy Spirit plays, to produce a sweet melody of love, he says:

[In the divine service, the Spirit sings;

“*Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet*”; For, by the sound of the trumpet He raises the dead.

“*Praise Him with the flute*”; For the tongue is the flute of the Lord.

“*Praise Him with the harp*”; Here he means the mouth, which the Spirit moves as a string.

“*Praise Him with timbrel and dance*”; referring to the church, meditating in the resurrection from the dead, through the sound of hitting on the leather of the timbrel (as a reference to the dead).

“*Praise Him with the stringed instruments and the organ*”; Here he calls our body ‘an organ’, and calls its nerves and tendons, ‘strings’, on which the Spirit plays, to produce harmonious human tunes.

“*Praise Him with cymbals*”. He calls the tongue a cymbal; for it produces the sound through the lips.

Then he cries out to all mankind, saying:

*“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord”*; For He cares for every breathing creature<sup>1</sup>].

In the fourth chapter of his second book “The Instructor”, **St. Clement of Alexandria** said that the church, in his time, did not use the musical instruments; For those instruments were used by the nations and the peoples to stir up hatred in wars: The people of ‘Etruria’, west of Italy used the trumpet; Those of ‘Arcadia’, in Greece, used the flute; The Cretians used the harp; The Egyptians used the drums; And the Arabs used the cymbals..... Whereas the unique tool of peace, is the “Word”, by which we honor God; and that is what we use; and not the ancient traditional instruments like the trumpet, the flute, the drums, etc. used by the heathens in their wars and celebrations.

- |                                      |                  |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>1- Where would we praise God?</b> | <b>1</b>         |
| <b>2- Why would we praise God?</b>   | <b>2</b>         |
| <b>3- How would we praise God?</b>   | <b>3 - 5 (a)</b> |
| <b>4- Whom would we praise?</b>      | <b>5 (b)</b>     |

## **1- WHERE WOULD WE PRAISE GOD?**

*“Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament”* (1)

According to the Hebrew version, this is the first time the name “EL” of God, came together with the word “Praise”, instead of the name “Jehovah”. Gathering together as one complete choir, carrying all the musical instruments, all singing in one voice in the temple, with the spirit of joy, together with strength; praising God, the Mighty, who set a covenant with mankind, who blesses and saves them, and lets them enjoy the eternal life<sup>2</sup>.

The singers, gathering together in the temple, feel as though they are in heaven, where the divine sanctuaries are; Or in the bosom of the Holy God *“His sanctuary”*..... They stand in His mighty firmament!

The word “firmament”, used in Genesis 1: 6, is derived from a verb meaning *‘to strike’* or ‘spread by striking’, like when you spread a plate of gold. God is praised by the heavenly hosts, as well as by His church, spread, extended, and lifted up high, like the firmament of heaven.

Lifted by the Spirit of God<sup>3</sup> up beyond the temporal things, the believer testifies to the salvation work of God and His exalted might;

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<sup>1</sup> *Paedagogus* 2: 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Adam Clarke, Ps. 150* ترجمة مريان فايز

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Adam Clarke, Ps. 150* ترجمة مريان فايز

and sings: “*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament show His handwork*” (Psalm 19: 1).

Starting by praising God in His saints, the psalmist declares praising Him in His mighty firmament. And according to **St. John Chrysostom**, he declares by this that God has created the ‘sky’ for the sake of man, and not man for the sake of the sky. **St. John Chrysostom** also believes that the angels dwelling in heaven partake of the praise to God.

❖ God should be praised by those dwelling, walking, and existing in holiness. For outside holiness and purity, it would be a foreign land; and how would it be possible to praise God in a foreign land? ... How would the holies be cast to the dogs; and the jewels to the pigs?

The great prophet says: “*Praise God in His saints*”; meaning, praise Him while you are counted among the saints; And meaning as well: Praise God for the sake of the saints; giving Him thanks, for, by his grace, He made men saints, and added them to the angels, for the sake of their pure behavior; and granted them great talents.

**(Father Onesimus of Jerusalem)**

❖ “*Praise God in His saints*”; or “in His sanctuary”. Here is a reference to the holy people, the holy life, or to the saints.

Let us notice that he ends the book of psalms by thanksgiving; teaching us how our deeds and words should begin, and how they should end, with thanksgiving. The apostle Paul also says: “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Colossians 3: 17).

This is how we begin our prayers by saying: “*Our Father*”; which in itself bears thanksgiving for the sake of His goodness, showing that it is befitting to refer all of them to His holy name.

By saying, “*Our Father*”, we confess our sonhood, and by confessing sonhood, we proclaim the righteousness, sanctification, salvation, and the forgiveness of sins. We present all that, to enjoy the sonhood, and become qualified to call God “*Our Father*”<sup>1</sup>.

❖ It seems to me that he hints to something else, when he says “*in His saints*” ... He gives Him thanks, for presenting such an amazing way of life to our being; namely, He makes human beings angels<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 150.*

<sup>2</sup> *On Ps. 150.*

## 2- WHY WOULD WE PRAISE GOD?

***“Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness” (2)***

Looking at His excellent greatness, love, care, grace, and what He prepares for the believers of eternal heavenly glories, righteousness, and justice; We shall never cease to praise Him with all our energies, and in every way. Being unable to perceive the perfection of God’s greatness, nor to express it, we would never stop praising Him; together with calling all creation to taste the sweetness of praising Him.

Our praise of God, amazing in His might and love, not only pours sweetness in the souls of those who praise Him, but would also grant them a fellowship with Him, who pours in them from His might, goodness, and righteousness, and who makes of them a living icon, drawn to the original.

❖ ***“Praise Him for His mighty act”*** ... Namely, for His wonders; for the might He declares in every thing, both in those in the heights, and down below; in the congregation as a whole, and in every individual, in particular, under any circumstances, and to all persons under all circumstances<sup>1</sup>.

