

Praying Psalm 101 (100) with Jesus

¹I sing of covenant love and right judgment.
To you, O GOD, I make music.

²I live the truth I sing, as I come before you.
I show my royal household how to live a perfect life.

³I do not admire anything dishonourable.
I hate the ways of the wicked.
They will never attach themselves to me.

⁴Perverseness of heart will be far from me.
I want nothing to do with evil.

⁵I silence anyone who secretly slanders a neighbour.
I do not tolerate a haughty look or an arrogant heart.

⁶I look with favour on the faithful in the land.
Only they will share my palace.
Only those whose lives are upright
have a place in my service.

⁷No one who practises fraud
shall remain in my house.
No one who utters lies
shall continue in my presence.

⁸Morning by morning
I put down the wicked in the land,
excluding all who do evil from the city of GOD.

Psalm 101

The king is promising God to govern with justice. Psalm 99 acknowledges GOD as a God of Justice: 'Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob' (Psalm 99:4). Psalm 100 celebrates the fact that God's justice is everlasting: 'GOD is good; God's covenant love endures forever. God's faithfulness to all generations' (Psalm 100:5). Here in Psalm 101 the psalmist declares that this exercise of justice is realised through the governing of the king.

Verse 1 ('I sing of covenant love and right judgment') speaks of right judgment when it is founded on covenant love. This is the way a ruler in Israel is expected to judge.

'Loving kindness and faithfulness preserve the king, and his throne is upheld by covenant love' (Proverbs 20:28).

'What does GOD require of you but to make right judgments, to be committed to covenant love, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6:8).

'Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with fairness (*en epieikeia*) and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose. Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind' (Wisdom 12:18-19).

The Greek *epieikeia* is a basic quality expected of a person who pronounces judgment. *Epieikeia* is the wise application of the law by a judge who takes all circumstances into consideration and exercises justice with compassion and loving kindness. In the New Testament it is frequently translated 'gentle'.

'Be gentle and show every courtesy to everyone' (Titus 3:2).

'The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy' (James 3:17).

In verses 3-5 and again in verses 7-8 the king promises to rid the government of anyone who is not committed to the covenant love that is the foundation of justice.

In verse 6 he describes the qualities he expects of those who share his power.

This is an excellent psalm for anyone who exercises power in the community, both in the Church and in the State. As we pray it with Jesus we hear him say: 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls' (Matthew 11:29). Paul appeals to the Christians in Corinth 'by the meekness and gentleness of Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:1). He lists 'gentleness' among the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23). He appeals to the Gentile Christians to be humble, gentle and patient (Ephesians 4:2), and to the Christians of Philippi: 'Let your gentleness be known to everyone' (Philippians 4:5).

As we pray this psalm with Jesus, let us pray to share his gentleness, especially in our judgments.

Praying Psalm 102 (101) with Jesus

¹Hear my prayer, O GOD, let my pleading reach you.

²Do not hide your face in my hour of need.

Listen to me; answer me speedily when I call.

³For my days dissolve like smoke,
my bones burn like a furnace.

⁴My heart withers like grass. I am too weak to eat,

⁵so consumed am I with grief. I am all skin and bone.

⁶I am like a bird in the wilderness,
like a young owl haunting the ruins.

⁷I lie awake and moan.

I am like a solitary bird on the rooftop.

⁸All day long my enemies taunt me.

They use my name to curse me.

⁹I eat ashes for bread, and mingle tears with my drink.

¹¹My days are like a lengthening shadow.

I wither away like grass.

¹²But you, O GOD, reign for ever.

Your name endures from one generation to the next.

¹³Rise up! Have compassion on Zion,

for it is time to favour us with your grace.

¹⁴Your servants hold dear its stones, and cherish even its dust.

¹⁵Nations will fear YOU, kings will be in awe of your glory.

¹⁶GOD, when you rebuild the walls of Zion,
you will appear in glory.

¹⁷You hear the prayer of the destitute.

You do not despise their plea.

Praying Psalm 102 (101) with Jesus continued

¹⁸Write this down for a future generation,
so that a people yet unborn may praise GOD.

¹⁹GOD watches from heaven, observing the earth.

²⁰GOD hears the groans of the prisoners,
and sets free those condemned to die.

²¹They chant GOD's name in Zion, GOD's praise in Jerusalem.

²²There peoples and kingdoms gather to worship GOD.

²⁴I say, 'My God, do not take me away.
My life is only half spent,
while you endure throughout all generations.'

²⁵Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

²⁶They will perish, but you endure.
They will all wear out like a garment.

You change them like clothing, and throw them away;
²⁷but you are the same. Your years will never end.

²⁸May your servant's line last for ever.
May our children grow strong under your gaze.

Omitted

¹⁰because of your indignation and anger;
for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside.

²³God has broken my strength in my prime
and cut short my days.

The omitted verses are written on the assumption that God controls whatever happens to us. For a reflection on this see Psalm 2, pages 20-22, where there is also a reflection on the expression 'The Anger of GOD'. Harsh experiences are seen as expressions of God's 'anger'.

This psalm offers us waves of lyrical poetry of excellent quality. In verses 1-12 the psalmist is pleading with God at a time of intense personal suffering. The threat of premature death in mid-life is seen against the eternity of God (verses 11-12). We are mortal, but God is immortal. It is in God that we place our hope. Compare the following.

‘Our years come to an end like a sigh.

Even if we live seventy years, or eighty if we are strong,
life is toil and trouble;
the years soon pass, and we are gone’ (Psalm 90:9-10).

‘I am gone like a shadow at evening’ (Psalm 109:23).

‘We are like a breath; our days are like a passing shadow’ (Psalm 144:4).

As we pray verses 1-12 with Jesus we think of the many times when he could pray ‘All day long my enemies taunt me’ (verse 8). At his baptism in the Jordan he experienced an overwhelming sense of being loved by God. This was at the heart of his mission. He realised that it is our failure to know how loved we are that is at the heart of our temptation to despair of meaning as we attempt to eke out an existence as best we can. Jesus brought God’s love to us in ways that gave authority to his message and power to his healing. But it wasn’t long before he experienced resistance, especially from the religious leaders. Quite early in his ministry we read: ‘The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him’ (Mark 3:6). See Psalm 3, pages 25-26 where we reflected on the opposition that Jesus endured. It is especially in his final suffering and death that we can hear him praying these words of Psalm 102.

In verse 13 the focus on personal suffering widens to a plea for Jerusalem (Zion): ‘Have compassion on Zion, for it is time to favour us with your grace.’ The Hebrew verb translated here as ‘have compassion’ is from the root *rhm*. ‘Favour with grace’ translates the Hebrew *hanan*. These two ideas are often found together in the Bible, along with the word *hesed* (covenant love). See Psalm 85, pages 261-262, for a reflection on these three key expressions of God’s love.

In verse 14 the psalmist speaks of the love that the people have for the city, even its very stones: ‘Your servants hold dear its stones.’ Jesus’ love for Jerusalem (‘Zion’) is apparent. Luke writes (19:41-44): ‘As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

Psalm 102

In verse 16, the psalmist prays: 'GOD, when you rebuild the walls of Zion, you will appear in glory.' Praying this psalm with Jesus we think of the call to rebuild the Church – a call that needs to be heard by each generation, so that the Church will be seen for what it is: the Body of Christ revealing God's love to the world. Saint Francis of Assisi was one who heard this call. He responded with generosity. His example inspires us, for we are all called to play our part in this.

'You hear the prayer of the destitute. You do not despise their plea' (verse 17). These words echo Psalm 22, the psalm placed on the lips of Jesus on the cross: 'He did not despise or scorn the condition of this wretch; he did not hide his face from me, but heard me when I cried to him' (Psalm 22:24).

In verse 18 the psalmist declares: 'Write this down for a future generation, so that a people yet unborn may praise GOD.' Psalm 78 expresses the same desire. There the psalmist insists on the importance of handing on the traditions that remind us of 'the glorious deeds of God.'

¹Listen, O my people, to my teaching;
attend to the words I speak.

²I speak of what we have heard from of old,

³what we have known from our ancestors.

⁴We must not keep it from our children;
we must tell the coming generation
of the glorious deeds of GOD,

⁵who established a law in Israel
and commanded our ancestors

to make it known to their children,

⁶so that future generations would know it,
and grow up to teach it to their young.

Verse 20 reads: 'GOD hears the groans of the prisoners, and sets free those condemned to die.' Compare: 'God gives the desolate a home, leads prisoners to freedom' (Psalm 68:6). 'GOD hears the needy, and does not despise those who are in bonds' (Psalm 69:33). 'Let the groans of the prisoners come before you. According to your great power preserve those doomed to die' (Psalm 79:11).

Verses 25-27 are quoted in the New Testament in the Letter to the Hebrews 1:10-12. The author is making the point that the risen and exalted Jesus shares in the eternal life of God. He 'endures'. His 'years will never end.'

Praying Psalm 103 (102) with Jesus

¹Bless GOD, O my soul.

All that is within me, bless GOD's holy name.

²Bless GOD, O my soul.

Never forget GOD's blessings.

³Bless GOD, who forgives our sins,
and heals every one of our ills,

⁴who keeps us from the grave,
and surrounds us with covenant love and compassion,

⁵who fills us with good things as long as we live,
renewing our strength like the eagle's.

⁶O GOD, you see to justice and right judgments
for all the oppressed,

⁷revealing your ways to Moses,
and your deeds to the people of Israel.

⁸GOD is tenderly compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in covenant love.

⁹GOD will accuse us, but not always,
and be angry, but not for ever.

¹⁰GOD will not deal with us as our sins deserve,
nor repay us according to our guilt.

¹¹For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is GOD's covenant love
toward those who revere [*fear*] God.

¹²As far as the east is from the west,
so far God removes from us our sins.

¹³As a father has compassion for his children,
so GOD has compassion for us who revere [*fear*] God.

¹⁴GOD does not fail to remember that we are but dust.

Praying Psalm 103 (102) with Jesus continued

¹⁵As for us mortal human beings, our days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field.

¹⁶Come the wind, the flower is gone,
and its place does not remember it.

¹⁷But for those who revere [*fear*] God,
GOD's covenant love has always been, and will always be, present.
Your righteousness, O GOD,
passes from one generation to the next,
¹⁸to all who keep your covenant
and take care to carry out your commandments.

¹⁹GOD reigns from heaven, governing the universe.
²⁰Bless GOD, you mighty angels who do God's bidding,
always obedient to God's word.
²¹Bless GOD, you powers, eager to carry out GOD's will.
²²Bless GOD, you creatures, subject to GOD's rule.
Bless GOD, O my soul!

This has been called the Old Testament's 'Te Deum' (Latin hymn of praise and thanksgiving prayed in the liturgy on major feasts). As it stands it is post-exilic, but it builds on earlier material. It is a hymn of thanksgiving, beginning in a personal way and then inviting all of Israel (verse 10), all humankind (verse 14), and finally the whole of the cosmos to join in praising God. It may arise out of a personal experience of healing (verses 3-4), or as a result of the return from exile (verse 6), or simply as a meditation on God's covenant love (verse 8). The focus is on God's mercy which is moved by human weakness (verse 14), and experienced by those who are faithful to the covenant (verses 17-18).

When GOD is the object of blessing, as in verses 1-3, and again in verses 20-23, we are praising and thanking God for a blessing already received or requested.

In verses 3-6 the psalmist gives six reasons for praising GOD.

1. God forgives all our sins. See Psalm 65, page 200 for a reflection on forgiveness. Again and again throughout his ministry Jesus assured people that their sins were forgiven. He saw their faith and their love. Read, too, Jesus' parable about the need to forgive (Matthew 18:21-35).

2. God heals all our diseases. Having shown Jesus' healing people, Matthew comments: 'This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matthew 8:17, quoting Isaiah 53:4). 'Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness' (Matthew 9:35-36).

3. God holds us back from death. This refers in a special way to his saving us from the ultimate death: separation from God, the source of life. Jesus said: 'I came not to be served, but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for the multitude' (Mark 10:45).

4. God crowns us with covenant love (*hesed*) and compassion (*rahamim*). These two words recur in the psalm (see verses 8, 11, 13 and 17). Along with 'graciousness (*hanan*) they occur together regularly when speaking of the key qualities of God. See the reflection on Psalm 85, pages 261-262.

5. God continues to satisfy us with all that is good.

'We are filled with the goodness of your house, with the holy gifts of your temple' (Psalm 65:4).

'With honey from the rock I would satisfy you' (Psalm 81:16).

'With long life I will satisfy them' (Psalm 91:16).

'He satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things' (Psalm 107:9).

'I will satisfy the poor of Zion with bread' (Psalm 132:15).

'You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing' (Psalm 145:16).

As we pray this psalm with Jesus we would do well to contemplate the scene of his multiplying the loaves and the fish to feed the crowd (see Mark 6:30-44 and 8:1-10). Let us reflect, too, on the Last Supper (see Mark 14:17-26), and on these words addressed by the Risen Jesus to the Christian community in Laodicea: 'Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me' (Revelation 3:20).

6. God sees that the oppressed receive justice. On justice see the reflections on Psalm 82, pages 249-251, and Psalm 85, page 263. Jesus' concern for justice is expressed, perhaps most clearly, in the first of his beatitudes: 'Blessed and happy are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God' (Luke 6:20). For a reflection on the 'poor' see Psalm 82, pages 251-254.

Psalm 103

In verse 7 the psalmist recalls the Exodus from Egypt. Later (verses 17-18) he will speak of the covenant.

Verse 8 repeats the creedal formula found throughout the Bible. See the reflection on Psalm 85, pages 261-262, and Psalm 61, page 187.

'GOD will accuse us, but not always, and be angry, but not for ever. GOD will not deal with us as our sins deserve, nor repay us according to our guilt. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is GOD's covenant love' (verses 9-11). These verses assume that some terrible catastrophe (the exile in Babylon perhaps), happened because God was angry at the failure of the people to repent (See the reflection on God's anger in Psalm 2, pages 20-23). The focus in this psalm, however, is on the assurance that God's 'anger' is always trumped by covenant love. God has made a commitment to love Israel, and the people can be confident that God will remain faithful to this commitment.

In verses 13-14 God is likened to a father: 'As a father has compassion for his children, so GOD has compassion for us who revere [fear] God. GOD does not fail to remember that we are but dust.'

Like a father GOD exercises authority:

'Let my son go that he may worship me' (Exodus 4:23).

Like a father GOD educates:

'Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so GOD your God disciplines you' (Deuteronomy 8:5).

'Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for GOD has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me' (Isaiah 1:2).

Like a father GOD accepts the anointed king as his adopted son:

'I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me' (2 Samuel 7:14).

'You are my son; today I have begotten you' (Psalm 2:7)

Like a father GOD cares for orphans as his own:

'Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.'
(Psalm 68:5)

GOD's 'feelings' are those of a father:

'How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? ... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender' (Hosea 11:8).

'I thought you would call me, "My Father", and would not turn from following me. Return, O faithless children, I will heal your faithlessness' (Jeremiah 3:19, 22).

'Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says GOD' (Jeremiah 31:20).

As we pray this psalm with Jesus we are conscious of the fact that picturing God as a father is central to Jesus image of God. We saw this when reflecting on Jesus' intimate communion with God in Chapter Two (pages 10-11). We looked at this again in reflecting on Psalm 4 (page 28). Jesus knows that everything he is and everything he does has its source in God. When Jesus calls God 'Abba' (as in Mark 14:36), he did not understand this as separating him from us. On the contrary, a central dimension of his ministry was to reveal God as everyone's Father. He wanted his disciples to love their enemies, and so 'to be children of your Father in heaven' (Matthew 5:45). Jesus wanted them to 'be compassionate as your Father is compassionate' (Luke 6:36). When he taught his disciples to pray he taught them to open their prayer with an acknowledgement that God is 'Father' (Luke 11:2). Jesus' image of God is expressed beautifully in the parable of the two sons (see Luke 15:11-32).

Jesus wanted all of us to be able to say, with him: 'The Father and I are one' (John 10:30); 'The Father is in me and I am in the Father' (John 10:38; see 14:10-11, 20). The Risen Jesus commissioned Mary of Magdala to 'go to my brothers and say to them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17).

Paul witnesses to the practice in the early Christian communities of addressing God as Jesus addressed God: 'Abba! Father!' (Romans 8:15). 'Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6). 'For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist' (1 Corinthians 8:6). 'Grace to you and peace from God our Father' (Philippians 1:2). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes: 'The one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters' (Hebrews 2:11).

Jesus wants each of us to know that God is the source of all we are and all we do. In his culture this is beautifully expressed in acknowledging God as 'Father.' In the ancient world, and in the medieval world, indeed right through to the beginning of the modern era, the role of the woman in conception was unknown. The father was thought to be the sole source of human life. It was the mother's role to nurture this life. It was not realised that she contributes to it.

Knowing this it is insufficient for us today to acknowledge God as 'Father'. We now know that the father is not the sole source of life. The mother has a complementary and essential role in procreation. In fidelity to what Jesus revealed about God we acknowledge God as 'Father-Mother.'

We human beings are fragile (verses 15-16).

'But for those who revere [fear] God,
 God's covenant love has always been, and will always be, present.
 Your righteousness, O GOD, passes from one generation to the next,
 to all who keep your covenant
 and take care to carry out your commandments' (verses 17-18).

The angels, the stars of the heavens, the whole of the created universe, are invited to 'bless God', that is, to praise and thank God for the blessings God continues to pour out on creation. Finally, the psalmist invites his own soul to join in the praise.

Praying Psalm 104 (103) with Jesus

¹Bless GOD, O my soul.

O GOD, my God, how wonderful you are.

