

Psalm 26: In the assembly I will bless the Lord



Psalm 26 (25) (Mode 2. 5....31 / 4.....32)

The psalmist recognises that cult and ethical behaviour must go hand in hand.

While he claims to be free of serious sin, he recognises his dependence on God, whose faithfulness is the basis of his confidence. He contrasts his behaviour with that of evildoers and pleads not to be judged along with them. At the same time he recognises the need to open his heart to God's testing (verse 2), and prays that God will help him remain innocent (verse 11).

The Missal of Pius V used this psalm as an introductory penitential rite for the celebration of the Mass.

‘With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me’(1Corinthians 4:3-4).

‘This is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God – and all the more toward you’(2Corinthians 1:12).

‘Pray for us; we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things’(Hebrews 13:18).

Pass judgment on me, O Lord,
for I am living an honest life.

I trust in the Lord without wavering.

Others can judge us wrongly, and we are not above deceiving ourselves. The judgment that ultimately matters is that of God. Here the psalmist invites God to pass judgment on him. As we shall soon see, the basis of his confidence is not his own innocence but God's redemptive and gracious action in his life (see verse 11). It is his trust in the Lord that enables him to act morally and not waver.

I trust in the Lord without wavering.
Test me, Lord, put me to the proof.
Probe my feelings.
Purify my heart.

Insofar as the psalmist is aware of the movements of his heart he does not detect sin. He is confident as well that even his feelings (literally his 'kidneys' – associated with irrational feelings and unconscious motivation) are pure, and he invites God to test whether this is true.

‘The human spirit is the lamp of the Lord,
searching every innermost part’(Proverbs 20:27).

‘All one’s ways may be pure in one’s own eyes,
but the Lord weighs the spirit’(Proverbs 16:2).

‘Remember the long way that the Lord your God has
led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order
to humble you, testing you to know what was in your
heart’(Deuteronomy 8:2).

Your kindness is ever before my eyes.
I walk boldly in your faithfulness.

I do not sit with scoundrels.
With hypocrites I do not mix.
I hate the company of evildoers.
With them I have no dealings.

The following verses used to be prayed by the priest at the washing of hands after the Offertory of the Mass.

I wash, purifying my hands,
and take my place, Lord, around your altar.
I sing a song of thanksgiving,
and recount your wondrous deeds.

‘Baptism now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God from a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ’(1Peter 3:21).

Lord, I love your dwelling place,
the home where your glory abides.
Do not sweep me away with sinners.
Do not cast me away with the violent.

They plan to do evil.

Their hand always ready to bribe.

‘You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.’

(Deuteronomy 16:19).

‘Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow’s cause does not come before them’(Isaiah 1:23).

‘They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals’(Amos 2:6).

As for me, I live an honest life.

Rescue me, and be gracious to me.

I continue to walk in an upright way.

In the great congregation I will bless the Lord.

The word ‘congregation’ translates the Hebrew maqhel [מִקְהָל] from qahal [קָהָל]. This generally refers to the congregation of Israel gathered in worship.

The Greek version translates it by ekklesia [ἐκκλησία]. In other texts it is translated by synagoge [συναγωγή].

ekklesia is translated into English as ‘church’,
synagoge as ‘synagogue’.