❖ ***“Praise Him according to His excellent greatness”*** ... Do not you see here, a mind, kindled with fire, striving and suffering to overcome its own limitation; to fly high to heaven itself; and, in servitude to God, to presents to Him its deep longing<sup>2</sup>?

(St. John Chrysostom)

## 3- HOW WOULD WE PRAISE GOD?

***“Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp” (3)***

***“With the sound of the trumpet”*** (showpaar); he refers to the exaltation, joy, and greatness of the sound. ***“with the lute”*** (neebel) <sup>3</sup>.

***“With the harp”*** The origin and meaning of the word (kinowr) is not known. All languages quoted the name from the Hebrew; and came in the Septuagint version as (Kithara), or (Kinura), a stringed instrument, played by hands or fingers<sup>4</sup>; mentioned in the book of Genesis (4: 21) as an invention of ‘Jubal’; and often mentioned by the psalmist (Psalms 32: 2;43: 4; 49: 5); and by Isaiah (5: 12).

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 150.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Adam Clarke, Ps. 150.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Adam Clarke, Ps. 150 ترجمة مريان فايز

Some believe<sup>1</sup> that most of the musical instruments mentioned in this psalm, which were used in the Jewish worship, are now gathered together in one instrument -- the 'organ', which is played by one individual in harmony.

The "**lute**" (neebel), from which is derived the Greek word (nablion), and the Latin (nablium), and (nabla), is a hollow stringed instrument similar to the guitar<sup>2</sup>, assumed to be bottle-shaped, was used in the east; or like a skin of wine (1 Samuel 10: 3; 25: 18; 2 Samuel 16: 1). In the beginning it was made of 'fir' wood, then of 'almug' wood, then of metal (2 Samuel 6: 5; Job 13: 6). The outer part of that instrument was of wood, on which strings were drawn in different ways. According to Juciphus, it had 12 strings, played by fingers; according to **Hecichius**, was played by both hands together<sup>3</sup>; and according to **St. Jerome, Isidros, and Casidorus**, it was Greek delta-shaped.

***"Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes" (4)***

The "**timbrel**" in Hebrew is (top), which is the (drum), played by the hand.

The "**dance**": The Jews used to dance accompanied by the timbrels. Yet, according to Adam Clarke, the Hebrew word (maachowl) does not mean (dance) at all.

The "**stringed instruments**" are the (miniym).

The "**flute**" (nwgaab) is derived from the word (aagab), meaning (to blow). There is no mention that this instrument, or any other (blowing instrument), like the (pipes) were used in the temple. According to some, it is mentioned here, on account of that it was used in the feast of the dedication of the walls, as a sign of gladness. It representing all kinds of blowing musical instruments.

***"Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals" (5a)***

Praising with the clashing cymbals suits the noisy celebrations (Nehemiah 12: 27); which are none other than the voice of the inner heart, that reaches up, unhindered, to the throne of God's grace; interpreted by the believer, by exerting every effort, and by forsaking everything else, in love for Him, who has delivered Himself for our

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Adam Clarke, Ps. 150 ترجمة مريان فايز

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Adam Clarke, Ps. 150 ترجمة مريان فايز

<sup>3</sup> Antiq. B. viii, ch. X.

sake. The cymbals are similar to plates, stricken one against the other, to produce loud sound.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, God commanded His people in the old covenant, to use the musical instruments, because of their spiritual weakness, to stir up in them the holy zeal to praise Him. ... Whereas now, as man reached the spiritual maturity, he uses all his body members as musical instruments, to express what is in his heart of love and thanksgiving to God.

❖ The psalmist exhorts the Jews to praise God with all musical instruments, to stir up and ignite their minds; and exhorts us, as well, to praise God by all our body members: the eye, the tongue, the hearing, and the hand: To which it is also referred by the apostle Paul, saying: *“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 service”* (Romans 12: 1).

The eye praises God, when the vision is under control;... The tongue, when it sings;... The hearing, when it receives no evil tunes, nor the reviling of one’s neighbor;... The mind, when it thinks of no evil plots, but binds with love;... The feet, when they do not run toward evil, but practice good works; ...And the hands, when they are not used in robbery, greed, and violence, but in giving alms, and in the defense against the wrong doers. By all that, man becomes like a harp that presents to God tunes of a symphony, spiritually harmonious.

At that time, they were commanded to use musical instruments, because of their spiritual weakness, to calm down their spirits, to conform to love and harmony, and to stir up their minds to contribute to what is for their benefit. Through the effect of music, it was meant to lead them to the great zeal<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ When we lift up holy hands in prayer, without wrath or doubting (1 Timothy 2: 8), we play, according to the psalmist, on an instrument with ten strings for the Lord; And we play on the harp of our bodies and souls, in perfect harmony<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Jerome)**

#### **4- WHOM WOULD WE PRAISE?**

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<sup>1</sup> *On Ps. 150.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on the Ps., 21.*

***“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. .... Praise the Lord” (5 b)***

Together with the use of every possible instrument, the call came to all the rational beings, both the heavenly, and the earthly, to form one harmonious choir, to praise God. And as the apostle says: *“that you may, with one mind and one mouth, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 15: 6).

The most magnificent music presented to praise God, does not emerge from mute instruments, nor lifeless strings, but from hearts, kindled with love of God and men. The call here, is to praise God with hearts full of trust, confidence, and hope in the Savior; to praise Him through our living faith, by which we would overcome the hosts of darkness, and become partners with the heavenly creatures in their love of God, their obedience, purity, and unity together.