You are clothed with beauty and majesty,

²wrapped in a mantle of light.

You stretch out the heavens like a tent.

³You establish your dwelling above the rains.

You make the clouds your chariot,

and ride on the wings of the wind.

⁴You make the storm your herald.

The lightning carries out your will.

⁵You set the earth on its foundations.

It will never be shaken.

⁶You cover it with the ocean as with a garment.

The waters rise up to assault the mountains.

⁷When you rebuke the waters they flee;

at the rumble of your thunder they take to flight.

⁸They rose up to the mountains and ran down to the valleys,
to the place you appointed for them.

⁹You set a boundary that the waters may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.

¹⁰You make rivers gush forth from their springs,
to flow between the hills,

¹¹giving drink to the wild animals.

The wild asses quench their thirst.

¹²The birds of the air nest near the streams,
and sing among the branches.

¹³From your lofty abode you water the hills.
The ground drinks its fill of your gift.

¹⁴You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants through human labour.

- We are to produce food from the fields,
¹⁵wine to gladden the heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread for strength.
- ¹⁶The trees of GOD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon planted by God.
- ¹⁷Birds nest in their branches.
On the tree-top the stork has its home.
- ¹⁸High mountains are for the wild goats;
rocks are a refuge for the hyrax.
- ¹⁹You make the moon to mark the seasons.
The sun knows its time for setting.
- ²⁰You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come out.
- ²¹The young lions roar to you
as they search for their prey.
- ²²At the rising of the sun they withdraw,
and go to rest in their dens.
- ²³We go out to our work
and labour until evening.
- ²⁴O GOD, how manifold are your works!
Everything you have done is masterly;
the earth is full of your wonderful creatures.
- ²⁵Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
filled with fish past counting.
- ²⁶There ships ply their trade,
and there is Leviathan that you made for play.

- ²⁷All these creatures look to you
to give them their food in due season.
- ²⁸When you provide it, they feed.
When you open wide your hand, they have their fill.
- ²⁹When you hide your face, they are dismayed.
When you take away their breath, they die and return to dust.
- ³⁰You send forth your breath, and they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.
- ³¹May your glory, O GOD, endure for ever.
May YOU rejoice in creation.
- ³²One look from YOU and the earth trembles.
One touch, and the mountains erupt.
- ³³I will sing to GOD as long as I live.
I will sing praise to my God, while I have breath to do so.
- ³⁴May my meditation be pleasing to YOU,
for I delight in YOU.
- ³⁵May sinners disappear from the earth.
May the wicked be no more.
Bless GOD, O my soul. Praise GOD [Alleluia].

Psalm 104 extols the greatness of the Creator as revealed by God's presence and action in creation.

As we reflect back on this psalm seven themes stand out.

1. How creation reveals God's work.

Compare with this poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'God's grandeur'.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
 And though the last lights off the black West went
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
 World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings.

2. The Transcendent God is continually present and acting in creation.

‘When you hide your face, they are dismayed.
 When you take away their breath, they die and return to dust.
 You send forth your breath, and they are created,
 and you renew the face of the earth’ (verses 29-30).

3. Human beings work in harmony with the rhythms of creation (verse 23).

4. Sharing in God’s delight in his creation. The author is a contemplative: he is attentive to the sacred in the inter-connectedness of things. He is a poet, working with language to share what he recognises to be beyond comprehensive expression.

5. Everything is connected to everything else (verses 29-30). This is expressed well in the following words from the Preacher: ‘All have the same breath’ (Ecclesiastes 3:19).

6. How creation reveals the beauty of the Creator. Praying it as Christians we contemplate Jesus, God’s focal word, the perfect expression of divine beauty. We might read ‘The Windhover’ by Gerard M. Hopkins, composed in 1877, just before his ordination, and dedicated ‘To Christ our Lord’.

I caught this morning, morning’s minion,
 kingdom of daylight’s dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in its riding
 of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
 high there, how he rung upon the rein of the wimpling wing
 in his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
 as a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend; the hurl and gliding
 rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
 stirred for a bird, - the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!
 Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
 buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
 times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!
 No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
 shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah, my dear,
 fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

We might reflect also upon the following stanzas and the accompanying commentary from 'The Spiritual Canticle' of John of the Cross.

Stanza 4

O woods and thickets
planted by the hand of my Beloved!
O green meadow,
coated, bright, with flowers,
Tell me, has he passed by you?

Stanza 5

Pouring out a thousand graces,
He passed these groves in haste;
And having looked at them,
with his image alone,
He clothed them in beauty.

'St. Paul says: The Son of God is the splendour of his glory and the image of his substance (Hebrews 1:3). It should be known that only with this figure, his Son, did God look at all things, that is, he communicated to them their natural being and many natural graces and gifts, and made them complete and perfect, as it is said in Genesis: "God looked at all things that he made, and they were very good" (Genesis 1:31). To look and behold that they were very good was to make them very good in the Word, his Son.

Not only by looking at them did God communicate natural being and graces, as we said, but also with this image of his Son alone, he clothed them in beauty by imparting to them supernatural being. This he did when he became man and elevated human nature in the beauty of God, and consequently all creatures, since in human nature he was united with them all. Accordingly the Son of God proclaimed: "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will elevate all things to myself" (John 12:32). And in this elevation of all things through the Incarnation of his Son and through the glory of his resurrection according to the flesh not only did the Father beautify creatures partially, but, we can say, he clothed them entirely in beauty and dignity' (Commentary on the Spiritual Canticle 5,4).

Stanza 14

My Beloved is the mountains,
and lonely wooded valleys,
strange islands, and resounding rivers,
the whistling of love-stirring breezes

Stanza 15

The tranquil night
at the time of the rising dawn,
silent music, sounding solitude,
the supper that refreshes,
and deepens love.

'This spiritual flight denotes a high state and union of love, in which, after much spiritual exercise, the soul is placed by God. This state is called spiritual espousal with the Word, the Son of God' (Commentary on the Spiritual Canticle 14-15,2).

7. The seventh theme concerns sin. In the final verse: 'May sinners disappear from the earth. May the wicked be no more' (verse 35) the psalmist longs to see the end of sin, for it is sin that obscures the glory of God and spoils creation.

Reflecting on Psalm 105 (104) with Jesus

Psalm 105 is not a prayer. The psalmist is calling the people to remember the covenant God made with their ancestors (verses 8-10) and that it is God who released them from slavery in Egypt (verse 37), led them through the wilderness (verses 39-43), and gave them 'the lands of the nations' (verse 34). They must 'observe GOD's law' (verse 45).

¹Give thanks to GOD, call on GOD's name,
Tell all the peoples what GOD has done.

²Sing to the sound of instruments;
tell of all the wonderful things GOD has done.

³Sing Alleluia to GOD's holy name.
May the hearts of those who seek GOD rejoice.

⁴Seek continually for the presence and the power of God.

⁵Remember God's wonderful deeds,
God's miracles, and judgments,
⁶you offspring of God's servant Abraham,
you children of Jacob, the chosen of GOD.

⁷GOD is our God, judge of all the earth,
⁸ever mindful of the covenant,
⁹the promise made to Abraham,
¹⁰the oath to Isaac, confirmed to Jacob,
the everlasting commitment made to Israel
fixed for a thousand generations.

¹¹God said 'To you I will give a land,
Canaan, as your inheritance.'

¹²When they were few in number, of little account,
and strangers in the land,

¹³wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another,

¹⁴God allowed no one to oppress them,
rebuking kings on their account:

¹⁵'Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.'

Psalm 105

¹⁶God caused famine to ravish the land,
and took away their sustenance.

¹⁷Joseph was sent on ahead, sold as a slave.

¹⁸His feet were bound with fetters,
his neck with a collar of iron,

¹⁹until what he had said came to pass,
and he was vindicated by the word of GOD.

²⁰Pharaoh released him;
the ruler of nations set him free.

²¹He made him master of the palace,
steward of all his possessions,

²²to instruct his officials at his pleasure,
and to teach his elders wisdom.

²³Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob lived there as an alien.

²⁴GOD made Jacob's people fruitful,
stronger than their foes,

²⁵whose hearts God then turned to hate Israel.
They were eager to enslave them.

²⁶God sent Moses, the servant of the Lord,
and Aaron, the chosen one.

²⁷They performed signs among them,
and miracles in Egypt.

²⁸God covered the land in darkness,
but still they resisted.

²⁹God turned their waters into blood,
causing their fish to die.

³⁰Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their king.

³¹God spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their country.

- ³²God sent hail to pound them,
and lightning to strike the land.
- ³³God struck their vines and fig trees,
and shattered the trees throughout the land.
- ³⁴God spoke, and the locusts came,
young locusts without number.
- ³⁵They devoured all the vegetation,
the fruit of the land.
- ³⁶God struck Egypt's first born,
the first issue of their strength.
- ³⁷Then God led Israel out with silver and gold.
Not one among them faltered.
- ³⁸Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread had fallen upon them.
- ³⁹God spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire glowing by night.
- ⁴⁰Israel prayed, and God sent quails,
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.
- ⁴¹God opened a rock, and water gushed out,
flowing through the desert like a river.
- ⁴²God remembered the holy promise,
given to Abraham, the servant of God.
- ⁴³God brought the people out with joy,
the chosen ones with shouts of rejoicing.
- ⁴⁴God gave them the lands of the nations,
and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples,
- ⁴⁵that they might keep the commandments
and observe God's law. Alleluia!

3. Praying Psalm 106 (105) with Jesus

The opening seven verses are addressed to God. The same is true of the final verse (verse 47). The psalmist admits: 'Like our ancestors we have sinned; we are guilty; we have acted wickedly' (verse 5). The bulk of the psalm focuses on the rebellion of the ancestors, but, more importantly, on God's faithfulness to the love God promised them. The psalmist trusts that God will continue this fidelity (verse 7), and that he will share in the joy this will assuredly bring to God's people (verses 4-5). Apart from the admission of personal sin, we can picture Jesus praying these verses and we can pray them with him.

¹Praise GOD! (Alleluia!)

Give thanks to GOD, who is good.

Your covenant love endures for ever.

²Who can number GOD's mighty deeds, or sing enough praise?

**³Blessed and happy are those who do what is right,
and act with justice at all times.**

**⁴Remember me, O GOD,
when you demonstrate your love for your people.**

Help me when you rescue them,

**⁵that I may experience the prosperity
enjoyed by your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice along with your nation,
and that I may greet you, as one of your own, with shouts of joy.**

**⁶Like our ancestors we have sinned;
we are guilty; we have acted wickedly.**

**⁷In Egypt our ancestors paid no heed
to your wonderful deeds.
They forgot the abundance of your covenant love,
and at the Red Sea rebelled against the Most High.**

2. Reflecting on Psalm 106 (105) with Jesus

The rest of the psalm is not a prayer, but an ‘historical survey’ of the ways in which the people of Israel persisted in breaking their covenant with GOD in spite of GOD’s constancy to them. Archeology has demonstrated that the survey presents, not an accurate detailed history, but the way Israel came to present its origins to itself and to others. We are dealing with legend, not history.

In their *The Bible Unearthed: archeology’s new vision of Ancient Israel* (2001), Finkelstein and Silberman write: “Although these stories [of the patriarchs, the Exodus, the conquest of Canaan and the sagas referring to the united kingdom of David and Solomon] may have been based on certain historical kernels, they primarily reflect the ideology and the world-view of the writers [of 7th Century Judah]” (page 23).

⁸Yet, true to God’s name, God saved them,
to reveal God’s mighty power.

⁹God rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up. [see Exodus 14]
The deep was as dry ground.

¹⁰God led the people across,
rescuing them from the enemy’s power.

¹¹The waters swallowed their adversaries.
Not one of them survived.

¹²Then our ancestors believed God’s word
and sang songs of praise.

¹³But they soon forgot God’s deeds.
They lost faith in God’s designs. [see Numbers 11]

¹⁴They had a wanton craving in the wilderness,
and in the desert put God to the test.

¹⁵God gave them what they wanted,
but sent a wasting disease among them.

¹⁶They were jealous of Moses in the camp,
and of Aaron, God’s holy one.

¹⁷The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan,
burying alive the followers of Abiram. [see Numbers 16]

¹⁸Fire broke out amongst them,
its flame consuming the wicked.

2. Reflecting on Psalm 106 (105) with Jesus continued

¹⁹They made a calf at Horeb
and worshipped a cast image.

²⁰They exchanged the glory of God
for the image of an ox that eats grass. [see Exodus 12]

²¹They forgot their God,
the God who had saved them

²²by doing great things in Egypt,
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

²³God determined to destroy them, and would have done so
had not Moses, your chosen one,
stood in the breach before God
to turn back God's wrath. [see Exodus 32]

²⁴They scorned the land of promise,
having no faith in God's promise. [see Numbers 14]

²⁵They grumbled in their tents,
and did not obey the voice of GOD.

²⁶So God swore an oath
to make them fall in the wilderness,

²⁵and would disperse their descendants among the nations,
scattering them over the lands.

²⁸They attached themselves to the Baal of Peor,
and ate sacrifices offered to the dead. [see Numbers 25]

²⁹They provoked GOD to anger
with the way they were behaving.
and a plague broke out among them.

³⁰Phinehas stood up and interceded,
and the plague was checked.

³¹This has been to his honour ever since.

³²They angered GOD at the waters of Meribah,
and it went ill with Moses on their account;
³³for they made his spirit bitter,
and he spoke rash words. [see Exodus 17 and Numbers 20]

³⁴They failed to destroy the peoples, as the Lord had commanded,
³⁵but intermarried with them and adopted their customs.

Verses 34-35 are dependent on the understanding of the Deuteronomic school which blamed the failures of Israel on the fact that they did not wipe out the Canaanites. This failure led them to compromise their faith (see Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:16-17). Their understanding of God and of God's will is flawed, but in a world that looked upon disasters as God's punishment they had to find a reason for their suffering in sinful behaviour.

³⁶They worshipped their idols,
which became to them a snare.
³⁷They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons.
³⁸shedding innocent blood. [see Deuteronomy 12:31]

They polluted the land with the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan.

³⁹Thus they prostituted themselves by their deeds.

⁴⁰Then the anger of GOD
was kindled against the people.
God was disgusted with them,
⁴¹and handed them over to the nations.
⁴²Their enemies oppressed them,
and they were ruled by their foes.

⁴³Again and again God delivered them,
but they were stubborn, and their sins brought them down.

⁴⁴But still God saw their plight
and heard their cry of distress.

⁴⁵Remembering the covenant,
God showed compassion
according to the abundance of GOD's covenant love.

⁴⁶God caused them to be pitied by their captors.

3. Praying Psalm 106 (105) with Jesus continued

⁴⁷Save us, O GOD, our God.

**Gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and glory in your praise.**

4. Conclusion to Book 4 of the Psalms

⁴⁸Blessed be GOD, the God of Israel, for ever and ever.
Let all the people say, "Amen." Praise GOD! (Alleluia).

Praying Psalm 107 (106) with Jesus

¹Give thanks to GOD who is good.
Your covenant love endures for ever.

²Let those saved by GOD tell their story:
how they were redeemed from the power of the enemy,
³and gathered in from far-off lands,
from east and west, north and south.

⁴Some wandered in desert wastes,
unable to find a town where they could dwell.

⁵Exhausted from hunger and thirst
they were on the verge of collapsing.

⁶*Then they cried out to you, O GOD,
and you came to their rescue,*

⁷leading them by a straight way
to a place where they could make a home.

⁸*They celebrate your covenant love,
all the wonderful things you have done.*

⁹You, O GOD, satisfy the thirsty,
and see that the hungry have food.

¹⁰Some sat in darkness and gloom,
prisoners in misery and chains,

¹¹having rebelled against the word of God,
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

¹²Weighed down by the burden of their misery
they collapsed with no one to help them.

¹³*Then they cried out to you, O GOD,
and you came to their rescue,*

¹⁴breaking their fetters,
and dispersing the gloom.

¹⁵*They celebrate your covenant love,
all the wonderful things you have done.*

¹⁶**GOD shatters bronze doors
and cuts through iron bars.**

¹⁷**Some became ill,
struck down because of their sin.**

¹⁸**They loathed any kind of food,
and drew near to the gates of death.**

¹⁹*Then they cried out to you, O GOD,
and you came to their rescue,*

²⁰**speaking a word of healing
which delivered them from death.**

²¹*They celebrate your covenant love,
all the wonderful things you have done.*

²²**Offering a sacrifice of praise.**

²³**Merchants sailed the sea in ships,
doing trade on the mighty waters.**

²⁴**They witnessed the deeds of GOD,
all the wonders of the deep.**

²⁵**A storm whipped up the waves.**

²⁶**They mounted up to heaven,
then plunged down to the depths.
Their courage melted away in the calamity.**

²⁷**They reeled and staggered like drunken men at their wit's end.**

²⁸*Then they cried out to you, O GOD,
and you came to their rescue.*

²⁹**You stilled the storm and the waves were calmed.**

³⁰**They rejoiced in the calm, and you brought them to port.**

³¹*They celebrate your covenant love, O GOD,
all the wonderful things you have done.*

³²**They thank you, O GOD, when the people assemble.
They give voice to their praise when the elders come together.**

³³**YOU** turn rivers into a desert,
springs of water into thirsty ground,
³⁴a fruitful land into a salty waste.

³⁵**But YOU** also transform a desert with springs of water,
change a parched waste into fertile land,
³⁶giving it to the hungry,
for them to establish a town.

³⁷They sow crops and plant their vines,
and gather in the harvest.
³⁸With Your blessing they prosper;
people and cattle flourish.

³⁹If the people fail to prosper,
suffering the effects of oppression,
⁴⁰Their leaders will find themselves
wandering in trackless wastes.

⁴¹**But YOU** lift up the needy from their distress,
shepherding them like a flock.
⁴²The upright see and rejoice.
Those who do wrong are silenced.

⁴³Let those who are wise give heed to these things,
and wonder at the marvel of **GOD's** covenant love.

Psalm 107

The psalmist uses a number of images to describe the situation people find themselves in through their sin. However, in each case, when they cry out to God their cry is heard. God frees them. The psalmist calls for gratitude and concludes: 'Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and wonder at the marvel of GOD's covenant love'.

This is a psalm about salvation. We reflected on this theme in Psalm 62, pages 189-190.

In the first scene (verses 4-9) God delivers those who are dying of hunger and thirst in the desert. Praying this with Jesus we recall his nourishing the crowd in the wilderness (see Mark 6:30-46). Verse seven pictures God 'leading them by a straight way to a place where they could make a home.' The author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes: 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them' (Hebrews 11:16). Praying this psalm with Jesus we call to mind John the Baptist making the path straight preparing us to find our home in the heart of Jesus.

In the second scene (verses 10-16) God rescues those who are in darkness and gloom because they have rejected God's word. We are reminded of the scene where Jesus brings peace to a deranged man (Mark 5:1-20). We reflect also on the trials that face us, and the effects of sin: 'If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it' (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).

In the third scene (verses 17-22) God delivers those who are facing death. Praying this with Jesus we recall his ministry of healing the sick (Mark 6:53-56; 7:24-37).

In the fourth scene (verses 23-32) God delivers those facing death at sea. The description of the vessel struggling against a storm reminds us of Paul's warning: 'We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming' (Ephesians 4:14). Praying this scene with Jesus, we recall the scene when the boat he was in appeared to be in danger of sinking. The disciples woke Jesus and 'Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm' (Mark 4:39). We recall another scene: 'The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going' (John 6:18-21).

The lesson of the psalm is expressed in the final verses: 'You lift up the needy from their distress, shepherding them like a flock. The upright see and rejoice. Those who do wrong are silenced. Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and wonder at the marvel of GOD's covenant love' (verses 41-43).

We recall Paul's words: If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself' (2 Timothy 2:13).

Praying Psalm 108 (107) verses 1-5 with Jesus

¹My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast.

I will sing and make melody. Awake, my soul!

²Awake, harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn.

³I will give thanks to you, O GOD, among the peoples.

I will sing praises to you among the nations.

⁴For your covenant love is as high as the heavens;

your faithfulness extends to the clouds.

⁵Rise up, O God, above the heavens.

Let your glory fill the earth.

Verses 1-5 are found also in Psalm 57:7-11. The only difference is that where Psalm 108 verse 3 addresses GOD, Psalm 57 addresses God*.

Rather than await the dawn, the psalmist wants to hurry it on with his expectant hope that God's faithful covenant love will light up the heavens like the first rays of the rising sun. He realises that it is not God who needs awakening, it is himself ('Awake my soul', verse 8). He remains vigilant (verses 1-2). Praying with Jesus we think of his resurrection. For us everything will be dispelled by the light of the resurrection. The ultimate dawn is when we share in Jesus' risen life.

See the commentary on Psalm 57, pages 177-179 for a reflection on 'Let your glory fill the earth' (verse 5).

Reflecting on Psalm 108 (107) v. 6-13 with Jesus

⁶Give victory with your right arm,
so that those whom you love may be rescued.

⁷God has decreed in his sanctuary:
'I will triumph and divide the land of Shechem.
I will portion out the Vale of Succoth;
⁸for Gilead is mine, and Manasseh.

Ephraim is my helmet;
Judah is my commander's staff.
⁹Moab is my washbowl;
on Edom I plant my shoe.
Against me, Philistia,
hurl forth your war cry if you dare!

¹⁰Who will lead us to Edom
to breach the city wall?
¹¹God, will you still hold back?
Will you desert our camp?

¹²Grant us help against the foe,
for human help is of no avail.
¹³With God we will do valiantly.
It is our God who will crush our foes.

Verses 6-13 are found also in Psalm 60:5-12. The understanding of God as a Warrior Lord, the thinking that God controls what happens in history, and the attitude the psalmist has to enemies leave this psalm as an historical record, but not as a prayer for Jesus or a disciple.

Where, in verse 6, the psalmist speaks of 'those whom you love' we might reflect upon the Church as the especially loved Spouse of Christ, redeemed by his love.

Praying Psalm 109 (108) with Jesus

Part One (verses 1-19)

In spite of the terrible way he is being treated (verses 2-19) the psalmist continues to turn to God, pleading for a response (verse 1).

¹God to whom I pray, be not silent.

²For wicked and deceitful voices speak out against me,
pursuing me with lies.

³They beset me with words full of hate;
they attack me without cause.

⁴I treat them with love, but they still accuse me,
even while I pray for them.

⁵They return evil for good, and hatred for my love.

⁶They say, 'Appoint a crooked judge,
and have an accuser close by.

⁷When he is tried, let him be found guilty;
may his pleading be reckoned as sinful.

⁸May his days be few. May others fill his place.

⁹May his children be orphans, and his wife a widow.

¹⁰May they wander about and beg;
may they be driven out of the ruins they inhabit.

¹¹May the creditor seize all that he has.
May strangers plunder the fruits of his toil.

¹²May there be no one to do him a kindness,
nor anyone to pity his orphaned children.

¹³May his line end; may his name be blotted out
in the second generation.

¹⁴May the guilt of his father be remembered before GOD.
Do not let the sin of his mother be erased.

¹⁵May his memory be cut off from the earth.

¹⁶He did not remember to show kindness,
but pursued the poor and needy
and the brokenhearted to their death.

¹⁷He loved to curse; let curses rebound on his head.
He did not offer a blessing; may he not receive one.

¹⁸He clothed himself with cursing as his coat,
may it soak into his body like water, into his bones like oil.

¹⁹May it be like a garment that he wraps around himself,
like a belt that he wears every day.'

Part Two (verses 20-31): The psalmist's prayer

²¹But you, O GOD, my God*,
act on my behalf for your name's sake.
Because you are good, rescue me.

²²For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded.

²³I am fading like a shadow at evening.
I am brushed aside like a locust.

²⁴My knees are weak through fasting;
my flesh has become gaunt.

²⁵I am an object of scorn to my accusers.
When they see me, they shake their heads.

²⁶Help me, O GOD, my God!
Save me according to your covenant love.

²⁷Let them see your hand at work.
Let them know that you have acted.

²⁸They curse, but you will bless.
Let my assailants be put to shame.
May your servant be glad.

²⁹May my accusers be clothed with dishonour.
May they be wrapped in their own shame as in a mantle.

³⁰I raise my voice in thanks to GOD;

I praise my God in the midst of the throng.

**³¹For GOD stands at the right hand of those in need,
to save them from those who would condemn them to death.**

Omitted

²⁰May what my accusers want for me

be Your payment for those who speak evil against me.

Psalm 109 is not used in the Church's liturgy, possibly because of the length of the section in which the psalmist speaks of the terrible way he is being treated, and possibly because verse 20 does not fit with Jesus' injunction that we love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). However, it has many verses that are quite moving.

Praying Psalm 110 (109) with Jesus

¹A decree of GOD to my king:

‘Sit on my right.

I will make you master of your enemies.’

²GOD will wield from Zion your sceptre of power.

will conquer your foes in battle.

³Your people will rally to you when you mobilize for war.

From the womb your majesty is sacred,
from your birth on the holy mountain,
your youth as fresh as the morning dew.

⁴GOD has sworn an oath and will not change:

‘You are a priest for ever

a priest like Melchizedek of old.’

⁷The king will drink from a wayside stream,
and rise up refreshed.

omitted (Verse 6 is not in the Church’s liturgy)

⁵God* is at your right

to crush kings on the day of judgment.

⁶It is God* who judges the nations.

shattering heads, heaping up corpses.

This is a royal psalm. Other royal psalms are Psalm 2, which speaks of the rebellion of vassals, Psalms 20-21 which are prayers for before and after a battle, Psalm 45 on the occasion of a royal wedding, and Psalm 72 concerning just government.

Psalm 110 opens with an oracle at the enthronement of the king. During the long centuries when Judah was under Persian, Greek and Roman rule Psalm 110 encouraged the community to hold on to their hope that one day they would be ruled again by a king of Judah.

1. The risen Jesus as Messiah

Once, in response to Jesus' question: 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered: 'The Messiah of God' (Luke 9:20). On that occasion Jesus seems to have been wary of the title, a wariness that stayed with him throughout his ministry. The term 'Messiah' meant different things to different people. Jesus was keen to carry on his ministry from God while avoiding being categorised. It was only after his death and resurrection that his followers embraced the title 'Messiah' ('Christ') for him, so much so that the community came to be called 'Christians' (Acts 11:26). Peter's speech at Pentecost as presented by Luke includes the words: 'let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:36). Central to Paul's enlightenment was the recognition of the Risen Jesus as the promised Messiah, the one who, in his person, fulfilled the hopes expressed in the royal psalms. In his letters he refers to Jesus as 'the Christ' (the 'Messiah') nearly four hundred times. The New Testament frequently calls on verse 1 in relation to Jesus:

'While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, 'How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, "The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet." David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?' (Mark 12:35-37).

'You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14:62).

'The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God' (Mark 16:19).

'David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool' (Acts 2:34-35 [Peter speaking on the day of Pentecost].

'Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us' (Romans 8:34).

'He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death' (1 Corinthians 15:25-26).

'God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 1:20; see Colossians 3:1).

'To which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?' (Hebrews 1:13).

2. The Risen Jesus as High Priest.

Verse 4 acclaims the king as 'a priest forever, a priest like Melchizedek of old.' Priesthood is about mediating the sacred. The Old Testament priests carried out their functions in the sanctuary. There they brought God to the people by mediating to them God's word, God's will and God's blessing. They brought the people into communion with God by offering to God the sacrifices through which their lives were sanctified.

Being of the tribe of Judah, the king could not hold the office of a priest of Levi. His priesthood, however, was a superior one, for he was responsible not only to see that the Levitical priests cared for the holiness of the cult but also to be God's instrument in making holy the whole land and its people. The priesthood of the king is 'like Melchizedek of old', for Melchizedek was the priest-king of Jebusite Jerusalem at the time of Abraham (see Genesis 14:18-19).

In the Letter to the Hebrews verse 4 is applied to Jesus: 'Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:5-6). The author is underlining the fact that the priestly mediation of Jesus is the mediation, not of the Levitical priests, but of the Messiah-king.

For Christians there is only one priest, one mediator, the exalted Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). From the sanctuary of heaven, Jesus speaks God's word and draws everyone to himself that we might make of our lives, as he did of his, a self-offering to God. His priesthood fulfils the functions of the Levitical priesthood, and transcends them, for his is the priesthood of the king: a royal priesthood 'according to the order of Melchizedek' (Hebrews 5:10). His priestly role is to mediate the sacred to the whole of creation.

This is the priesthood into which all the baptised are consecrated, called as Jesus' followers to carry the mission of Jesus to all the world. Jesus' disciples are graced to share in Jesus' priesthood. Jesus said: 'I am the vine, you are the branches' (John 15:5). His life, the life of the vine, is the Spirit of love that binds him in intimate communion with God, his Father. The branches share this Spirit and so share in Jesus' communion of love. Paul can say: 'It is Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2:19). Disciples share in Jesus' life according to the special grace each is offered, and according to the way in which each responds to this grace. In the community of the church we are the Body of Christ carrying out his mission in the world with all the creative power of God, through his Spirit poured out into the community.

In his First Letter, Peter writes: 'Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 2:4-5). The communities to whom Peter is addressing this letter are feeling the rejection of their neighbours. By adhering to Christ through belonging to the Christian community they have turned their backs on many of the meanings and values that inform the culture to which they once belonged.

In doing so they have become the object of suspicion, rejection, harassment and even persecution. Peter tells them to come to Jesus. He was 'rejected', but not by God. He was 'chosen and precious in God's sight.' They are living in intimate communion with God because they are sharing in the life of Christ. This means that they, too, though suffering a similar rejection, are not being rejected by God. On the contrary, they, too, are 'chosen and precious in God's sight'.

Christ is an especially dressed stone (Greek: *lithos*), selected by God for a special purpose. The rejection is part of the chiselling that prepared the stone for God's purpose which is that he live the full life of resurrected glory. God is preparing them, as one dresses a stone, for the same fullness of life. Peter tells them to let God work on them as together they are being built by God into a 'house' which is 'spiritual', because it is being formed by the action of God's Spirit. It is also a temple in which God has chosen to dwell.

The Christian community, God's household, is present in the world as a temple. The whole community is to be a 'holy priesthood.' They are to offer sacrifices which are acceptable to the only true, living, God. They are to mediate God's grace to the world and draw all people into communion with God. The sacrifices are 'acceptable' because they, too, are 'spiritual', being inspired by the Spirit and expressive of the communion in the Spirit of love which is the very life of the community.

All of this – being 'living stones', welcoming God's action which is dressing them so as to build a temple, and offering their lives, like Jesus, as a sacrifice to God – all of this is 'through Jesus Christ'.

In the Book of Revelation we read: 'Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen' (Revelation 1:4-6). Echoing Exodus 19:6, John says that the glorified Jesus makes the Christian assembly 'a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.' The kingdom of God is brought about by the redemption effected by the blood of Christ, that is to say, by his life-giving on the cross. The assembly recognises that it is in the Christian community that Christ reigns as Lord, and so it renews its commitment to live his life, and to carry on his mission of bringing about God's reign on earth.

John, the author of the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:1) reminds his listeners that Christ has chosen to exercise his priestly mediation through them. Christ has chosen to live in us. We are to live our lives in union with him in the presence of God. Sharing in Jesus' priesthood, we are called to mediate God's word, God's will, and God's blessing to the world. We are called to offer prayer and praise to God, to offer ourselves as a spiritual sacrifice and to draw others into communion with God. We are to show that God delights in all that he has made.

Psalm 110

We are to mediate God's forgiveness, to reconcile the world with God, to draw people to a life of obedient faith in God and of love for each other, and so, throughout all the epochs of time, to effect redemption for humankind.

We are able to carry out this priestly function thanks to the grace and peace from God given us by Christ through the Spirit. Those who are listening to John's proclamation are suffering discrimination but they are not to be on the defensive. They are to resist the prevailing culture and continue to mediate the love of Christ and so convert their contemporaries to a life of grace.

There are as many different ways of carrying out Christ's priestly mediation as there are disciples of Jesus in the Christian community. One can think of all the many simple ways in which we are a sacrament to each other of God's love and consecrated into the priesthood of Jesus through our baptism. In all stages and forms of life, each disciple of Jesus has the unique opportunity to live out this priestly mediation in the world. As sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, indeed every form of family relationship can answer this call to mediate love. Single people, devoted to Jesus, bring a particular focus with their presence in love. From her communion in the life of God, a wife and mother lives out the priestly mediation of Jesus by mediating God's love and God's word to her husband and children, and by welcoming their loving response she helps draw them into the communion of love which is Jesus' life. Likewise a husband and father for his wife and family. One can think of volunteers in all walks of life, teachers, nurses, politicians and public servants. Jesus is carrying on his priestly mediation through and in us, sanctifying the world through the holy lives which we live, lives which he makes possible by sharing his Spirit with us.

Praying Psalm 111 (110) with Jesus

¹Praise GOD (Alleluia)!

I give thanks to GOD with all my heart,
in the assembly of the upright.

²Look at what GOD has done.

Reflect upon it with admiration.

³Glorious and majestic are the deeds of GOD,
whose justice endures forever.

⁴Who can fail to acclaim GOD's wonderful deeds?

GOD is gracious and tenderly compassionate,

⁵nourishing the faithful,
ever mindful of the covenant,

⁶demonstrating mighty deeds,
giving them a land, the heritage of the nations.

⁷GOD's deeds are according to truth and right judgment.

All GOD's precepts can be trusted.

⁸Enacted in justice and truth,

they are established forever.

⁹GOD has redeemed the chosen people,

ratifying the covenant for all time.

Holy and awesome is GOD's name.

¹⁰Reverence for ['fear of'] GOD is the beginning of wisdom.

Wise are those who live this way.

Praise of GOD will continue forever.

This is a meditative hymn of thanksgiving for what God has done. Since God's covenant (verses 5 and 9) endures for ever (verses 3, 5, 8 and 9), so must our praise (verse 10).

1. Praying this psalm with Jesus, we think of his words at the Last Supper. Having broken bread to share with his friends his body, about to be broken in death, Jesus shared a cup of wine with them. But it was more than a cup of wine: 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20).

Jesus had given himself to them all through their life together. Now, his life was about to be violently taken from him. He wanted his disciples to know that he would never stop loving them. He would always be with them. He would make, even of his dying, a gift of himself, and so a gift of God, for them – what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews calls 'the new and eternal covenant' (Hebrews 13:20). Christ is 'the mediator of a new covenant' (Hebrews 9:15). His gift brought to its fulfilment all the ancient promises given by God. 'Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant' (Hebrews 7:22). God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah: 'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts and I will be their God, and they shall be my people' (Jeremiah 31:33). This promise is quoted by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, who sees it fulfilled in Jesus (Hebrews 8:10).