❖ I wish we praise God unceasingly, and not fail to present to Him, thanksgiving for everything, by words and by work; For that would be our best sacrifice and offering; and would be the most exalted worship, like the life of angels. ... If we persist on praising God in this way, we would enjoy a blameless life, and the good things to come<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. John Chrysostom)**

❖ There are many, who are living by the body, yet are dead, and could not praise God.... And there are many who are dead in the body, yet they praise God by their spirits; As it is written: *“Bless the Lord, O spirits and souls of the righteous”*; and *“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord”* (Psalm 150 : 5 b). In the book of Revelations, we find the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held, not only praising God, but also requesting from Him (Revelation 6: 9-10). In the gospel, the Lord, very clearly says to the Sadducees: *“Have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying: ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live in Him’”* (Matthew 22: 31-32); And the apostle says: *“God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them”* (Hebrew 11: 16). ... Being separated from the body, does not make the souls without work, nor deprive them of feeling and sensing<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 150.

<sup>2</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 1: 14.

**(Father Moses)**

- ❖ All creation keep a feast, O brethren, And, according to the psalmist, “everything that has breath, praise the Lord” (Psalm 150: 5 b); for the sake of the destruction of the enemies (the devils), and for our salvation.

Indeed, if “*There will be ... joy in heaven over one sinner who repents*” (Luke 15: 7), How could there be no joy, because of putting an end to sin, and of the resurrection of the dead?

Oh! What a feast and joy in heaven!

Oh, yes, How much will be the joy of the heavenly hosts, when they come to partake of our gathering together, to be perpetually with us, particularly during the days of the feast of resurrection.

They watch the sinners as they repent; those who turn their faces away from sin, and change; and those who used to be sunken in lusts; and now, are contrite by fasting and chastity.

And, finally, they watch the enemy (the devil), cast down, weak and lifeless, with his hands and feet bound; and scornfully say to him: “*O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*” (1 Corinthians 15: 55).

Let us now sing to the Lord the song of victory and conquest.

**(St. Athanasius the apostolic)**

**AN INSPIRATION FROM PSALM 150**

**LET US PRAISE GOD IN HIS HOLY SANCTUARY**

- ❖ All the heavenly hosts unceasingly shout and praise;  
They are in a continuous feast;  
And in an unceasingly glorious joy;  
You are the secret of their exultation and shouting;  
I wonder whether to call You, to incline Your ear to hear the praises of my heart.  
Or to grant me Your Holy Spirit, to take me up to Your heavens;  
For there, I shall rejoice in praising You in the language of the heavenlies;
- ❖ In such a glorious heavenly atmosphere, the lips will never cease to praise You;

Here, setting Your heavenly kingdom in my depths;  
Grant me to forsake and forget everything around me;  
Entering into my depths which You sanctify;  
There I find pleasure in praising You.

- ❖ Who is worthy of playing, what is befitting to Your Holiness?  
Your Holy Spirit condescends and embraces me;  
Plays on the strings of my soul, mind, and emotions;  
Even on all the energies of my body members;  
To become, indeed, a unique harp;  
The handwork of Your amazing Spirit;
- ❖ I take pleasure in praising You;  
Although You need, neither my praise, nor my goodness;  
Praising You, lifts me up to Your heavens;  
It brings me into Your bosoms;  
It includes me among the heavenly hosts;  
It opens up my insight;  
To enable me to drink from the fountain of Your knowledge;
- ❖ Praising You, increases the thirst of humanity for You;  
When shall I see all men have become members in the heavenly  
choir?  
Prepare all men, O Lord, with Your Holy Spirit;  
That all men, together with the heavenlies, would form an amazing  
and a unique choir of praise;  
Glory be to You, O who Grant praise, and receive it as an exalted  
sacrifice of love.

## ***PSALM 151*** **OF DAVID WHO OVERCAME GOLIATH**

This psalm, found in the Alexandria copy of the Septuagint version; was referred to by St. Athanasius the apostolic, and St. John Chrysostom, as well as by Apolinarius and others. But is not found in the Hebrew version, nor in the Volgata.

### **Psalm 151 and the verses of the Bright Saturday:**

This psalm occupy a prominent position in the praises of the resurrection of the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ. Once the church celebrates His burial in the great Friday, it sings this psalm, as our eyes look up to the soul of the Lord Christ, setting forth to Hades to preach the good news to those who departed on hope. His soul, un-separated from His Godhead, entered, and carried the souls of all believers, captivated by death, to release them to paradise, destroying the gates of the pit.

At the beginning of the celebration of the Bright Saturday, the priest, dressed in the attire of glory, opens up the veil of the altar, carrying the gospel, wrapped in white linen, against his forehead; singing this psalm with a magnificent and joyful tune. It is as though the church has chosen this psalm to begin with it, the celebration of the feast of resurrection, that was experienced by those who were in Hades, even before the disciples and the women at the dawn of the resurrection Sunday. The priest, with the spirit of gladness, stand to proclaim the resurrection of the Lord Christ, and its work in the life of the believers who departed.... That is how we interpret this psalm.

Many psalms and praises have clearly and obviously prophesied the resurrection of the Lord Christ, with the spirit of gladness and joy. **Why then, did the church chose this very psalm to open by it the joyful worship celebration of the feast of resurrection?**

1- Each of the early fathers patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), and the prophets, has embodied a certain aspects of the Person of the Lord Christ, or of His salvation work. But the prophet David, in particular, has been privileged with the honor of having the Lord Christ, the Messiah, referred to him, being called "the Son of David". This psalm came to reveal the reason why Christ, resurrected from the dead, was called "the Son of David".

2- This psalm begins by talking about David as the youngest of his brothers. When the prophet Samuel came, commanded by the lord, to

choose one of the sons of Jesse to anoint as a king; and Jesse introduced each of them, save the lad David who was away caring for the sheep of his father, That, in itself implied some kind of belittling him, being the youngest of his brothers.... The Lord Christ came to occupy the rearmost row of humanity, counting himself as the least, by the spirit of humility, opening His arms with salvation to all.

3- The prophet David, proclaims that he cherishes praising the Lord with the spirit of joy; he was called "*the sweet psalmist of Israel*" (2 Samuel 23: 1). And our Christ came to bring us back to the joyful paradisiacal life, to let us join the heavenly choir, to partake of their praises and heavenly joy.