The covenant is 'new', not in the sense that God's commitment has changed – God's commitment has always been absolute – but in the sense that, at last, a member of the human race, Jesus of Nazareth, welcomed God's commitment with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. And so he was able to show us, in a human way, how absolute is God's commitment to us. Furthermore, he loved us so convincingly, that he showed us how to respond to God. He shared his Spirit with us, so that we would be able to respond with his response. For the same reason Jesus could say: 'A new commandment I give you: love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34). Paul speaks of Jesus as 'the last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45), the 'man of heaven' (1 Corinthians 15:47): 'Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Corinthians 15:49). Paul writes: 'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation' (2 Corinthians 5:17), and 'a new creation is everything' (Galatians 6:15).

Thanks to Jesus we are able to witness God's absolute commitment to us, and, because we share Jesus' Spirit (his love-communion with God) we are able to welcome God's commitment, and respond by loving God and each other with Jesus' love. God's unconditional commitment to love is absolute. The covenant is 'new' because our response to God's commitment is new.

2. The psalmist claims that 'Fear of GOD is the beginning of wisdom' (verse 10). We reflected on 'fear of GOD' in Psalm 2, page 23, and again in Psalm 33, page 109, and Psalm 47, page 145. The psalmist is speaking of a gift from the Spirit of God: a gift of a profound sense of awe in the presence of the sacred, and a humble recognition of our fragility, and the possibility of separating ourselves from God's love by our sinful behaviour.

Praying Psalm 112 (111) with Jesus

¹Praise GOD (Alleluia)!

Blessed and happy are those who revere [fear] GOD,
and delight in GOD's law.

²Their descendants too will be blessed.
They will be mighty in the land.

³Their households thrive,
their righteousness endures for ever.

⁴When they find themselves in the dark,
a light is shining for them:
the light of their GOD who is gracious,
tenderly compassionate and just.

⁵All goes well for those
who deal generously and lend,
who conduct their affairs with justice.

⁶They will never falter and will be remembered for ever.

⁷They are not afraid of evil tidings.
Their hearts are secure in GOD.

⁸Steady and fearless,
they are not afraid of their enemy.

⁹They give generously to the poor.
Their righteousness endures.
Their strength brings them honour.
They will never falter.

¹⁰The wicked are angry
on seeing the prosperity of the just.
Their hatred eats them up.
Their desires will be thwarted.

Psalm 112

Verse 1 is a declaration of who are 'blessed and happy' (see Reflection on Psalm 1, page 18). They are 'those who 'fear GOD'. For a reflection on 'Fear of GOD' see Psalm 2, page 23, and also Psalm 33, page 109 and Psalm 47, page 145).

In verse 4 GOD is acclaimed as 'gracious [hannûn], tenderly compassionate [rahûm] and just [tsadîq].'

The verb hanan means to show favour [hen]. The one showing favour is 'gracious'. When used of God it refers to the many particular ways in which God graces his people, or an individual. 'Gracious' is one of the qualities attributed to God in the creedal formula that recurs throughout the Bible (see Psalm 85, pages 261-262).

The Hebrew for 'womb' is rehem. We find it in Psalm 22:10, 58:3 and 110:3. It is likely that there is a connection with the verb rhm which speaks of the tender compassion that GOD has for his people. The noun rah^amîm speaks of God's tender compassion, as does the adjectival form rahûm which occurs here in verse 4. Being 'tenderly compassionate' is also one of the qualities attributed to God in the creedal formula that recurs throughout the Bible. We recall also Jesus' words: 'Be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate' (Luke 6:36).

For a reflection on GOD's justice see Psalm 82, pages 249-251 and Psalm 85, page 263. As we reflect with Jesus on verse 6 ('They will never falter') we recall the final words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: 'The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock' (Matthew 7:25).

Verse 9 ('They give generously to the poor. Their righteousness endures') is quoted by Paul:

'The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, 'He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us' (2 Corinthians 9:6-11).

In reflecting on verse 10 we recall Jesus' parables about the Last Judgment, about what ultimately matters in our lives (Matthew 25). When we have to face up to our obstinate and persistent failure to welcome grace and to live accordingly there will be 'gnashing of teeth'(Matthew 25:30).

Praying Psalm 113 (112) with Jesus

¹Praise GOD! [Alleluia].

²O servants of GOD, praise GOD,
now and forever.

³From the rising of the sun to its setting,
praised be GOD, who is on high, above all nations.

⁴GOD's glory shines over the heavens.

⁵Who is like our GOD, enthroned on high?

⁶GOD looks down upon heaven and earth,
to raise the poor from the dust.

⁷GOD raises the needy from their misery,

⁸to seat them with princes, with the leaders of the people.

⁹It is God who gives a home to the barren woman,
and gladdens her heart with children. Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

This is the first of the so-called Hallel Psalms (Psalms 113-118), sung on the pilgrimage feasts (Tabernacles, Passover, Pentecost), and also at Hanukkah and each month at the new moon. It is an acclamation of praise and joy. All are invited to praise GOD, especially for raising up the poor.

Verses 6-9 speak of God's action on the earth. Compare the Cantic of Hannah (1Samuel 2) and the Magnificat of Mary (Luke 1:53-53). Praying the psalm with Jesus we see God carrying out God's liberating action in and through Jesus.

Reflecting on verse 7 we recall the following from James: 'Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?' (James 2:5).

Reflecting on verse nine we recall Paul's words to the communities in Galatia. He quotes Isaiah 54 verse 1: 'Shout, you who have not been in labour! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married' (Isaiah 54:1; quoted Galatians 4:27). We might reflect on Jesus' words on Calvary: 'Jesus said to the disciple, "Here is your mother", and from that hour the disciple took her into his own' (John 19:27).

Praying Psalm 114 (113:1-8) with Jesus

¹When Israel came out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from an alien people,

²Judah became God's sanctuary,
Israel, God's dominion.

³The sea pulls back before them,
the Jordan retreats.

⁴The mountains leap like rams,
the hills like yearling sheep.

⁵'Why shrink back, O sea?
Jordan, why do you retreat?

⁶'Mountains, why is it that you leap like rams,
you hills, like yearling sheep?'

⁷Tremble, O earth, at the presence of GOD,
at the sight of the God of Jacob,

⁸who turns rock into a pool,
flint into a spring of water.

This is a joyful, festive hymn inviting praise of God for liberating Israel from Egypt and marvellously caring for them as they journeyed. It has a special quality of concentrated, lyrical energy.

Praying Psalm 115 (113:9-26) with Jesus

¹Not to us, O GOD, not to us, but to your name give glory,
because of your covenant love, because of your faithfulness.

²Why do the nations say, 'Where is their God?'

³Our God is in the heavens and answers to no one.

⁴Their gods are crafted by hand, mere silver and gold.

⁵They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.

⁶They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.

⁷They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk.

No sound comes forth from their hollow throats.

⁸Those who make them are like them;

as are all who trust in them.

⁹Israel, trust in GOD,
your strength and your shield.

¹⁰House of Aaron, trust in GOD,
your strength and your shield.

¹¹All who revere ['fear'] GOD, trust in GOD,
your strength and your shield.

¹²Always mindful of us, GOD will bless us all:
the house of Israel; the house of Aaron;

¹³all who revere ['fear'] GOD, both small and great.

¹⁴May GOD bless you more and more,
you and your children.

¹⁵May you be truly blessed
by the Maker of heaven and earth.

¹⁶The heavens belong to GOD,
who has entrusted the earth to you.

¹⁷The dead go down into silence.
They do not praise GOD.

¹⁸But we, the living, bless GOD,
now and for ever. Amen! Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

Psalm 115

Because the Greek Septuagint (and consequently the Latin Vulgate and the Christian liturgical texts) kept the Hebrew Psalms 9 and 10 together as a single psalm, the numbering of the Greek, Latin and liturgical psalms from the Hebrew Psalm 10 up to this point has been one behind the Hebrew numbering. Now, once again, the Greek Septuagint has kept two psalms (Hebrew Psalms 114 and 115) together as one psalm, with the result that now the Greek Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate and the Christian liturgical text are two behind the Hebrew numbering.

Verse 1 reads: 'Not to us, O GOD, not to us, but to your name give glory, because of your covenant love, because of your faithfulness'. See Psalm 85, pages 261-262 for a reflection on 'Covenant Love.' See Psalm 61, page 187 for a reflection on 'Covenant Love and Faithfulness.' See Psalm 57, pages 177-179 for a reflection on 'glory.'

Verse 2 reads: 'Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?"' Compare the following: 'My tears have been my food by day and by night, as they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"' (Psalm 42:3 and 10), and 'Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"' (Psalm 79:10).

Verses 3-8 is a polemic against idols from the period of the Exile in Babylon. Before the Exile there was an attempt to educate the people away from having idols, because of the danger of falling back into an identification of GOD with an idol (see the account of the golden calf, Exodus 32, and the idols in Bethel, 1 Kings 12:29). During the exile, it appeared that Marduk, the god of Babylon, had defeated Israel's God. Furthermore they could only point to a destroyed sanctuary when asked: 'Where is your god?' Their response was 'Our God is in the heavens and answers no one' (verse 3; see Genesis 1). This psalm belongs with parts of the Isaiah scroll in mocking the popular Babylonian idol-worship (see Isaiah 44:12-20 and 46:1-7).

In verses 9-11 the psalmist appeals to the people of Israel assembled in prayer, then to the priests, and then to all who look to GOD in reverence to place their trust in GOD.

In verses 14-15 the psalmist prays for GOD's blessing. As we pray this psalm with Jesus we recall his words in the parable about the ultimate judgment, where the king (the Risen and Exalted Jesus) says to those who have cared for people in need: 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father' (Matthew 25:34).

Jesus does not share the psalmist's understanding that 'the dead do not praise GOD' (verse 17). When the Sadducees tried to make fun of the idea of life after death, Jesus responded: 'You are wrong. You know neither the scriptures nor the power of GOD' (Mark 12:24). He goes on to remind them of GOD's appearance to Moses in the burning bush, when GOD declared: 'I am the GOD of Abraham, the GOD of Isaac, and the GOD of Jacob' (Exodus 3:6). Jesus adds: 'He is the GOD not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong' (Mark 12:27).

Praying Psalm 116 (114-115) with Jesus

¹I am filled with love for GOD who hears me when I call.

²I will continue to call on you, O GOD, as long as I live.

³Death's trap was set. The grave had me in its grip.

I was overcome with distress and anguish.

⁴I cried out to GOD: 'Rescue me, O GOD! Save me!'

⁵Gracious is GOD, and just, and tenderly compassionate.

⁶GOD shelters those who are weak.

When I was brought low, God saved me.

⁷Rest once more, my heart,

for GOD has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸GOD, YOU have delivered me from death,

wiping my tears, steadying my feet.

⁹I am walking with YOU in the land of the living.

•••••

¹⁰I believe, even as I say, 'I am sorely afflicted.'

¹¹I believe, even as I cry, 'No one can be trusted.'

¹²How can I repay GOD for all the goodness I am shown?

¹³*I raise the cup of salvation and call on you, O GOD.*

¹⁴*I fulfill my vows to YOU in the presence of all your people.*

¹⁵O GOD, you hate to see your faithful die.

¹⁶I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.

You freed me from death's grip.

¹⁷*I offer a thanksgiving sacrifice, and call on you, O GOD.*

¹⁸*I fulfill my vows to YOU in the presence of all your people,*

¹⁹in the courts of the house of GOD,

in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

Psalm 116

In the Greek Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, and so the Christian liturgical books, Hebrew Psalms 9 and 10 are combined into one psalm (Psalm 9), and Hebrew Psalms 114 and 115 are combined into one psalm (Psalm 113). In the present psalm the process is reversed. Here it is the Greek, Latin and liturgical texts which divide Hebrew Psalm 116 into two psalms (Psalms 114 and 115). This means that in the next psalm (Hebrew Psalm 117) we are back with what we have become accustomed to: The Greek being one behind the Hebrew numbering.

The Psalmist is thanking God because he has escaped death (verses 1-4 and 16; compare Psalm 30). He speaks of his being abandoned and powerless to help himself. He speaks also of his interior affliction. He is taking part in a liturgy in which he is fulfilling a vow taken when ill (verse 14). Verse 19 suggests a communal dimension: God has liberated his people from the slavery and death of exile, and restored them to life in bringing them back to the temple. It is a song of love (verse 1), of faith (verse 10), and of thanksgiving (verse 17).

Psalm 116 is listed among the Hallel Psalms, sung on the pilgrimage feasts (Tabernacles, Passover, Pentecost), and also at Hanukkah and each month at the new moon. Psalm 116 was the first psalm sung after the Passover meal, and so is possibly the psalm sung by Jesus before leaving the Last Supper (see Matthew 26:30).

Verse 5 ('Gracious is GOD, and just. Tenderly compassionate is our God') draws on the creedal formula of the Book of Exodus: 'GOD passed before Moses, and proclaimed, 'GOD, GOD, a God tenderly compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness' (Exodus 34:6). See Psalm 112 verse 4 for a reflection on 'gracious', 'just' and 'tenderly compassionate.'

Verse 6 reads: 'GOD shelters those who are weak.' See Psalm 82, pages 251-254 for a reflection on God's care for the poor.

Praying verse 7 with Jesus ('Rest once more, my heart, for GOD has dealt bountifully with you') we recall Jesus' invitation: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls' (Matthew 11:28-20). We recall also the acclamation by the chorus in the scene where Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night: 'God so loved us that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (John 3:16). We think also of Paul: 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies' (Romans 8:18-23).

Paul draws on verse 10 when he writes: 'Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with Scripture-- 'I believed, and so I spoke' – we also believe, and so we speak' (2 Corinthians 4:13). Paul also draws on verse 11: 'Although everyone is false, let God be proved true' (Romans 3:4).

In the Biblical tradition, the word 'believing' (verses 10-11), and the word 'faith' translate words from the Hebrew root *'mn*. The noun *'mnh* is often translated 'faithfulness'. It denotes the quality one has when one acts according to one's nature or commitments. The related adjective is descriptive of a person who is faithful, reliable, and so trustworthy.

God has this quality in its fullness because God always acts according to who God is. To speak of God in this way is to say that God is the real God, not a false one, and that God always acts according to the truth. Because of this, we can find our security in God, we can rely upon God, we can place our trust in God: 'The word of GOD is upright, and all GOD's work is done in faithfulness' (Psalm 33:4).

When we say that God is 'faith-full', we are saying that God always acts according to who God is. But who is God? Among the many necessarily imperfect answers to this question found in the sacred Scriptures, there is one that stands out: God is the one who hears the cry of the poor. When God first appears to Moses, God declares: 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them' (Exodus 3:7-8). 'I am GOD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am GOD, your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians' (Exodus 6:6-7).

We are made in God's image. What does it mean for us to 'believe', to have 'faith', to be 'faith-full'? To believe in God is to accept the salvation which God offers and to experience a summons, like Moses, to be God's instrument in liberating the oppressed: 'God has taken his place in the council of the gods. It is there God holds judgment: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the orphan; defend the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the power of the wicked" (Psalm 82:1-4).

Jeremiah challenges King Zedekiah: 'Did not your father [King Josiah] eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? ... He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord' (Jeremiah 22:15-16). King Josiah, Zedekiah's father, acted justly and so can truly be said to have put his faith in the faithfulness of God. The idea recurs again and again in the writings of the prophets: 'Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream' (Amos 5:24). 'Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land' (Hosea 4:1). 'I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings' (Hosea 6:6).

‘They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea’ (Isaiah 11:9).

The Mosaic Law requires of God’s people to be faithful to the covenant by acting with justice for the poor. They are to remember that they were once oppressed and that it was God who redeemed them. The following text is typical and similar injunctions can be found throughout the books of the Law: ‘You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry’ (Exodus 22:21-23).

What, then, does it mean for us to have ‘faith’, to ‘believe’, to be ‘faith-full’? To answer this question we must look at Jesus. In the New Testament Jesus is portrayed as having perfect faith. He always acts towards God as Son, in perfect trust and obedience. In doing so he reveals who God is for us and how we are to respond to grace. He is our ‘leader in faith’ (Hebrews 12:2). For a reflection on obedience see Psalm 123, pages 393-398.

We have faith when, in accordance with who we are as creatures totally dependent on God, we listen to Jesus’ word and open our hearts to receive the sharing in his intimate life of love with the Father which he offers us. To do so we will need to trust him. We will also need to live faithfully the life he offers us, not independently, but as people who are ‘born of God’ (John 1:13), like branches which draw their life from the vine to which they remain attached (John 15:1ff). Believing speaks of listening to God, heeding God’s inspiration, and acting accordingly. It focuses on the dynamic movement of our actual relating with God. Far from being a speculative, cerebral thing, faith is essentially practical. It is fundamentally about action. As Jesus himself says: ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven’ (Matthew 7:21).

The Vatican Council (*Dei Verbum*, n. 2) writes: ‘The invisible God from the fullness of Love addresses human beings as God’s friends and moves among them in order to invite and welcome them into God’s own company.’ Opening our minds and hearts to welcome God’s communication and loving invitation is what we mean by faith. It speaks of the decisions we make, and the lifestyle to which we are committed as a consequence of taking this revelation seriously.

When we speak of human beings believing, we are saying that they are trustworthy because what they do and say is in accordance with the truth. If we seek the truth, and deal honestly and carry out our obligations, then we share in the faithfulness of God, and others in turn can rely upon us. Abraham is described as having a faithful heart (Nehemiah 9:8), and Moses is spoken of as being trustworthy because of the intimacy of God’s communication with him (Numbers 12:7). We hear of a faithful priest (1 Samuel 2:35) and a trustworthy prophet (1 Samuel 3:20).

To believe is, as the English word so aptly expresses, to ‘be’ - ‘lieve’, to ‘be’ in ‘love’. It is to be in God’s love, receiving with an open heart the love which God is, the love which the risen Jesus enjoys in the eternal mystery of God’s being and which he offers to us by pouring his Spirit into our hearts.