4- The choice of David to be the anointed of the Lord: It was said that the Lord Christ is anointed with the oil of gladness; having dedicated His life to present salvation to the whole world. .... David was anointed a king on Israel; Whereas the Lord Christ, reigning over the hearts of all mankind, sets out of them kings and priests for God His Father.

5- David sees his older brothers, as good-looking and full of beauty; But God finds pleasure in the inner beauty they did not have, except for David, to whom the lord, Himself, testifies, saying: "*I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart*" (Acts 13: 22). Whereas the Lord Christ is beauty itself, He pours on the believers in Him, to set out of them the holy heavenly bride, blameless, and without defilement or wrinkles.

6- David was the leader of a unique battle: That young man, who was anointed a king in secret, stands without any of the traditional weapons, whether a sword, a spear, or even a helmet; but enters the battle against the fully armed giant Philistine Goliath; with only a sling and five smooth stones, he put in his shepherd's bag, by one of which, in the name of the Lord, he could struck the Philistine in his forehead, that he fell on his face to the ground; then took the man's sword and cut off his head (1 Samuel 17).... It is a portrait of the work of the cross, by which the Lord Christ struck the devil in his forehead. By the cross, that the devil intended to get rid of the Lord Christ, the devil was destroyed, lost his authority and kingdom on the children of God! ... In a unique battle, which ended with the destruction of the devil, the children of God were liberated from his captivity, and presented the glory of resurrection. By His resurrection, the Lord Christ took the reproach away from mankind, and granted them the right of fellowship in the eternal glories.

## **The title:**

According to the Septuagint version, it came as: [This psalm was hand-written by David; when he fought single-handed against the giant Philistine Goliath; although it is out of the numbers of psalms.

*“Out of the numbers of psalms”* refers to the fact that the Jews only recognized 150 psalms; and accordingly, they counted this one, as out of the number of psalms.

On the spiritual aspect, and the Messianic one as well, the Lord Christ who came to the world, dwelt among men as one of them, and was rejected, as though one “out of the numbers”, *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him”* (John 1: 11). Counting Him not worthy to be included among them, they crucified Him outside the camp; and as said by the apostle Paul: *“Therefore, let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach”* (Hebrew 13: 13). *“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5: 10), to bring us forth into His bosom.

Bearing the features of His Christ, or becoming an icon of Him, the believer will expect to be counted like Him, “out of the number”.

- 1- The little shepherd<sup>1</sup>**
- 2- The sweet psalmist of Israel<sup>2</sup>**
- 3- Having been anointed with the oil of gladness<sup>5 – 5</sup>**
- 4- A holy battle<sup>6 – 8</sup>**

## **1- THE LITTLE SHEPHERD:**

*“I was the youngest of my brothers, and a junior in my father’s house; I was a shepherd of my father’s sheep”* (1)

The psalmist David often says that he will always remember God’s past works with him. He will never forget that, because he was the youngest of his brothers, he was entrusted with shepherding his father’s sheep. But God was preparing him for a greater shepherding task, that of the rational flock of God.

Remembering his humble youth, kept him walking with the spirit of humility, perceiving that he had no merit for what he reached of high position or great success. It gave him, as well a kind of confidence and trust in God, who has chosen him from among his handsome brothers, to be a prophet and a king over the people of God.

His humility and trust in the work of God, were his support in his life, the source of joy, and songs of praise, even in the worst moments of affliction.

According to **St. Augustine**<sup>1</sup>, choosing David, the smallest among his brothers, is a symbolic reference to choosing the Gentiles as members in the church of the new covenant, to reign in the Lord instead of the Jews, who, although preceded them in knowledge, yet they rejected faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is as though the Gentiles symbolize David, the smallest among his brothers, who received the grace of royalty from God; according to the words of the Lord Christ Himself, saying: “*So the last will be the first, and the first last*” (Matthew 20: 16). In the same way, Abel was preferred over Cain, his older brother; and Isaac over Ishmael; Jacob over Esau, his twin brother; and Perez over Zerah (Genesis 38: 29).

Choosing David, the smallest among his brothers, as a king, symbolizes Jesus, the Lord of Glory who, occupying the rear row, became the smallest among His brothers; the smallest in His Father’s house., to stretch His arms to embrace all, and to bring them over to His Father’s bosoms. For our sake He became a servant, so that, by the cross He would reign over our hearts. He is the second Adam, who reigned in place of the first Adam (Romans 5), to become the Head of mankind, capable of setting them aright and of renewing them.

Looking, by the spirit of prophecy, to Christ, our Savior, risen from the dead, the psalmist said: “*Though the Lord is on high, yet He regards the lowly, but the proud He knows from afar*” (Psalm 138: 6). ... He is close to the lowly, and far from the proud. ... He became the smallest, to bring the true believers forth into membership in the household of God His Father. ... He became truly, close to the lowly, not regarding the distance, but regarding their union with Him, being members of His own body, of “*the household of God*” (Ephesians 2: 19). By that He proclaimed His care for His Father’s flock, saying: “***I was a shepherd of My Father’s sheep***” (1).

The Lord of Glory wishes to find comfort in your heart, to lay His head; if it becomes lowly like the house of Lazarus in Bethany.

Commenting on the Lord’s going to Bethany, **St. Jerome** says: [He (the Lord) was so poor, that, finding no place in the big city – Jerusalem – He went to dwell in the tiny and lowly house of Lazarus and his two sisters in Bethany].

❖ The Son of God became a little innocent lamb, “***led to the slaughter***” (Isaiah 53: 7), “*to take away the sin of the world*” (John 1: 29). He, who gives the “Word” to all, became compared to “*a sheep*,

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 78 (9).

*silent before its shearers*” (Isaiah 53: 7). So that we all, be purified by His death, He is distributed as a medication against the effects of the enemy; and against the sin of those who long to receive the truth. The death of Christ made the opponent hosts to mankind of no avail; And, by an un-expressible authority, He put an end to the life in sin in the life of every believer<sup>1</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ Revealing the heavenly secret, the Son of God proclaims His grace to the babes, rather than to the wise and prudent of this age (Matthew 11: 25). This is portrayed in more detail by the apostle Paul, saying: *“Since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”* (1 Corinthians 1: 21)

He, who knows how to be puffed up, or how to give his words the sound of wisdom, is the **“wise and prudent of this age”**; Whereas the babe says: *“Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty, neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me”* (Psalm 131: 1). This later seems little, not in age, nor in mind, but in his humility, through keeping away from commendation; Hence he goes on saying: *“Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother”* (Psalm 131: 2).

Meditate in the greatness of such a person, described by the words of the apostle, saying: *“If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God”* (1 Corinthians 3: 18-19)<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Ambrose)**

- ❖ Getting up and washing himself, as a symbol of baptism, ‘Naaman’s body became like a child’s body (2 Kings 5: 14), born in the font of renewal<sup>3</sup>.

**(The scholar Origen)**

- ❖ **We, the small fish**, according to our Fish Jesus Christ, have been born in water; and will never, in any way, be safe, except by perpetually staying in the water.

**(The scholar Tertullian)**

It is befitting of us, in our humility, to keep on enjoying the spiritual food, to grow and become mature, through the work of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 1: 233.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Luc. 10.*

<sup>3</sup> *Origin: Comm. Jos 6: 47, 48: in Luc-hom 33. Origen: Comm. Jos 6: 47, 48: in Lue-hom 33.*

grace of God. According to **St. Ambrose**: [Only he, who is spiritually mature, will surpass the corners of this world].

- ❖ As long as the soul is little and not fully mature, it will remain under the guidance of instructors and teachers; namely, the angels, called by the name ‘the guardians of babes’, and have the privilege of perpetually beholding God’s face in heaven.

(The scholar Origen)

## **2- THE SWEET PSALMIST OF ISRAEL:**

*“My hands made the harp; and my fingers got used to the flute. Praise the Lord” (2)*

What is this harp that drives away the distressing spirit, and gives comfort to man (1 Samuel 16: 23), but the Word of God in the Old and the New Testaments, which includes the strings of the law, the prophecies, the praises, the gospels, and the apostolic writings, etc.; Although diverse strings, yet they work together in harmony to grant the believer comfort and peace.

According to **the scholar Origen**: [The Holy Scripture is God’s one instrument, which, in its integrity and harmony, gives, through the diverse sounds, the one sound of salvation, to those who wish to learn. It is the harp that brings to naught, and opposes, the work of every wicked spirit; as it happened with David, the musician, who, by his music, managed to calm down the distressing spirit of Saul<sup>1</sup>].

## **3- GOD HAS ANOINTED HIM (THE LORD JESUS CHRIST) WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS:**

*“Who will inform my Lord?... He is the Lord who responds to those who cry out to Him” (3)*

*“He sent forth His angel; took me from my father’s sheep, and anointed me with the oil of anointment” (4)*

He is the Lord Christ, who eternally sits on the throne; worshipped by the angelic hosts, and reigns over the people with love. He, alone, being Righteous, and without sin, has been anointed since eternity, by God the Father, to realize salvation through His incarnation and life among us, and delivering Himself a sacrifice of love for our sake. Here, His divine will is melded with His personal piety, to realize His goal in us. As, according to the apostle: *“You have loved righteousness, and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has*

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<sup>1</sup> In Matt. Book 2.

*anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions”* (Hebrew 1: 9).

The Mosaic law commanded the anointment of persons (kings and priests), locations (the temple), and vessels dedicated for the service of the house of the Lord, etc. The goal of this anointment, is that the person, or the thing, become dedicated to God alone. All that, along the generations, referred to the coming of Christ, whom the Father anointed with the oil of gladness (Psalm 45: 7), to “*preach good tidings to the poor*” (Isaiah 61: 1. He is the subject of pleasure and gladness to the Father; for, while being the divine Word, and the Only-begotten Son, He incarnated to reconcile the whole humanity with the Father, and to bring forth the heavenly joy to the poor, who were deprived of the flood of gladness of the heavenly life.

He was anointed, for us to be anointed in Him. Being members of His body, we are counted as anointed.

❖ You are so called; and about you, God said: “*Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm*” (Psalm 105: 15).

You have been made<sup>1</sup> “*anointed*” through receiving the Holy Spirit; and everything done in you, was to be like Christ; for you are the image of Christ. .... He went down into the Jordan River, brought forth His divine knowledge in its water, and came out of it; and the Holy Spirit in His wholeness, shined and dwelt upon Him. As for you, as you come out of the holy font of baptism, you acquire oil, similar to that by which Christ was anointed; the Holy Spirit, about whom the blessed Isaiah, in his prophecy about the Person of the Lord: “*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed Me*” (Isaiah 61: 1)

Christ was not anointed by someone, nor by a material oil; but it is the Father, who has designated Him from eternity, to be the Savior of the whole world; As according to the apostle Peter: “... *How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 10: 38).

The prophet David proclaimed, as well, cried out, saying: “*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*” (Psalm 45: 6-7).

As Christ has been crucified, buried, and truly risen; You, in baptism, are worthy to be counted as crucified, buried, and risen together with Him. Concerning the oil; As He was anointed with an exalted oil,

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<sup>1</sup> الكلمة اليونانية "نموذج" لا تعني نموذجًا رمزيًا بل كما ورد في عب 9: 24

the oil of gladness; on account of that He is the Initiator of the spiritual joy; You, as well, are anointed with oil; having fellowship with Christ and His followers<sup>1</sup>.

**(St. Cyril of Jerusalem)**

- ❖ He who is baptized must also be anointed; to become through anointment, an anointed of God, and worthy of having the grace of Christ<sup>2</sup>.

**(St. Cyprian)**

- ❖ The name “Christ” means “The Anointed”. Every Christian receives the anointment, but this does not mean that he became a partner in the Kingdom, but that he came to be among the warriors against the devil.