To be faith-full is to let this divine communion transform us so that our lives, too, become radiant reflections of God's love reaching out to others and inviting them into the same shared communion. To believe is:

- to listen to God's word as revealed in Jesus.
- to heed what God says, trusting that God is faithful and so accepting his word as true with our hearts and minds, our soul and strength.
- to live in communion with Jesus, sharing his life of love and so sharing his faith – the faithfulness (fullness of faith) of God which Jesus incarnates and reveals.
- to act in accordance with God's will as revealed by Jesus, especially by living a life of love.

To have faith is to respond to God by savouring what we have received, reflecting upon it, integrating it into our lives, and living accordingly.

We now come to the heart of Christian faith. It is not a matter of copying Jesus, of modelling ourselves on him, on his 'faith', on his 'believing', on his being 'faith-full.' It is welcoming Jesus' own faith, given us when he pours his Spirit into our hearts. We are given the 'faith of Jesus, the Messiah' (Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16). We have faith when, in accordance with who we are as creatures totally dependent on God, we listen to Jesus' word and open our hearts to receive the sharing in his intimate life of love with the Father which he offers us.

We are not isolated individuals. God reveals God's Self to us through others. Christian faith is handed on through tradition, through the Sacred Scriptures and through the community of Jesus' disciples. We might reflect on the following statements from the Catholic Catechism: 'To live, grow, and persevere in faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God. We must beg the Lord to increase our faith. It must be 'working through love' (Galatians 5:6), abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church' (n. 162). 'No one can believe alone ... I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I help support others in the faith' (n. 166), 'The Christian community is our teacher in the faith' (n. 169).

God's 'faithful' (verse 15) are those who have welcomed God's covenant love [hesed] and are faithful in keeping the covenant: 'Love GOD, all you his faithful ones. GOD preserves those who believe in GOD' (Psalm 31:23).

The 'cup of salvation' (verse 13) and the 'thanksgiving sacrifice' (verse 17) draw us to think of the Last Supper, and the Eucharistic meal that is central to the life of Jesus' disciples: 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20). 'The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?' (1Corinthians 10:16). 'Jesus took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me' (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Praying Psalm 117 (116) with Jesus

¹Praise GOD, all you nations!

Extol our God, all you peoples!

²Great is GOD's covenant love for us.

GOD is forever faithful.

Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

In his Letter to the Christians in Rome (Romans 15:8-12), Paul includes this psalm among the quotations he uses to indicate God's will to reach out to the Gentiles. He speaks of God's faithfulness to Israel in keeping his promises, and God's steadfast love in reaching out to save all nations.

'Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the faithfulness of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name' (Psalm 18:50); and again he says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people' (Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX); and again, 'Praise GOD, all you nations! Extol our God, all you peoples' (Psalm 117:1).'

For a reflection on God's 'covenant love' see Psalm 85, pages 261-262.

For a reflection on God's faithfulness see Psalm 116, pages 357-359.

The call is for *all* peoples to praise God (verse 1). The Gospels recall Jesus' ministry to people who were not Jews. We think of his healing of the servant of the centurion (Matthew 8:5-13) and the demoniacs in the country of the Gadarenes (Matthew 8:28-34). He healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). Matthew ends his Gospel with the commission Jesus gave to his disciples: 'Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"' (Matthew 28:18-20).

For a reflection on the universal offer of salvation see Psalm 87, pages 268-272.

Praying Psalm 118 (117) with Jesus

¹*Give thanks to GOD who is good.*

GOD's covenant love endures for ever!

²Let the people proclaim:

'GOD's covenant love endures forever.'

³Let the priests proclaim:

'GOD's covenant love endures forever.'

⁴Let all who revere ['fear'] GOD proclaim:

'GOD's covenant love endures forever.'

⁵I called to GOD in my distress.

GOD answered and set me free.

⁶With GOD on my side,

I do not fear what people can do to me.

⁷GOD is with me to help me.

I will see my enemies defeated.

⁸It is better to take refuge in GOD
than to rely on human help.

⁹It is better to take refuge in GOD
than to trust in princes.

¹⁰The nations surrounded me.

Calling on GOD, I drove them back!

¹¹They surrounded me on every side.

Calling on GOD, I drove them back!

¹²They swarmed like bees,
and blazed like a brushwood fire.

Calling on GOD, I drove them back!

¹³I was hard pressed and falling.

GOD came to my help.

¹⁴GOD is my strength, my song, my saviour.

¹⁵Glad shouts of victory ring out
in the tents of the righteous.
'With triumphant arm raised high,
¹⁶GOD has conquered!'

¹⁷I will not die.
I will live to recount GOD's deeds.

[¹⁸GOD punished me severely,]
but did not leave me to die.

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter and give thanks.

²⁰This is GOD's gate.
Through it only the righteous can enter.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me.
You have become my saviour.

²²The stone that the builders rejected
has become the corner stone.

²³This is GOD's doing;
it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day GOD has made;
let us rejoice in it and be glad.

²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O GOD!
O GOD, grant us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in GOD's name.
We bless you from GOD's house.
GOD is our light.

²⁷On this our festival go forward with branches
even to the altar.

²⁸You are my God. I give you thanks.
You are my God. I extol you.

²⁹*Give thanks to GOD who is good.
GOD's covenant love endures forever!*

The occasion is a festival procession into the temple, celebrating victory. The Master of Ceremonies is summoning the people, then the priests, and finally the whole assembly to thank God, and in turn to shout: 'God's covenant love endured forever!' (verses 1-4).

For a reflection on Thanksgiving (verse 1) see Psalm 21, page 74. For a reflection on 'Fear of GOD' (verse 4) see Psalm 2, page 23.

Then the king recounts how GOD came to his aid (verses 5-14). Verse 6 is quoted by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews: 'He has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "With GOD on my side, I do not fear what people can do to me":' (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Responding to the king, the chorus recalls the celebration in the camp of the victory that was achieved through the power of GOD (verses 15-16).

Verses 17-19 are spoken by the king. Praying the psalm with Jesus we rejoice that 'God did not leave Jesus to die': 'We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him' (Romans 6:9). We trust that we will share in Jesus' risen life. In the meantime: 'We are treated as dying, and see - we are alive' (2 Corinthians 6:9).

In verse 19 the king turns to those responsible for opening the gate to the temple: 'Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter and give thanks.' They reply in verse 20. Praying this with Jesus we recall his words: 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture' (John 10:9). And: 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6).

Verses 22-23 are chanted by the chorus. Jesus quotes them in his parable about his being rejected and the consequences for those who rejected him: 'Have you not read this scripture: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone. This is GOD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes' (Mark 12:10). Peter quotes this text in his trial before the Sanhedrin: 'This Jesus is "the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone." There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortal human beings by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:11-12).

Peter quotes it again in his First Letter: 'It stands in scripture, "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame" (Isaiah 28:16). To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner' (1 Peter 2:6-7).

Paul alludes to it in his Letter to the Gentile communities: 'You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in GOD; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God' (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Psalm 118

The chorus chants verses 24 to 26. 'Save us' translates the Hebrew 'Hosanna.' These verses are echoed in the New Testament. In the account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem we read: 'Those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' (Mark 11:9-10). 'They took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!" (John 12:13).

In his recounting of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, Matthew includes the following lament: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate' (Matthew 23:37-38). The conclusion picks up Psalm 118: 'You will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord"' (Matthew 23:39).

The Master of Ceremonies instructs the assembly: 'Go forward on this our festival with branches even to the altar' (verse 27). The king cries out: 'You are my God. I give you thanks. You are my God. I extol you' (verse 28). The assembly repeats the cry: 'Give thanks to GOD who is good. GOD's covenant love endures forever!' (verse 29; see verse 1).

Praying Psalm 119 (118) with Jesus

Psalm 119 is an acrostic psalm. Each line in the first stanza begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each line in the second stanza begins with the second letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and so on throughout the psalm. In including the whole alphabet in this way, the psalmist conveys the idea of God's all-encompassing will.

Stanza One

¹Blessed and happy are those whose lives are blameless,
who follow GOD's law,

²Blessed and happy are those who keep GOD's decrees
seeking God with all their heart,

³who do no wrong, but follow GOD's way.

⁴You have laid down your precepts
to be observed with care.

⁵O that I was steadfast in keeping your statutes!

⁶I would be without shame,
if only my eyes were fixed on your commandments.

⁷I praise you with an upright heart,
as I learn your righteous judgments.

⁸Hold me close to you,
and I will observe your statutes.

Before commenting on Psalm 119, it is good to recall Psalm 19:7-11 (and see the reflection on page 70).

⁷GOD's law is perfect; it revives the soul.
GOD's decrees are sure; they make wise the simple.
⁸GOD's precepts are right; they delight the heart.
GOD's commandment is clear; it enlightens the eyes.

⁹The awe inspired by GOD is pure and enduring.
GOD's judgments are true and all of them just.

¹⁰More precious are they than gold, than the finest gold;
sweeter are they than honey dripping from a comb.

¹¹Your servant is enlightened by them.
In keeping them there is great reward.

'Blessed and happy are those whose lives are blameless, who follow GOD's law' (verse 1).

1. For a reflection on 'Blessed and happy' see Psalm 1, page 18.

2. God's law ('Torah')

It is important from the outset to state that the word 'law' does not satisfactorily convey the meaning intended by the Hebrew word *Torah*. The Concise Oxford Dictionary gives as its first definition of law: 'a body of enacted or customary rules recognised by a community as binding.' This is a fairly adequate definition of the Greek word *nomos* which the English 'law' translates. However behind the Greek *nomos* stands the Hebrew *Torah*, which is perhaps better translated as 'instruction', or 'way'. It includes what we intend by 'law', but has a broader as well as a more precise application.

We find Torah being used for the way God reveals God's will via a specific oracle issued by a priest or a prophet. From this it came to stand for the totality of the way God has revealed God's Self and God's will through the history of dealings with the people of Israel. In this sense Torah ('law') is synonymous with the whole of Israelite tradition, written (the Scriptures), and oral. In this sense 'law' can be the equivalent of 'the religion of Israel.'

When the Scriptures were given a more definite form in the period after the exile, the word Torah came also to be used in a more restricted sense for the first five books of the Jewish canon: the Book of Genesis and the Books concerned with Moses (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). An example of this usage is found in the Prologue to the Book of Sirach: 'Many great teachings have been given to us through the Torah and the Prophets and the other Writings that followed them.'

For the rest of this reflection we use the word 'law' in its widest application as 'the revelation from God found in the writings and traditions of Israel.' This is the meaning it has in Psalms 19 and 119. Committed as he is to doing God's will, the psalmist in Stanza One speaks also of God's 'decrees' (verse 2; instructions backed by divine testimony), God's 'way' (verse 3; the path we are to follow), God's 'precepts' (verse 4; obligations of special importance), God's 'statutes' (verse 5; God's will engraved on stone or parchment), God's 'commandments' (verse 6), and God's 'judgments', (verse 7). Stanza Two will speak of God's 'word' (verse 9; God's will as revealed in creation and history), and God's 'promise' (verse 11). In Psalm 119 the psalmist loves to play with all these words to speak of the centrality of obeying God's will. As we pray this psalm with Jesus we recall his absolute commitment to doing the will of his Father (see texts quoted on pages 10-11).

Living according to the law as an experience of salvation

It is clear from the whole of the New Testament that the law (Torah) was treasured as a genuine revelation of God and that living according to the law was a genuine experience of salvation. This remained the understanding of the Christian community when the Church saw itself as distinct from the Jewish synagogue and was increasingly Gentile.

This is clear from the theological writings of Irenaeus. In his famous work *Against Heresies: a refutation and subversion of knowledge falsely so called* (180AD), he writes: 'God formed humankind ... but chose the patriarchs for the sake of humankind's salvation, and prepared a people ... and raised up prophets upon earth, accustoming people to bear his Spirit and to hold communion with God' (AH IV,14,2).

The Bible records the religious experience of a people, many of whom in living their religion came to close communion with God. One has only to pray the psalms to realise this truth. Using a remarkably evocative image, which applies not only to Judaism (the 'law') but to all that is genuine in every human religion, Irenaeus continues: 'God put the human race together in many ways to effect a symphony of salvation' (AH IV,14,2).

For Irenaeus, and for Christians generally, Christianity is not just one among many religions, including Judaism. We find expressions of the Word of God in every human expression of truth. We find the life-giving activity of the Spirit of God in every genuine religious experience. In Christianity, however, we have the Word of God finding perfect human expression ('incarnation') in Jesus. Once again, Irenaeus: 'The person who is truly spiritual, knowing always the same God, and always acknowledging the same Word of God (although he has but now been manifested to us), and acknowledging also at all times the same Spirit of God (although he has been poured out upon us after a new fashion in these last times) will know that he descends even from the creation of the world to its end upon the human race, from whom those who believe God and follow God's word receive that salvation which flows from God' (AH IV,33.15).

The Second Vatican Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*'Dei Verbum'*, 1965) reminds us: 'Through Moses, with the race of Israel, God acquired a people for God's Self, and to them he revealed God's Self in words and deeds as the one, true, living God, so that Israel might experience the ways of God with people' (DV n.14).

Jesus and the Law

Again and again the Gospels speak of Jesus fulfilling what has been written in the sacred Scriptures. From Jesus' opening words, it is clear that Matthew intends to portray Jesus as wanting to 'fulfill all righteousness' (3:15). In the wilderness, he remains obedient to God's will (4:1-10). He has come to fulfill the law and he demands obedience to God's revealed will from his disciples (5:17-19; 7:21; 12:50). Matthew would agree with Paul that the law is a 'gift' from God (Romans 9:4); that it is 'holy' (Romans 7:12) and 'good' (Romans 7:12) and 'beautiful' (Romans 7:16), and that it reveals God's fidelity to his covenant of love (what Paul calls his 'justice', Romans 1:32; 2:26; 7:12). It is God's Spirit who breathes through the law (Romans 7:14). Besides revealing God, it directs us how to respond to God, and therefore helps us to recognise our sinfulness (Romans 3:20; 7:7; Galatians 3:19).

Matthew presents Jesus as the goal of God's revelation found in the law. It is he who brings it to perfection. He demands the same perfection from his disciples who are to obey God's will from the heart with a 'righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees' (5:20; see 5:21 - 6:18). They can learn to do this only from the Son:

'All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light' (Matthew 11:27-30).

Jesus as the fulfilment of the law (and the prophets) is expressed dramatically in what is commonly called the Transfiguration: 'There appeared to the disciples Moses [symbolic of the law] and Elijah [symbolic of the prophets] talking with Jesus ... Then from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' ... When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone' (Matthew 17:3,5,8).

To obey God's will expressed in the law we must listen to Jesus and share in Jesus' faith, hope and love (Galatians 2:15-21; Romans 3:31; 10:4). It is because Christ lives in his followers that they are able to carry out the just requirements of the law (Galatians 3:2,5; Romans 8:4). It is the love of Christ experienced in the Christian community which is the fulfilment of the law (Galatians 5:14; 6:2; Romans 13:10). Jesus' relationship to the law is summed up in the opening words of the Letter to the Hebrews: 'Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds' (Hebrews 1:1-2).

This same point is made by Irenaeus: 'The patriarchs and prophets sowed the word concerning Christ, but the Church reaped, that is, received the fruit ... both the sower and the reaper may rejoice together in the kingdom of Christ, who is present with all those who were from the beginning approved by God who granted them his Word to be present with them' (AH IV,25,3).

Likewise by the Second Vatican Council: 'The most intimate truth which revelation gives us about God and human salvation shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of revelation' (DV, n.2). 'God taught them to look for the promised saviour. And so, throughout the ages, he prepared the way for the Gospel' (DV, n.3). 'Jesus Christ completed and perfected revelation' (DV, n.4).

Removing the limitations of the law

It is important to recognise the essentially human and so limited understanding of God and of ourselves that we find expressed in the Sacred Scriptures. See our reflection on this in Chapter one of this book. This point is stressed in a document issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993). A few passages should suffice: 'Scripture reveals the meaning of the events which bring revelation to fulfilment and the events reveal the meaning of Scripture, that is, they require that certain aspects of the received interpretation be set aside and a new interpretation adopted' (pages 91-92).

In other words all understandings found in the law concerning God, God's ways with the human race, and our response to God must be looked at anew in the light of the events that fulfil the law – that is to say, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus: 'The exegete need not put absolute value in something which simply reflects limited human understanding' (page 94). 'The Word of God finds expression in the work of human authors. The thought and the words belong at one and the same time both to God and to human beings, in such a way that the whole Bible comes at once from God and from the inspired human author. This does not mean, however, that God has given the historical conditioning of the message a value which is absolute' (page 113). 'Addressing men and women, from the beginnings of the Old Testament onward, God made use of all the possibilities of human language, while at the same time accepting that his word be subject to the constraints caused by the limitations of this language' (pages 132-133).

The law, however good, was imperfect, incomplete. It had to give way before the revelation of the Word-made-flesh. Matthew, like Paul, held that the limitations and imperfections of the law had to be let go when they failed to express the revelation of God and of God's will given by him who is 'the lord of the sabbath' (12:8). Paul writes: 'You have died to the law through the Body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God ... We are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit' (Romans 7:4,6).

This does not mean that the law has lost its value. It does mean that it now has to be treasured as seen through the eyes of Jesus and as understood with his mind. The law indicates the way to communion with God, but now it has come to its goal, now we have experienced its flowering, now we can read it in its proper perspective and discern more accurately what is of God and where limited human perception was unable to receive God's Word without distortion.