**(St. Augustine)**

***“My brothers are good looking, and older than me; yet they did not find favor in the eyes of God” (5)***

When the prophet Samuel intended to anoint ‘Eliab’ the oldest son of Jesse (most probably Elihu who became ruler on the tribe of Judah), the Lord said to him: *“Do not look at his appearance, or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outer appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”* (1 Samuel 16: 7).. According to **St Clement of Alexandria**, [He did not anoint the one good looking in stature, but the one with a beautiful soul<sup>3</sup>].

God chose David for the sake of his inner purity, and his beautiful soul, and not for his outer appearance. He has previously given the people, Saul a king, he who was tall and good looking, according to their request; Now He is granting them a king according to His own mind.

The Lord did not chose any of the seven sons whom Jesse let pass before Samuel; and finally he called the youngest of his children who was keeping the sheep, to be anointed a shepherd of the rational sheep of God.

#### **4- A HOLY BATTLE:**

***“I went forth to encounter the Philistine; who cursed me by his gods” (6)***

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<sup>1</sup> مقال 21 (الأسرار: 1، 2).

<sup>2</sup> Letter, 70.

<sup>3</sup> Paed 3: 2.

In a symbolic interpretation of the story of David and Goliath, after **St. Augustine, Caesarius, Bishop of Arle**, said:

[When Jesse sent his son David to see how his brothers fare; It so seems that he was a symbol of God the Father, who sent His only-begotten Son, about whom it is said: “*I will declare Your name to my brethren*” (Psalm 22: 23). Christ has truly come to see how His brethren fare; saying: “*I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Matthew 15: 24).

“*Jesse said to his son David: ‘Take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried grain, and these ten loaves, and run to your brothers at the camp’*”. In the ephah, which is three measures, we may understand the secret of the Trinity; which Abraham previously understood in the three persons who visited him under the terebinth tree of Mamre; when he instructed his wife Sarah to knead three measures of fine meal (Genesis 18: 6). Together with the three measures of grain, Jesse gave his son David ten pieces of cheese, in which we perceive the ten commandments of the Old Testament. ... The way David came with the three measures of grain and the ten pieces of cheese, to visit his brothers in the camp; Christ came with the secret of Trinity, and the ten commandments of the law, to liberate mankind from the devil<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine** says: [Before coming to visit his brothers in the camp, David, who was secretly anointed by the prophet Samuel, killed a lion and a bear without weapons, as he, himself, so told king Saul. The lion and the bear symbolize the devil, who dared to attack some of David’s sheep, and he killed them by his strength.

What we read here, beloved brethren, is a symbol. What is symbolized by David, has been realized in our Lord Jesus Christ, who killed the lion and the bear, when he went down to Hades to liberate all the saints from their claws. Listen to how the prophet pleads to the Person of our Lord, saying: “*Deliver me from the sword; my precious life from the power of the dog; Save me from the lion’s mouth*” (Psalm 22: 20-21).

As the bear has its strength in its claws; and the lion in its mouth; So the devil is symbolized by these two beasts. That is why it is said about the Person of Christ, that He takes His only church from the claws and the mouth of the devil.

David came, to find the Jewish people camped in the valley of terebinth to fight with the Philistines; For Christ – the true David – had to come to lift mankind up from the valley of sin and tears, where the

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<sup>1</sup>Caesarius of Arles: *Serm. 121: 1, 2.*

burden of their sins brought them down. ... Anyway, the Israelites were standing, not daring to fight the enemies, because David – the symbol of Christ – has not yet come. ... That is true, brethren, Who would dare to fight against the devil before our Lord Jesus Christ liberate mankind from his authority? ... Now, the word ‘David’ means (strength of the hand); ... Who is stronger than Him, who has overcome the whole world, armed by the cross, and not by a sword?!

The Israelites stood 40 days before the enemies. Those 40 days refer to the present life, in which the Christians keep fighting against Goliath and his army; namely against the devil and his angels (figure 4 refers to the 4 seasons of the year; and the figure 10 to the full time).

David came and found the people standing before the Philistines; No one daring to enter into the battle alone. David, the symbol of Christ came to the battle against Goliath carrying a staff in his hand; which was realized in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ -- the true David – who came carrying His cross, to fight against the spiritual Goliath; namely, the devil.

Notice, O brethren, where did the blessed David strike Goliath -- in his forehead, which did not carry the sign of the cross. As the staff symbolized the cross; the stone with which David struck Goliath in his forehead, symbolizes our Lord Jesus Christ; the Living Stone, about whom it is said: *“The stone which the builders rejected, has become the chief cornerstone”* (Psalm 117: 22).

David stood over Goliath and killed him, not with a sword of his own, but with that of Goliath himself; which refers to that, with the coming of Christ, He will overcome the devil with the devil’s own weapon. With his craftiness and oppression, against Christ, the devil has indeed lost his authority over all the believers in Christ.

David put Goliath’s armor in his tent. ... As we have been tools in the hand of the devil; the apostle Paul says: *“Just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now, present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness”* (Romans 6: 19); And, *“Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin”* (Romans 6: 13).

Yes indeed, Christ has put the armors of His enemy in his tent, once we, who were a dwelling place for the devil, became worthy to be a temple for Christ, to dwell in us. The apostle confirms that Christ dwells in us, by saying: *“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”* (Ephesians 3: 16-17). That we, in our turn, dwell in Christ, is confirmed by the apostle, saying: *“For as many of you as were baptized*

*into Christ, has put on Christ” (Galatians 3: 27).; as well as by our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, who says to His disciples in the gospel: “I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (John 14: 20).*

Striking Goliath in his forehead, and not anywhere else, symbolizes something that happens to all of us. Making the sign of the cross on his forehead, that will be a strike by him who seeks baptism, against the spiritual Goliath; a defeat to the devil. And bearing on his forehead the ointment of the Spirit; he is as though sealed with the phrase “*Holiness to the Lord*” (See Exodus 39: 30); through which he would enjoy the graces of the Lord Christ, that sanctify the mind (the forehead), as an entrance to the inner life of man.

Through the graces of Christ, the devil is driven out of our hearts. Hence we strive, by his help, not to receive the devil again in us by our own will, through our wicked works, and our corrupt thoughts; For in case we do, what is written in the gospel, will be realized in us: “*When an unclean spirit goes out of man. He goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says: I will return to my House from which I came. And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes, and takes with him seven other more spirits more wicked than himself, and they will enter and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worst than the first, So shall it also be with this wicked generation*” (Matthew 12: 43 – 45).

Now, as long as, by the grace of baptism, we have got rid of all evil, without prior worthiness on our part; let us then, by the help of God strive to get filled with the spiritual blessings. Whenever the devil attempts to drag us along, he will find us perpetually filled with the Holy Spirit, and bound by good works. By that it will be realized in us the saying: “*Who endures to the end, will be saved*” (Matthew 10: 22) <sup>1</sup>].

**“But I drew his sword out from his hand, and cut off his head”**

(7)

David struck the mighty Goliath by his own sword; a symbol of the Son of David who used the weapons of the devil to strike him with.

Christ prevailed over the devil by the same ways the devil prevailed over the world. He fought him with his own weapons he used. How?!

**The virgin, the wood, and the death:** those were the signs of our defeat. The **virgin** was Eve, who, still, did not know a man; The

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<sup>1</sup> *Caesarius of Arles: Serm. 121: 3: 8.*

**wood** was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and the **death** was the punishment brought over Adam.

Yet, those signs of our defeat; became, themselves the tools of our conquest.

The holy Virgin St. **Mary** took the place of Eve; The **cross** took the place of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; And the **death of Christ** took the place of that of Adam. ... You see, therefore, that the devil was overcome by the same tools that helped him prevail.

The devil prevailed over Adam by the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil**; And Christ prevailed over the devil by the **tree of the cross**.

The **tree of the knowledge of good and evil** cast Adam into Hades; Whereas the tree of the cross liberated those who went down into it. The **first tree** bared man of weapon, and brought **death** on him; Whereas the **second tree** bared the conqueror (the devil) from his weapon, made him of no reputation, and prevailed on him in the sight of the whole world.

**The death of Adam** reigned over all who came after him; Whereas **the death of Christ** raised those who were born before Him.

*“Who will proclaim the power of the Lord?”* (Psalm 104).  
Through the miracle of the cross, we crossed over from death to “non-death”;

The Lord fought, and the crown was ours. ... Therefore, as the conquest is ours, I wish we follow the lead of the Lord of hosts; Let us, in our joy, sing the song of victory; Let us praise the Lord by singing: *“Death is swallowed up in victory; O death, where is your sting? O Hades where is your victory?”* (1 Corinthians 15: 54-55).

Those are the goods that were given to us by the **cross**: a sign of victory set against the devils; and a sword against sin; a sword, by which Christ prevailed against the serpent. ... The **cross** is the will of God the Father; ... the glory of the Son; ... the victory and glorification of the Holy Spirit.; ... the honor of angels; ... the security of the church; ... a subject of glory to Paul; ... a shield for the saints; ... and light for the world. As the darkness in a house is scattered by lighting a lamp, and putting it on a high place; In the same way Christ lighted the cross like a lamp, and set it up high, to scatter all the darkness of the earth. And the way the lamp carries light at its top, the cross, on its top, carried Christ, the splendid Sun of righteousness; for which the world trembled, the earth quaked, and the rocks cracked, when they saw Him crucified; The

rocks cracked, but not the cruelty of the Jews, and the veil of the temple split, but not their shameful plot<sup>1</sup>.

(St. Cyril the Great)

***“And I took the reproach away from the children of Israel. Praise the Lord” (8)***

In the battle of the cross, the Lord Christ destroyed the kingdom of the devil; granted us authority; and took our reproach away.

The Holy book, sometimes describes the devil as a horrible dragon, a roaring lion, a vicious crocodile, etc. ... And other times, it describes him as a helpless little jackal. ... If man confronts the devil by his own strength, he will get terrified before that arrogant enemy, But if he hides in the grace of God, he will see him lowly, and helpless to harm him.

In the book of ‘Job’, it was written: *“Will you play with (Leviathan) as with a bird, or will you leash him for your maidens?”* (Job 41: 5). Birds are put in cages, to entertain little maidens, who gather around to look at them; and in some backward countries, parents leash the birds with a thread to let their children play with them. But this could not be done with Leviathan.

❖ The devil , after having been a king, became in reproach, and wove for himself crowns of lies.

His throne was cast away; For the Lord has come to the world.

When the divine child came to the manger, the devil was driven out of his kingdom.

❖ The darkness was scattered; the devil was defeated; and the light began to appear.

To proclaim loudly that the firstborn Son has overcome.

The dark devil was overcome together with the darkness.

And the light, that is ours, prevailed together with that of the Sun of Righteousness<sup>2</sup>.

❖ The Lord Christ has come to set us free of the shackles of the bondage to the devil; as He did, from the hand of Pharaoh. He sealed our souls by His Spirit; and our body members by His blood.

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<sup>1</sup> ميمر للقديس كيرلس الكبير عن الصليب – الكتاب الشهري للشباب والخدامن – مارس 2009 – بيت التكريس لخدمة الكرازة.

<sup>2</sup> تسابيح الميلاد، 14: 11.

He covered death with a garment of reproach; clothed the devil with an attire of grief, as Moses did with Pharaoh<sup>1</sup>.

**(Mileto from Sardes)**

❖ I wish, by the divine mercies, our adversary finds nothing of his works in us; for, in this case, he will be helpless to keep us in his grasp; or to call us back from the eternal life.