Disciples of Jesus are not bound to observe all the detailed prescriptions of the law. Many of the laws will express lasting human values, values embraced by Jesus himself. A Jew, becoming a Christian, will find much in his religious tradition that is of lasting value. A Gentile, becoming a Christian, will be enriched by coming to know and follow the divine guidance found in the law. However, the early Christian community recognised that it was not necessary to become a Jew in order to become a Christian, for the basis of a person's communion with God was not conformity to the law but communion with Jesus. For Paul, as no doubt for many Jews who became disciples of Jesus, this was experienced as a deliberate and painful shift, likened to a death: 'By works of the law shall no one be justified ... For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live in the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose' (Galatians 2:16,19-21).

'If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the Law' (Galatians 5:18; see also Philippians 3:7-11).

‘Their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains, unlifted, because only through Christ is it being annulled. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts; but when a person turns to the Lord the veil is removed’ (2 Corinthians 3:14-16).

In Matthew’s Gospel we have already seen Jesus setting aside injunctions accepted as law by his contemporaries. Jesus touches lepers (8:3), eats with sinners (9:11). He does not follow the Sabbath regulations expected by the religious authorities of his day. Jesus’ followers did not follow the cultic food laws (Acts 10-11), nor did they accept the necessity of circumcision as a requirement of belonging to God’s people (Acts 15). Following Jesus’ teaching they did not accept the barrier between Jews (judged to be ‘holy’) and Gentiles (judged to be ‘unclean’).

It is still obvious today that people find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to let go practices which have been part of their religious identity. Many of Jesus’ contemporaries, especially those responsible for preserving the tradition, were no exception. Jesus was crucified because he was seen as a threat to the temple and to all that the temple stood for (26:61; see Deuteronomy 13:1-5). Jesus’ followers were to meet a similar fate (Acts 6:13; see Acts 7; re Paul, see Acts 21:28).

The other side to this is that many recognised in Jesus the fulfilment of their religious aspirations, and the flowering of the law. They found in his love the power to be liberated from sin – something they were unable to do within the confines of the law.

‘Blessed and happy are those who keep God’s decrees, seeking God with all their heart’ (verse 2). Note that obedience to the law is within the context of seeking God.

Stanza Two

⁹How can young people keep themselves pure?

By paying attention to your word.

¹⁰With all my heart I seek you; do not let me stray.

**¹¹I treasure your word in my heart,
to avoid offending you.**

¹²Blessed are you, O GOD; teach me your statutes.

¹³With my lips I recite the judgments you have uttered.

¹⁴I delight in your ways, more than in great riches.

¹⁵I meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your way.

¹⁶I delight in your statutes. I remember your word.

It is because we are ‘seeking God with all our heart that we ‘treasure God’s word in our heart’, that we ‘delight in following the way’ God reveals to us, that we ‘pay attention to God’s word.’ We do not want to ‘offend God’, or ‘stray’ from God’s way.

Stanza Three

¹⁷**Deal bountifully with your servant,
so that I may live and observe your word.**

¹⁸**Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things in your law.**

¹⁹**I am a pilgrim on the earth;
do not hide your commandments from me.**

²⁰**My soul is constantly consumed
with longing for your judgments.**

²¹**You rebuke the insolent,
who wander from your commandments.**

²²**Save me from their scorn and contempt,
for I keep your decrees.**

²³**Even though princes sit plotting against me,
I, your servant, meditate on your statutes.**

²⁴**Your decrees are my delight; they are my counsellors.**

‘Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things in your law’ (verse 18). Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall Jesus’ ministry of healing the ‘blind’ (see Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52; John 9:1-41). Jesus wants us to see: ‘Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not in the lampstand?’ (Mark 4:21). Jesus wanted to enlighten (John 9:5). We recall Paul’s enlightenment on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9). He calls us to be ‘a light to the world’ (Matthew 5:14).

In his letter to the Gentile churches Paul prays: ‘I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, *with the eyes of your heart enlightened*, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power’ (Ephesians 1:15-19).

‘I, your servant, meditate on your statutes’ (verse 23). See Psalm 63, page 196, for a reflection on ‘meditate’.

Stanza Four

²⁵I lie in the dust; revive me by your word.

**²⁶I tell you of my straying
and you answer by teaching me your statutes.**

**²⁷When you make me understand your precepts,
I recognize your wondrous works.**

**²⁸When I am numb with grief,
revive me with your word.**

**²⁹Turn me away from false paths,
graciously teach me your law.**

**³⁰I have chosen the way of faithfulness,
cherishing your judgments.**

**³¹O GOD, I cling to your decrees.
Do not disappoint me.**

**³²I hasten along the way of your commandments,
for you set free my heart.**

'I have chosen the way of faithfulness' (verse 30). See Psalm 116, pages 357-359 for a reflection on 'faith' and 'faithfulness'.

'I hasten along the way of your commandments for you set free my heart' (verse 32). We recall Jesus' words: 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (John 8:31-32). Jesus continues: 'If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:36). God's commandments do not restrict our lives. On the contrary, they reveal how we are to live so as to be open to welcome God's offer of God's Self, God's offer of love. When we 'stray' (verse 26), we are 'numb with grief' (verse 28). God's response is to reveal the way we should walk. Praying this with Jesus we thank God that Jesus is 'the way' (John 14:6). Walking this way we are never alone, for Jesus is walking with us.

Stanza Five

- ³³Teach me, O GOD, the way of your statutes,
and I will observe them closely.
- ³⁴Help me understand your will,
that I may keep your law with all my heart.
- ³⁵Guide me along your path, for in it I delight.
- ³⁶Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.
- ³⁷Keep my eyes from looking at vanities;
give me life in your way.
- ³⁸Confirm to your servant your promise,
which is for those who revere [‘fear’] you.
- ³⁹Keep me from the disgrace that I dread.
How good are your judgments.
- ⁴⁰See, I long for your precepts;
in your righteousness, give me life.

‘Help me understand your will, that I may keep your law with all my heart’ (verse 34). The history of Ancient Israel is a history of failure to ‘keep God’s law.’ Hence the promise of Jeremiah: ‘The days are surely coming, says GOD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says GOD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be my people’ (Jeremiah 31:31-33; quoted in the Letter to the Hebrews 8:8-12).

This is reinforced by the prophet Ezekiel: ‘A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances’ (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall his gift of himself at the Last Supper, a gift which he saw as a fulfilment of the promises given by God through Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jesus called it ‘a new covenant in my blood’ (Luke 22:20; see 1 Corinthians 11:25). Jesus is ‘the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance’ (Hebrews 9:15). Jesus asked his disciples to do what he is doing: to give our lives in love for each other, indeed for the world. Paul saw himself as graced to be ‘a minister of the new covenant’ (2 Corinthians 3:6).

For a reflection on ‘Fear of GOD’(verse 38) see Psalm 2, page 23.

Stanza Six

⁴¹Touch me, O GOD, with your covenant love.

Save me as you promised.

**⁴²Then I will have an answer for those who taunt me,
for I trust in your word.**

**⁴³Let me speak the whole truth,
for my hope is in your judgments.**

⁴⁴I keep your law, now and always will.

⁴⁵I walk freely, following your precepts.

**⁴⁶I will speak of your decrees before kings,
and not be ashamed.**

**⁴⁷I find my delight in your commandments,
because I love them.**

**⁴⁸I revere your commandments, which I love,
and I meditate on your statutes.**

For a reflection on God's 'covenant love' (verse 41; Hebrew *hesed*) see Psalm 85, pages 261-262). Jesus offers more than a 'touch' (verse 1). He promises to live in our hearts, along with the Father and the Spirit: the communion in love which he shares with the Father (John 14:15-23; see John 17:26).

For a reflection on 'trust' (verse 42) see Psalm 27, page 95.

For a reflection on 'truth' (verse 43) see Psalm 12, pages 47-49.

For a reflection on 'hope' (verse 43) see Psalm 62, pages 190-191.

In verse 47-48 the psalmist speaks of his 'delight in God's commandments' and of 'loving' them and 'meditating' on them. We hear Jesus saying: 'I do nothing on my own. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him' (John 8:28-29). At his baptism Jesus was overwhelmed by an experience of God's delighting in him (Mark 1:9-11). Jesus knew that God wants everyone 'to live, and to live to the full' (John 10:10). God reveals how we are to live so as to welcome the love that God is constantly pouring over us. Jesus knew this. Hence his commitment to respond to God's will with all his mind and soul and heart and will. He wants us to do the same, for this is the way to the life and happiness for which we are created.

Stanza Seven

⁴⁹Remember your word to your servant.

It has given me grounds for hope.

⁵⁰This is my comfort in distress,

that your promise gives me life.

⁵¹The arrogant utterly deride me,

but I do not turn away from your law.

⁵²When I think of your judgments from of old,

I take comfort, O GOD.

⁵³Indignation seizes me because of the wicked,

who forsake your law.

⁵⁴Your statutes have been the subject of my songs

in the land of exile.

⁵⁵I remember you in the night, O GOD, and cherish your law.

⁵⁶This is what counts for me: to obey your precepts.

For a reflection on 'comfort' (verses 50 and 52) see Psalm 86, pages 266-267. Exiled from his home, the psalmist rejoices that he finds his 'home' in knowing and obeying God's will. No one can take this from him. It gives him 'life' and 'grounds for hope.'

'This is what counts for me: to obey your precepts' (verse 56). Praying this with Jesus we recall his words: 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother' (Mark 3:35). Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Deuteronomy 8:3; see Matthew 4:4). And Paul writes: 'In Christ Jesus ... the only thing that counts is faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6). Paul speaks of 'the obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5).

Stanza Eight

⁵⁷YOU, O GOD, are my portion. I promise to keep your word.

⁵⁸I implore your favour with all my heart.

Be gracious to me according to your promise.

⁵⁹When I think of your ways, I turn my steps to your decrees.

⁶⁰I hasten, and do not delay to keep your commandments.

**⁶¹Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me,
I do not forget your law.**

**⁶²At midnight I rise to praise you
for your righteous judgments.**

**⁶³I am a companion of all who revere [‘fear’] you,
who keep your precepts.**

**⁶⁴The earth, O GOD, is full of your love;
teach me your statutes.**

‘You, O GOD, are my portion’ (verse 57). In Psalm 16 the psalmist says to GOD: ‘I have no good apart from you’ (Psalm 16, verse 2). Others choose other gods, but ‘GOD is my chosen portion and my cup’ (Psalm 16, verse 5). In Psalm 73 we read: ‘My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever’ (Psalm 73, verse 26). God has chosen us as his heritage: ‘Blessed and happy is the nation whose God is GOD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage’ (Psalm 33:12). And in turn God gives God’s Self to us as ours.

‘The earth, O GOD, is full of your love’ (verse 64). Jesus revealed that it is this love that God wants to give everyone, without exception. George Herbert picks this truth up well in his poem:

Love bade me welcome; yet my soul drew back, guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack from my first entrance in,

Drew near to me, sweetly questioning if I lacked anything.

‘A guest’, I answered, ‘worthy to be here’. Love said, ‘You shall be he’.

‘I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear, I cannot look on Thee’.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply, ‘Who made the eyes, but I?’

‘Truth, Lord, but I have marred them; let my shame go where it doth deserve’.

‘And know you not’, says Love, ‘who bore the blame?’ ‘My dear, then I shall serve’.

‘You must sit down’, says Love, ‘and taste my meat’. So I did sit and eat.

Stanza Nine

- ⁶⁵You have dealt well with your servant,
just as you promised.**
- ⁶⁶Teach me right discernment and knowledge,
to put faith in your commandments.**
- ⁶⁷Before I was humbled I went astray,
but now I obey your word.**
- ⁶⁸You are good and your deeds are good;
teach me how to obey.**
- ⁶⁹The arrogant smear my name with lies,
but with all my heart I keep your precepts.**
- ⁷⁰Their hearts are cold and closed to good,
but I delight in your law.**
- ⁷¹It is good for me that I was humbled,
so that I might learn your statutes.**
- ⁷²Your law is better to me than untold wealth.**

The psalmist talks about being 'humbled' (verses 67 and 71). Praying this psalm with Jesus we hear his invitation: 'Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls' (Matthew 11:28-29). To be humble is to know that all we are and all we have is gift. It is to know the joy of being dependent, knowing that the One on whom we ultimately depend is God, our Loving Father/Mother. The only hope for the proud is to learn humility (see Matthew 23:12). Paul exhorts us: 'As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience' (Colossians 3:12).

'Teach me how to obey' (verse 68). Praying this psalm with Jesus, we turn to him and ask him to teach us how to pray. When his disciples asked this of Jesus he replied by telling us to begin, not by looking at ourselves, but by looking towards God, allowing ourselves to be caught up in awe, and wanting the whole world to enjoy God's holiness and to know the joy of doing God's will and so bringing about the reign of God's love (Luke 11:1-2). Only then are we to think of ourselves, trusting our daily needs to God's love, confident in God's forgiveness, and in the knowledge that God will be with us in our trials.

Stanza Ten

**⁷³It was your hands that fashioned me.
Give me understanding that I may know your ways
and obey your commandments.**

**⁷⁴Those who revere you see me and rejoice,
because I hope in your word.**

**⁷⁵How right your judgments, O GOD,
how wisely you humble me.**

**⁷⁶Comfort me with your covenant love,
just as you promised.**

**⁷⁷Let your tender compassion cover me, that I may live,
for your law is my delight.**

**⁷⁸Let the arrogant be put to shame,
because they undermine me with guile.
As for me, I meditate on your precepts.**

**⁷⁹Let those who revere you turn to me,
so that they may know your decrees.**

⁸⁰Keep me true to your statutes, free of all shame.

‘It was your hands that fashioned me’ (verse 73). In Psalm 64, the psalmist prays: ‘O GOD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand’ (Psalm 64, verse 8). The wise teacher writes: ‘Like clay in the hand of the potter, to be molded as he pleases, so all are in the hand of their Maker, to be given whatever he decides’ (Sirach 33:13).

‘How wisely you humbled me’ (verse 75; see Stanza Nine).

For a reflection on ‘comfort’ (verse 76) see Psalm 86, pages 266-267.

For a reflection on ‘covenant love’ (verse 76), see Psalm 85, pages 261-262.

For a reflection on God’s ‘tender compassion (verse 77; Hebrew rhm) see Psalm 85, page 261-262.

The psalmist pleads to God to ‘cover him’ with God’s tender compassion. We think of the cover of the ark in the inner temple and the plea to be with God there under the protecting wings of the cherubim. See the reflection on being in the ‘shade of God’s outstretched wings’ in Psalm 61, page 186.

Stanza Eleven

⁸¹I yearn for your salvation; I hope in your word.

⁸²My eyes grow dim from watching for your promise.
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

⁸³I never forget your statutes.

⁸⁴How many days do I have left?
When will you punish those who persecute me?

⁸⁵The arrogant scheme to trap me; they flout your law.

⁸⁶Your commandments are true. My enemies know only lies.
I am persecuted without cause; be my strength!

⁸⁷They have almost made an end of me;
but I have not forsaken your precepts.

⁸⁸In your covenant love spare my life,
so that I may keep your decrees.

The psalmist knows the connection between covenant love and wants to keep God's decrees. He knows God. This covenant love is his strength.

Stanza Twelve

⁸⁹**You, O GOD, exist for ever;**

your word is firmly fixed in heaven.

⁹⁰**Your faithfulness endures to all generations.**

You have established the earth, and it stands firm.

⁹¹**According to your decree all exist to serve you.**

⁹²**If your law had not been my delight,**

I would have perished in my misery.

⁹³**I never forget your precepts,**

for by them you give me life.

⁹⁴**Save me, for I am yours.**

I seek your precepts.

⁹⁵**The wicked lie in wait to destroy me,**

but I observe your decrees.

⁹⁶**I have seen a limit to all perfection,**

but your commandment is boundless.

'Your faithfulness endures to all generations' (verse 90). For a reflection on God's 'faithfulness' see Psalm 116, page 357-359.

'Save me, for I am yours' (verse 94). For a reflection on salvation see Psalm 62, pages 189-190. On the universal dimension of salvation see Psalm 87, pages 268-272.

'I have seen a limit to all perfection' (verse 96). Jesus invites us to 'be perfect as your Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). The kind of perfection to which we aspire is the kind of perfection we see in God as revealed by Jesus: perfection in the gift of self, perfection in love. We are limited in our capacity to love, until we can say with Paul: 'It is no longer I who live. It is the Messiah who lives in me' (Galatians 2:21).

Stanza Thirteen

- ⁹⁷**How I love your law!**
It is my meditation all day long.
- ⁹⁸**Your commandment makes me wiser than my foes,**
for it is always with me.
- ⁹⁹**I have more understanding than my teachers,**
for I ponder your decrees.
- ¹⁰⁰**I understand more than the aged,**
because I keep your precepts.
- ¹⁰¹**I keep my steps from every false way,**
in order to follow your word.
- ¹⁰²**I do not turn away from your judgments,**
for you are my teacher.
- ¹⁰³**How sweet are your words to my taste,**
sweeter than honey.
- ¹⁰⁴**Through your precepts I get understanding;**
and so I hate every false way.

The Pharisees in Jesus' time wore, strapped to their foreheads and to their arms, containers holding key texts from their sacred writings (Matthew 23:5). In the Book of Exodus the people are instructed to remember God's freeing them from slavery in Egypt: 'It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of GOD may be on your lips; for with a strong hand GOD brought you out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:9).

Likewise Deuteronomy: 'Hear, O Israel: GOD is our God, GOD alone. You shall love your GOD with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates' (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; see 11:18).

They wanted to remind themselves to keep God's law before their eyes and to carry out the law in their actions. Here the psalmist wants to keep the law 'always with me' (verse 98). He 'loves God's law' (verse 97) because it gives meaning to his life and keeps him grounded in God's love. 'How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey' (verse 103).

**¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp for my feet
a light for my path.**

**¹⁰⁶I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to observe your righteous judgments.**

**¹⁰⁷I am severely afflicted.
Give me, O GOD, the life you promise.**

**¹⁰⁸Accept, O GOD, my offerings of praise,
and teach me your judgments.**

**¹⁰⁹My life is continually at risk,
but I do not forget your law.**

**¹¹⁰For me the wicked lay snares,
but I do not stray from your precepts.**

**¹¹¹Your decrees are my heritage for ever;
they are the joy of my heart.**

**¹¹²I incline my heart to perform your statutes
for ever, to the end.**

‘Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path’ (verse 105). For a reflection on God as our ‘light’ see Psalm 27, page 95.

The psalmist knows that to receive ‘the life promised by God’ (verse 107), he must follow the path laid out for him by God, and revealed in the law. This is not because God’s offer of love is conditional, but because this is the only way we can open ourselves to receive the unconditional offer.

‘Accept, O GOD, my offerings of praise’ (verse 108). The Hebrew title for the book of psalms is ‘songs of praise.’

Stanza Fifteen

**¹¹³I have no love for the deceitful:
my love is for your law.**

**¹¹⁴You are my hiding place, my shield;
I hope in your word.**

**¹¹⁵Go away from me, you who do evil,
that I may keep the commandments of my God.**

**¹¹⁶Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live.
Let me not fail to attain that for which I wait.**

**¹¹⁷Hold me up, that I may be safe
and have regard always for your statutes.**

**¹¹⁸You spurn all who swerve away from your statutes;
their cunning is in vain.**

**¹¹⁹All the wicked of the earth you count as dross;
therefore I cling to your decrees.**

**¹²⁰In awe [‘fear’] of you I tremble,
and I revere your judgments.**

We reflected on God’s secret hiding place (verse 114) when reflecting on Psalm 31, page 105. This is the place Jesus told us to go to when we want to pray (Matthew 6:6). He promised that he would be there along with his Father and the Spirit of love that is their communion (John 14:16-23).

‘Let me not fail to attain that for which I wait’ (verse 116). See our reflection on ‘hope’ in Psalm 62, pages 190-191).

On ‘fear of GOD’ (verse 120) see the reflection on Psalm 2, page 23.

Stanza Sixteen

¹²¹**I live by justice and right;
do not abandon me to my oppressors.**

¹²²**Stand up for your servant's welfare;
do not let the godless oppress me.**

¹²³**My eyes tire from watching for your salvation,
and for the fulfillment of your promise.**

¹²⁴**Deal with your servant according to your covenant love,
and teach me your statutes.**

¹²⁵**I am your servant; give me understanding,
so that I may know your decrees.**

¹²⁶**It is time for GOD to act, for they are breaking your law.**

¹²⁷**Truly I love your commandments
more than the finest gold.**

¹²⁸**I direct my steps by all your precepts;
I hate ways that are false.**

For a reflection on 'justice' (verse 121) see Psalm 82, pages 249-251 and Psalm 85, page 263.

For a reflection on 'salvation' (verse 123) see Psalm 62, page 189-190 and Psalm 87, page 268-272.

For a reflection on 'covenant love' (verse 124) see Psalm 85, pages 261-262 and Psalm 61, page 187.

The psalmist calls himself God's 'servant' (verses 122, 124 and 125). Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall his gesture of washing his disciples' feet at the Last Supper – the action of a servant. He asked us to follow his example: to serve each other. However, he went on to say: 'I am not now calling you servants. I am calling you friends, because I have revealed to you everything that I have heard from my Father' (John 15:15). In its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, the Second Vatican Council wrote: 'From the fulness of his love, God addresses us as his friends, and moves among us in order to invite and receive us into his own company' (*Dei Verbum* n.2).

It is in our coming to know Jesus more intimately that we will come to know all he heard from the Father, having understanding to know God's decrees.

Stanza Seventeen

¹²⁹**Your decrees are wonderful;
I guard them with my life.**

¹³⁰**The unfolding of your word gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple.**

¹³¹**Sighing for you, I long for your commandments.**

¹³²**Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I love to call on you.**

¹³³**Keep my steps steady according to your word,
never let evil master me.**

¹³⁴**Redeem me from human oppression,
that I may keep your precepts.**

¹³⁵**Make your face shine upon your servant,
and teach me your statutes.**

¹³⁶**My eyes stream with tears
over those who do not keep your law.**

‘The unfolding of your word gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple’ (verse 130). Praying this with Jesus we recall how ‘Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will” (Luke 10:21).

‘Sighing for you, I long for your commandments’ (verse 131). For a reflection on ‘longing’ see Psalm 11, page 45, Psalm 42, pages 132-134, and Psalm 63, pages 193-196.

‘Be gracious to me’ (verse 132). For a reflection on God’s graciousness see Psalm 85, pages 261-262.

‘Make your face shine upon your servants’ (verse 135). For a reflection of the Face of God see Psalm 31, pages 104-105.

‘My eyes stream with tears over those who do not keep your law’ (verse 136). Praying this with Jesus we recall the following scene: ‘As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God” (Luke 19:41-44).

Stanzas Eighteen to Twenty-one repeat themes already present in earlier stanzas.

Stanza Eighteen

- ¹³⁷**You are righteous, O GOD, and your judgments are right.**
¹³⁸**You have established your decrees in righteousness and truth.**
¹³⁹**Zeal consumes me because my foes forget your word.**
¹⁴⁰**Your promise is well tested, and your servant loves it.**
- ¹⁴¹**I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts.**
¹⁴²**Your righteousness is everlasting, and your law is true.**
- ¹⁴³**When trouble and anguish come upon me,
your commandments are my delight.**
¹⁴⁴**Your decrees are for ever righteous;
give me understanding that I may live.**

Stanza Nineteen

- ¹⁴⁵**With all my heart I cry.
Answer me, O GOD. I will keep your statutes.**
- ¹⁴⁶**I cry to you; save me, that I may observe your decrees.**
¹⁴⁷**I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your word.**
- ¹⁴⁸**I am awake through the night,
meditating on your promise.**
¹⁴⁹**In your covenant love hear my voice, O GOD;
in your justice preserve my life.**
- ¹⁵⁰**Those who want to harm me draw near;
they are far from your law.**
¹⁵¹**But you, O GOD, are close,
your commandments are true.**
¹⁵²**Long ago I learned about your decrees
that you fixed for all time.**

Stanza Twenty

- ¹⁵³Look on my oppression and rescue me,
for I do not forget your law.
- ¹⁵⁴Plead my cause and redeem me;
give me the life you promised.
- ¹⁵⁵For the wicked salvation is far off,
for they spurn your statutes.
- ¹⁵⁶Great is your tender compassion, O GOD.
give me life according to your justice.
- ¹⁵⁷Many are my persecutors and my adversaries,
yet I do not swerve from your decrees.
[¹⁵⁸I look at the faithless with disgust,
because they do not keep your commands.]
- ¹⁵⁹See how I love your precepts.
Let me live in your covenant love.
- ¹⁶⁰Your word is founded on truth;
your righteous judgments endure for ever.

Stanza Twenty-one

- ¹⁶¹Princes persecute me without cause,
but my heart stands in awe of your word.
- ¹⁶²I rejoice at your word like one who finds a treasure.
- ¹⁶³I hate and abhor all falsehood, because I love your law.
- ¹⁶⁴Seven times a day I praise you for your just judgments.
- ¹⁶⁵Great peace they have who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.
- ¹⁶⁶I hope for your salvation, O GOD,
and I fulfill your commandments.
- ¹⁶⁷I keep your decrees; I love them dearly.
- ¹⁶⁸I keep your precepts and decrees,
for all my ways are before you.

Stanza Twenty-two

- ¹⁶⁹Let my cry come before you, O GOD;
give me understanding according to your word.
- ¹⁷⁰Let my supplication come before you;
rescue me according to your promise.
- ¹⁷¹My lips pour forth praise,
because you teach me your statutes.
- ¹⁷²My tongue sings of your promise,
for all your commandments are just.
- ¹⁷³Reach out, ready to help me,
for I have chosen your precepts.
- ¹⁷⁴I long for your salvation, O GOD,
your law is my delight.
- ¹⁷⁵Let me live that I may praise you,
let your judgments help me.
- ¹⁷⁶If I go astray like a lost sheep, seek out your servant,
for I never forget your commandments.

Praying verse 175, we recall Paul's words about setting our hope on Christ so as to live for the praise of God's glory (Ephesians 1:12).

Praying the final verse of Psalm 119 with Jesus, we remember how he went out to rescue the 'lost sheep.' We read: 'When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Matthew 9:36). Jesus speaks of himself as 'the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep' (John 10: 11).

We recall his parable: "'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance' (Luke 15:3-7).

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews calls Jesus 'the great shepherd of the sheep' (Hebrews 13:20). Peter writes: 'You were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls' (1 Peter 2:25).

Praying Psalm 120 (119) with Jesus

¹In my distress I cry to YOU, O GOD, seeking your response:

²'O GOD, save me from lying lips and a deceitful tongue.'

³What do you expect to receive from God,
you who use words to deceive?

⁴A warrior's sharp arrows, with blazing, red-hot coals!

⁵Woe is me, that I live as an alien in Meshech,
dwelling among the tents of Kedar!

⁶For too long I have dwelt among those who hate peace.

⁷I call for peace, but they are for war.

This is the first of the psalms that bear the title: 'A Song of Ascents' (Psalms 120-134). A likely explanation of the title is that these psalms were sung in the caravans by pilgrims who were making their way up to the mountainous regions of Judah, to Jerusalem and the temple. Here in Psalm 120 the psalmist is either living in a foreign land, or the behaviour of his neighbours makes it feel that way. He is complaining how hard it is to live as an alien among people who have no regard for truth or peace. In his distress he is crying out to GOD.

Verse 3 appears to be a question. In fact it is a form of oath taking. It is the equivalent of saying: 'Let double be done to me if you are not punished!' The desired punishment follows in verse 4.

For a reflection on 'peace' (verse 7) see Psalm 85, page 263. Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall his promise: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives' (John 14:27). Paul says of Jesus: 'He is our peace' (Ephesians 2:14). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews offers the following exhortation: 'Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord' (Hebrews 12:14).

Praying Psalm 121 (120) with Jesus

¹I lift up my eyes to the mountains.

Will my help come from there?

²My help comes from GOD,

the Maker of heaven and earth.

³GOD will not let you stumble.

Your guard does not sleep.

⁴Israel's guard neither slumbers nor sleeps.

⁵GOD is your guard, your shade,

always at your side.

⁶The sun will not harm you in the day,

nor the moon in the night.

⁷GOD will keep you from evil,

watching over you always.

⁸GOD will watch over you

as you go out and as you return,

now and forever.

The psalmist has a particularly fine sensitivity to rhythm. Among other elements, he picks up the final phrase of one verse and uses it to introduce the following verse, which expands the idea. The key theme is that GOD is the one who guards [Hebrew *samar*] Israel. This idea is expressed in the name 'Samaria', given to the capital city of the northern kingdom. The statement 'GOD is your guard' (verse 5) is exactly at the centre of the psalm. The psalmist also uses polarity (sun-moon, day-night, going-coming, now-forever) to emphasise the all-encompassing nature of his trust in GOD. This is the second of the psalms that bear the title: 'A Song of Ascents' (Psalms 120-134).

Verses 3 to 8 appear to be words of reassurance from the leader of the pilgrimage.

Special vigilance was expected of the guard during the hours of darkness (verses 3-4). We can all sleep securely, because GOD is watching over us. We call on God 'Awake, awake!' (Isaiah 51:9), but it is we who have not been vigilant, and so God responds 'Rouse yourself, rouse yourself!' (Isaiah 51:17), 'Awake, awake!' (Isaiah 52:1).

That GOD is watching over us is a theme often found in the psalms.

'Guard me as the pupil of your eye;
hide me in the shade of your wings' (Psalm 17:8).

'GOD keeps guard over all their bones;
not one of them will be broken' (Psalm 34:20).

'GOD will command his angels
to guard you in all your ways' (Psalm 91:11).

'GOD guards the lives of the faithful' (Psalm 97:10).

'Guard me, O GOD, from the hands of the wicked;
protect me from the violent' (Psalm 140:4).

'GOD watches over strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow' (Psalm 146:9).

In verse 1 the psalmist assured us that GOD, our guard, is not limited by space. In verses 7-8 he states that GOD's protection is not limited by time.

As we pray this psalm with Jesus we hear him pray: 'I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I guarded them' (John 17:11-12).

Paul assures us: 'The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one' (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Praying Psalm 122 (121) with Jesus

¹What joy when I heard them say,
'Let us go to GOD's house.'

²And now we are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

³Jerusalem, you are built as a city
so integrated and compact.

⁴To you the tribes go up, the tribes of GOD.
Israel's law it is, there to praise GOD.

⁵There is the seat of judgment,
the throne of the house of David.

⁶For the peace of Jerusalem pray:
'Prosperity for all who love you!

⁷May there be peace within your walls,
security within your towers.'

⁸For love of family and friends
I pray: 'Peace be within you!'

⁹For love of the house of GOD,
I pray for your welfare.

The pilgrim is singing of Jerusalem. Verses 1-5 focus on the first part of the name 'Jerusalem.' 'Jeru' derives from the Hebrew *yarâ* meaning 'to lay stones', 'to found'. It is similar in sound to the Hebrew word for city, *'îr*. Jerusalem is called simply 'the city' in Psalm 87:1 and 3. Verse 1 recalls the pilgrim's joy when he was invited to join the pilgrimage. Verse 2 expresses his delight at having arrived at his destination. Verses 6-9 focus on '*salem*' (peace), the second part of the name 'Jeru-salem.' For a reflection on peace see Psalm 85, page 263.

Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall his lament: 'As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!" (Luke 19:41); 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!' (Matthew 23:37). We reflected on Jesus' love for Jerusalem in Psalm 2, page 23.

Praying Psalm 123 (122) with Jesus

¹I lift up my eyes to you,
to you who are enthroned in the heavens.

²A male servant watches his master's hand,
a female servant, the hand of her mistress.
So our eyes look to our God,
waiting for a sign of God's favour.

³Have mercy upon us, O GOD, have mercy upon us.

⁴We have had more than we can take
of the scorn and contempt of the proud.

The psalmist is being humiliated (verse 4). Does he belong to a social class in Judah that is being humiliated by others of their own people (see Nehemiah 5)? He looks to God, knowing that his real value is in relationship to God, and that God will never humiliate him.

'Favour' (verse 2) and 'mercy' (verse 3) translate the Hebrew *hanan* (to be gracious). For a reflection on graciousness see Psalm 85, pages 261-262. The Greek Septuagint translates verse 3 'Kyrie eleison' – words used in the Christian liturgy.

Praying this psalm with Jesus we think of him raised by the Father and enjoying divine intimacy 'enthroned in the heavens' (verse 1). We 'lift up our eyes to him' (verse 1), wanting to share his intimacy with God (verse 4). See the reflection on 'Love's gazing' in Psalm 11, page 46.

We keep our eyes on Jesus for we want to do the will of his Father as he reveals it to us. We want to be like servants, ready to do the will of their master or mistress. Jesus was 'obedient to the point of dying' (Philippians 2:8). We pray for the grace to share in Jesus' obedience.

Obedience is basic to Christian living

Obedience to God is as basic to prayer (including, of course, praying the psalms) as it is to every other aspect of our lives. Since 'there are many paths along this way of the Spirit' (Teresa Foundations 5.1), it is important that we follow the path along which God draws us. The goal of prayer is communion with God which John of the Cross defines as 'an habitual and loving attentiveness to the will of God' (Spiritual Canticle 28.10). John is very direct: 'What does it profit you to give God one thing if God asks another of you? Consider what it is that God wants, and then do it. You will as a result better satisfy your heart than with whatever it is towards which you yourself are inclined (Sayings of light and love 70).

Teresa concludes her Life with the following prayer: 'May it please the Lord that I might succeed in doing the Lord's will in everything' (Life 40.24). In her Interior Castle she writes: 'The whole aim of any person who is beginning prayer – and don't forget this because it is very important – should be to prepare yourself with determination and every possible effort to bring your will into conformity with God's will. The greatest perfection attainable along the spiritual path lies in this conformity ... In perfect conformity to God's will lies all our good (Interior Castle II.1.8).

This teaching on the radical importance of obedience is repeated by two Carmelite saints from the modern era. Having mentioned her spiritual yearnings, Therese of Lisieux writes: 'Now abandonment alone guides me. I have no other compass! I can no longer ask for anything with fervour except the accomplishment of God's will in my soul, without any creature being able to set obstacles in the way' (Story of a Soul). Her contemporary, Elizabeth of the Trinity writes: 'The soul must surrender itself to the Divine will completely, passionately, so as to will nothing else but what God wills' (Heaven in Faith). In the final retreat before her death, she uses the image of harp string that is tuned so that it can sound the note intended by Christ when he chooses to play upon it, and she adds: 'The soul remains under his touch like a lyre, and all his gifts to it are like so many strings which vibrate to sing, day and night, the praise of his glory' (Complete Works Volume 1, page 158).

The importance of listening attentively

Communion in love between two people is possible only to the extent that they are able to listen to each other and are committed to do so. It is the transcendent God who takes the initiative in communicating with us, and God does so through God's Word and through God's Spirit. How can we respond if we are not listening for God's invitation to share God's life and to enjoy the intimacy of communion with God in prayer?