Let us examine the secret places of our conscience and our hearts; And when we find in them nothing that belong to the devil, let us rejoice and thank God. ... Let us by His help, do our best to keep the gates of our hearts perpetually wide open before Christ; and forever closed before the devil.

But in case we discover some of the works or craftiness of the devil in our hearts, let us hasten to cast them away, and get rid of them, as we do with a deadly poison. Then, if the devil, intending to catch us, finds in us nothing belonging to him, he would depart in confusion; while we cry out thanking the Lord, together with the psalmist, saying: *“You have saved us from our enemies, and have put to shame those who hated us”* (Psalm 44: 7).

**(Father Caesarius, bishop of Arle)**

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<sup>1</sup> تساييح الميلاد

**AN INSOIRATION FROM PSALM 151  
AN AMAZING SONG IN HADES**

- ❖ In the midst of the celebration of the church of Your burial;  
O, Creator of heaven and earth;  
I stand astonished, and in awe;  
How could we bury the Grantor of life?  
I wonder, Shall I partake of the tears of Nicodemus and Joseph of Aramethea?  
Will my soul be shaken because of the fleeing away of the disciples, even during the moments of Your burial?  
Or will you allow me to accompany You to Hades;  
To enjoy seeing the procession of the fathers, the prophets, and all believers;  
And the foundations of Hades, shaken by Your entrance, O My Savior;  
You preached the believers by setting them free from captivity;  
You carried them as though over Your shoulders;  
To bring them forth in an amazing procession of victory;  
The eyes of all opened up to perceive that the prophecies have been realized;  
And that the day of salvation has finally come.
- ❖ I wonder if it was David the sweet psalmist of Israel,  
who led the procession as the head of the choir of singers!  
He carries no lute, harp, nor flute,  
He sings and praises,  
He sings the psalm, not included among the psalms (Psalm 151);  
The psalm of the mighty Leader, the Destroyer of the devil;  
The psalm of the divine Groom, the Fountain of the heavenly joy;  
He presents it with an angelic heavenly language.
- ❖ When David was on earth, he was amazed;  
Although he was the youngest of his brothers, You chose him as Your anointed;  
Now, he sees the true Anointed; the One with the Father in essence;  
He sees Him incarnate, and occupy the last of human rows;  
By His own free will, He became a slave, rejected by His brethren;  
He became a slave, sold for thirty pieces of silver, like the lowest of men;

He who is the heavenly Cornerstone, is despised and cast aside by the builders;  
They counted Him as a burden upon humanity;  
As having no place among them;  
The only way to get rid of Him, was to crucify Him outside of the camp.

- ❖ David stood before the Son and Lord of David;  
To say in astonishment: As for me, and against my will, I have been the least;  
But You, the Heavenly One, by Your own free will, You became the least of all;  
I was the least of my brothers;  
But You became the least among those created by Your own hands;  
I was a junior in my father's house;  
But You came a stranger, having no place to lay Your head;  
I was a shepherd of my father's sheep;  
But You came to search for the sinners and the adulterers;  
To bandage the wounded souls;  
And to carry the weak on Your shoulders;  
You came to care for Your enemies; O amazing in Your love;
- ❖ I kept my flute with me, even in the time of my anguish;  
I kept praising you with my tongue, as well as with my harp;  
But You came to flood joy over all mankind;  
To turn our life into a harp, on which Your Holy Spirit plays;  
And to set out of the church an almost heavenly choir;  
That never stops giving thanks;
- ❖ You sent Your prophet Samuel to anoint me a king over Your people;  
You raised me up from the trash, to sit among the elites of Your people;  
But You are the Holy One, the King of kings;  
Whom the Father sent for the sake of our salvation;  
To unify His Will with Your will;  
Nothing preoccupies You like our salvation;  
You sanctify us by Your Holy Spirit;  
You prepare us for the fellowship of the eternal glories;
- ❖ You granted me to kill a lion and a bear;  
To rescue irrational sheep;  
You were my hidden weapon;

By Your name I encountered the mighty Goliath;  
By his own sword, I cut off his head; for he was a symbol of the  
devil;  
By it, I took the reproach away from Your people;  
But You, led the battle against the devil himself;  
He, who has set the cross to get rid of You;  
Not perceiving that, with the cross, he was destroyed and lost his  
authority;  
By all his energies, he provoked the multitude to kill and bury You;  
And behold, You are, coming to destroy death;  
To carry us as spoil, and to liberate us from the eternal death;  
To bring us forth into the paradise; to enjoy Your divine light;  
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**PSALM 147: THE PRAISE AND THE JERUSALEM:**

Praise is good and pleasant; Praise and the ecclesiastical building; Praise is a healer of the soul; Praise and the heavenly stars;

Praise and the enjoyment of the divine power; Praise and the fellowship with God; Praise and the enjoyment of the divine commandment.

--An inspiration from psalm 147: Let me praise You with my whole being.

**PSALM 148: THE AMAZING CHOIR OF PRAISE OF THE WHOLE CREATION:**

A call to the heavenlies to praise; A call to heaven to praise; A call to the earth, with all what are on it to praise; A call to the rulers to praise; A call to the people to praise; The motives behind praising God: (a- His great name b- His glory fills earth and heaven c- His care for His people).

-- An inspiration from psalm 148: Grant me to join the choir of those who praise.

**PSALM 149: A CALL TO THE CHURCH OF THE NEW COVENANT TO PRAISE:**

A call to the church to praise; Great privileges for the people of God; A conquest and glory for the church.

-- An inspiration from psalm 149: A new people and a new praise.

**PSALM 150: AN ECUMENICAL PRAISE:**

Where would we praise God; Why would we praise God; How would we praise God; Whom would we praise.

-- An inspiration from psalm 150: Let us praise God in His holy Sanctuary.

**PSALM 151: A PSALM OF DAVID WHO OVERCAME GOLIATH.**

The little shepherd; The sweet psalmist of Israel; God has anointed Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) with the oil of gladness; A holy battle.

-- An inspiration from psalm 151: An amazing song in Hades.

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