It is not accidental that the word for obedience in the Hebrew Bible is identical with the word for listening. Listening from the heart is essentially what obedience requires. In the Greek New Testament the word 'to obey' is based on the word 'to listen' with a prefix which adds the idea of listening from a position of submission. Our English word 'obedience' derives from the Latin, which, once again, is based on the word for 'listening'. In Latin the prefix 'ob' adds the idea of listening that is from right up close. To obey God is to be close to God and to be listening for the slightest expression of God's will, with the desire and intention of doing what God inspires us to do with all our heart and with joy, knowing that God's will is the most liberating thing we can do.

Jesus' obedience and the obedience he expects of his disciples

Jesus, whose prayer we are invited to share, constantly insists on the central importance in his life and in ours of wanting only what God wants and of being committed in all things to doing God's will. In essence Jesus is calling us to be attentive to the movements of God in our hearts and in our world. The reason for this is obvious. God is love and God is creating us moment by moment in love and for love. To be guided by God's inspiration is to be guided along the path of holiness. To resist God's inspiration is to resist the gravity of grace drawing us into divine communion.

Let us listen to Jesus as he resists the tempter: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4). Elsewhere we hear Jesus say: 'My food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to complete his work (John 4:34). It was the same, even when he found himself facing crucifixion: 'Jesus threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want ... My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done' (Matthew 26:39, 42).

Jesus asks the same of his disciples: 'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven' (Matthew 7:21).

Obedience from the heart

God does not want us to obey blindly or automatically, without engaging our heart. God's will is discovered in the circumstances of our lives, but always invites a response from the heart. This is what we mean by conscience: an attentive listening to the movements of our heart that are inspired by God. If we are attentive to our heart and listen to the directions of God that are picked up by our conscience, and if we humbly and faithfully respond from our heart to these inspirations, we are promised a special blessedness.

If we are wondering how we are to listen to God and how we are to know God's will, we have the basis for an answer already. God is inspiring each of us, pouring God's loving Spirit into our hearts in the very best way, and wants us to welcome this gift and respond. We do not have to begin the conversation. Our primary task is to listen. To do this, we must, first of all, learn to live an attentive, reflective life, and to do this we must resist the temptation to live our life away from our hearts, for God is speaking to our heart.

The kanji for the Japanese 'busy' is made up of two elements. One stands for heart and the other for destruction. If we are 'busy' we are in danger of destroying our heart. Most of us live in cities, away from the natural, and generally slow-moving, rhythms of nature. Life is getting faster and faster, and it getting easier to flick a switch and fill up our time with whatever distraction is on hand. The speed of change has swept us up and gobbled us up. It is possible to spend a whole day without encountering moments that invite us to quiet reflection. We sense that this is not good. We sense that our heart is being destroyed. At the same time, to call a halt and make time and space to connect with our inner spirit can be quite difficult. At least many people find it so. My sense is that this is mostly because we are afraid of what we might find when we go deep into our hearts. This is our biggest mistake. When we are halfway in we do discover stuff we are not happy with. If only we dared to go right in! For then we would find what God sees. Then we would share in God's delight. Then we would discover the fountains of energy that would enable us to make the changes that are necessary if we are to do what Jesus wants us to do: 'to live to the full' (John 10:10). If only we would make space for prayer, we would be in a position to hear God and respond to God, the source of our life who initiates the conversation and the communion.

Listening to others

Furthermore, we must realise that if God is speaking to us God is speaking also to others. We should listen attentively to those whose words issue from their prayer, for God speaks to us through them. In fact, because we are so prone to self-deception, God will always confirm God's inspirations to us by also inspiring those who genuinely care for our soul and are concerned for our spiritual growth.

John of the Cross writes: 'God is so content that the rule and direction of human beings be through other human beings, and that we be governed by human reason, that God definitely does not want us to bestow entire credence upon supernatural communications, or be confirmed in their strength and security, until they pass through the human channel of the mouth of another human being. As often as God reveals something, God confers upon the soul a kind of inclination to manifest this to someone appropriate. Until this is done, we usually go without complete satisfaction, for it is not received from another person like ourselves' (Ascent II.22.9).

We find an example of this in the conversion of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus. He experienced Jesus in a dramatic and extraordinary way. Yet when he asked: 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' (Acts 22:10), Jesus did not tell him directly. Rather he told him to go into Damascus, and there a man called Ananias would tell him what to do.

So the more attentive we are to others and especially to the community of faith in which Christ has promised to be present, the more we will be able to listen to 'every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matthew 4:4). To be obedient, therefore, we must be attentive to all the ways in which God speaks to us. While we listen to others, however, it is essential that we are also in touch with our own heart and listen there for the echo inside us, the echo that says 'Yes' or 'No' or 'Perhaps' to what we hear. The Spirit helps us to discern God's word in the many words that continually impact upon us.

Both Teresa and John consider the role of a spiritual director or confessor. We are, indeed, blessed if we can find a soul-companion to whom we can open our heart, holding nothing back and knowing that we are loved whatever our weakness or confusion. This is a safeguard against self-reliance. It offers to God a channel of grace that is free from our inherent capacity for self-deception.

Being a soul-companion for another person is a delicate art. People are as diverse as flowers and God has mysterious ways of leading each one into communion. If someone has entrusted the care of their soul to you, you should act towards them out of spiritual love: a love that is free of self-interest, seeking only their spiritual good. If we are to be helped by a soul-companion, we will need to have faith that God is working in and through them. We need to be simple and straightforward, revealing the state of our soul as we see it. How can the director, confessor or soul-companion be an instrument of the Physician of our soul if we are not honest or are selective in what we choose to reveal? If we have chosen to open our heart in trust to a spiritual guide with whom our soul feels at home, God will not let us down if we humbly listen to the words that come to us through the one to whom we are opening our soul.

As we listen to his or her words, let us listen to the echo of those words, the echo that arises in our heart. If we are humble, honest and prayerful, the Spirit of him who loves us will use the director's response to guide us.

Discerning what it is that God wills

Discerning God's will is sometimes quite difficult. People can be very confident that they are doing God's will, when it is obvious that they are deceiving themselves. On the other hand, people can be very unsure of themselves when it is clear that they are doing God's will. How do we know? What does doing God's will look like? Are there signs that show us that we are not doing God's will?

Much of what we have already touched on in this reflection is relevant here. We need to live an attentive, reflective life in touch with our own heart. We need to have an expectation that God is revealing God's will to us, and we need to be listening for it. However, we need to guard against putting too much trust in our own convictions. The fact that we judge that we are living a prayerful life is no guarantee that it is God's will that we are pursuing in our day to day life. Since God's will is revealed to us also through others, our listening to others, including spiritual direction, is essential.

Suffice to add here that we must see what happens when we do what we think God is calling us to do. Paul's list of the fruits of the Spirit in his letter to the Galatians is useful here. He writes: 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5:22-23).

If it truly is God's will that we are doing, we will find ourselves growing in these virtues. If, by contrast, we find ourselves becoming less loving, we should have another look. It is likely that we are being deceived and are in fact resisting God's inspiration and not carrying out God's will. Likewise, if we are experiencing a disturbance and lack of joy that won't go away, we should look again at what we are doing. If we are doing God's will, even when this involves the cross, there will be a profound joy and a profound peace that sustains us below the pain and difficulty. Jesus felt abandoned on the cross but he was still able to address God as 'Father'; he was still able to commend his spirit into God's care. The same goes for the other virtues mentioned by Paul. Jesus said: 'It is by their fruits that you will know them'(Matthew 7:16).

Obedying a loving God

God is love. God is no lover of distraction, waste and mediocrity. God loves us and wants us to live as we have seen Jesus live: lives that are self-giving, life-giving and love-giving. God is love. Created in the image of God, we, too, are love. Love is not something we have. It is what we are. No wonder we want to receive love and give love. No wonder we are profoundly disturbed when we find ourselves unable to give or receive love. May we learn, like Jesus, to want God's will with all our minds, hearts, soul and strength. After all, it is God who creates us, holds us in being and draws us into the fullness of divine communion. To welcome God's offering of love is the path to maturity and to peace. It is the way of holiness. Wanting what God wants is wanting what is truly best for us and for our world.

Praying Psalm 124 (123) with Jesus

¹If GOD had not been on our side –
this is Israel's song –

²if GOD had not been on our side,
when enemies attacked us,
³they would have swallowed us alive,
when their anger was kindled.

⁴The flood would have swept us away,
the torrent gone over us;
⁵we would have been overwhelmed
by the raging waters.

⁶Blessed be GOD,
who did not give us as a prey to their teeth.

⁷We escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowler.
The snare was broken, and we escaped.

⁸We called on GOD, who came to our aid,
GOD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

This is a hymn of thanksgiving to GOD for having saved the people from extreme danger.

The psalmist has experienced 'GOD on his side' (verse 1). Jesus' disciples came to see this even more profoundly through their experience of Jesus. So can we as we pray the psalm with him. At the Last Supper Jesus promised that after his death he would go before them into Galilee (Matthew 26:32), and his last words to them were: 'I am with you always to the end of the age' (Matthew 28:20).

Fire (verse 3) and water (verses 4-5) are the two elements most commonly used to describe destruction.

For the image of a bird escaping from the snare of a fowler (verse 7) see Psalm 57:6 and Psalm 91:1.

For a reflection on salvation see Psalm 62, pages 189-190.

Verse 8 is found also in Psalm 121:2.

Praying Psalm 125 (124) with Jesus

¹Those who trust in GOD are like Mount Zion.
They stand firm for ever.

²As the mountains encircle Jerusalem,
so you, Lord, embrace your people,
now and always.

³The rule of the wicked will not rest
on the land allotted to the just,
lest the righteous turn to evil.

⁴Do good, O GOD,
to those who are good, whose hearts are true.

⁵Peace be upon Israel!

Omitted

⁵Those who turn aside to their crooked ways,
may GOD send them to join the wicked.

This is a hymn of trust (verses 1-3), leading to a prayer of petition (verses 4-5). The prayer arises out of a situation in which some Jews, including those in power (verse 3), have given up their faith under foreign influence. It may come from the period of the Maccabees. The author looks to God's justice to set things right.

For a reflection on trust see Psalm 27, page 95.

The psalmist knows that God's judgment is just. He prays, therefore, that God would see to it that those who 'turn aside to their crooked ways' would suffer the judgment of the wicked (verse 5). We hear Jesus reaching out to them in love, wanting them to repent of their evildoing and find life for themselves, to the benefit of all. As Christians we join him in this prayer.

For a reflection on justice see Psalm 82, pages 249-251.

For a reflection on good government see Psalm 101, page 310.

For a reflection on peace see Psalm 85, page 263.

Praying Psalm 126 (125) with Jesus

¹When GOD restored the fortunes of Zion,
it seemed like a dream.

²Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
on our lips there were songs.

It was said among the nations,
'What marvels GOD worked for them.'

³Indeed, GOD has done great things for us.
We celebrate with joy.

⁴Restore our fortunes, O GOD,
like the watercourses in the desert.

⁵May those who are sowing in tears
reap with shouts of joy.

⁶They went out weeping,
bearing seed for sowing.
They come back, they come back, full of song,
carrying their sheaves.

This is a hymn of joy at the wonder of the return from Exile, when GOD faithfully carried out his promise to restore the fortunes of his chosen people. It was almost too good to be true (verse 1). Back home there is still much to be done. Hence the plea for a further restoration (verses 4-5), for an abundant harvest of joy. For a reflection on joy see Psalm 65, page 201.

Verses 5-6 recall an earlier psalm: 'Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the dawn' (Psalm 30:5).

Psalm 126 reminds us that the marvels God works, the great things done for the people are actually in the toing and froing of everyday life, in the everyday ordinary yet absolutely essential sowing of seed and reaping of the harvest. This is another reminder of a God who is very much 'with us' (see the commentary on Psalm 124).

Praying Psalm 127 (126) with Jesus

¹If GOD does not build the house,
in vain do its builders labour.
If GOD does not guard the city,
in vain do the guards keep vigil.

²In vain is your earlier rising, your going later to rest,
you who toil for the bread you eat.
Those loved by GOD
receive love's gifts even while they slumber.

³Children are a gift from GOD,
a blessing for those who bear them.
⁴Like arrows in the hand of an archer
are children born to the young.

⁵Blessed and happy are those
whose quiver is filled with these arrows.
They will have no cause for shame
when they face their foes at the gate.

The psalmist is pointing out that all our human efforts are worthless if we are not relying on GOD. Verse 2 ('Those loved by God receive love's gifts even when they slumber') reminds us that what ultimately matters is our communion with GOD.

Where the above translation has 'children' in verses 3 and 4 the Hebrew has 'sons'. They were ignorant of the process of procreation. They thought the male was the only source of the seed of life. They thought that the role of the female was to receive and nurture this life. In light of what we now know there is no place for this cultural bias favouring the male.

Praying Psalm 128 (127) with Jesus

¹How good it is to revere ['fear'] GOD,
to live in accordance with God's will.

²You will eat the fruit of your labour.
In everything you will prosper.

³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
in the heart of your home.
Your children like shoots of the olive,
around your table.

⁴May this blessing be on those
who revere ['fear'] GOD:

⁵May GOD bless you from Zion.
May you see Jerusalem prosper.

⁶May you see your children's children.'

On Israel, peace!

This is a psalm celebrating the positive value of work and the blessing and the joy of family life, including the family of Israel centred in the mother-city, Jerusalem.

One theme expressed in this psalm is that genuine communion with God involves ethical obligations, 'living in accordance with God's will' (verse 1). This involves 'labour' (verse 2). If we obey God's wise will, our lives will be blessed and happy.

Another theme is that of the vine and the olive (verse 3). The vine is a symbol of the joy experienced by Israel in the love of God for his people Israel (Isaiah 32:12). The olive is a symbol of fruitful Israel (Jeremiah 11:16).

The blessing and the intimacy of which this psalm speaks invites reflection on the Church as the bride of Christ.

'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish ... For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body' (Ephesians 5:25-27, 29-30).

Saint Cassiodorus writes of the ultimate reality of the Church:

‘The gathering of all faithful saints in one soul and one heart, the bride of Christ, the Jerusalem of the life to come.’

It also invites us to reflect upon an ancient tradition in the Christian community which speaks of God and of Christ as our Mother. In his commentary on Psalm 101:7, ‘I am made like to the pelican in the desert’ (the Hebrew is Psalm 102:7, and has ‘owl’), Augustine writes: ‘Christ exercises fatherly authority and maternal love just as Paul is also father and mother ... through his gospel preaching.’ Augustine is referring to Paul’s statement to the Thessalonian community: ‘We were gentle among you, like a mother tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God ... As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children’ (1 Thessalonians 2:7-11).

Saint Anselm writes:

‘You, too, good Jesus, are not you also a mother? Is not he a mother who like a hen gathers his chicks beneath his wings (Matthew 23:37)? Truly, Lord, you are a mother too’ (*Proslogion*, line 446).

For a reflection on ‘Fear of GOD’ (verses 1 and 4) see Psalm 2, page 23; also Psalm 33, page 109 and Psalm 47, page 145.

For a reflection on peace see Psalm 85, page 263.

Reading Psalm 129 (128) with Jesus

Part One: The oppression suffered by the people

¹They attacked me from my youth – so says Israel –

²but they have not prevailed against me.

³They ploughed my back with deep furrows,

⁴but GOD, who is just,

has broken the yoke of the wicked.

Part Two: The psalmist wants to see the oppressors punished

⁵May all who hate Zion be repulsed.

⁶Let them be like grass on the rooftop,
that withers before it flowers.

⁷The reapers do not get to handle the grass,
nor is it bound into sheaves.

⁸Those who pass by do not say:
'The blessing of GOD be upon you!
In GOD's name we bless you!'

This is a prayer that those who oppose Jerusalem will be thwarted and deprived of God's blessing. The people have been treated cruelly. They have been used as slaves, yoked like farm animals, pulling the plough and turning the mill wheel.

The psalmist wants 'all who hate Zion' (verse 5) to wither (verse 6), to miss out on a harvest (verse 7) and to be deprived of a blessing (verse 8). They do not belong to the people, and so are separated from GOD.

The psalm is not found in the Christian Lectionary. It appears in the Prayer of the Church in the Prayer during the Day for Thursday Week 4. From a human point of view, the feelings are understandable, but fall short of Jesus' exhortation that we love our enemies (see Matthew 5:43-48). Reflecting on this psalm with Jesus we hear his words from the cross to those who were responsible for his being crucified: 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

Praying Psalm 130 (129) with Jesus

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O GOD.

²God*, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive to my pleading!

³If you, O GOD, should mark our guilt,
who would survive?

⁴But with you there is forgiveness.

For this we revere you.

⁵I wait for you, I long for you, O GOD.

I count on your word.

⁶I am longing for you

more than watchmen for daybreak,

more than watchmen for daybreak.

⁷O Israel, hope in GOD

For with GOD there is covenant love,
and great power to redeem.

⁸Israel indeed will be redeemed
from all its iniquity.

Psalm 130

Traditionally, Psalm 130 is numbered among the penitential psalms (see also Psalms 6, 12, 38, 51, 102 and 143). Though Jesus is innocent (see the reflection on Psalm 6, pages 33-34), he prays this psalm in solidarity with us sinners.

The psalmist is deeply aware of the terrible consequences of sin. Relying on God's goodness, he cries out to GOD in his distress, and calls on Israel to do the same in the certain knowledge that GOD will redeem his people. A key image is that of 'watching'. God is watching the sinner (verse 3) and the sinner is watching for God (verse 6).

'Forgiveness' (verse 4) is something that characterises GOD. As sinners we must approach God humbly in the hope of receiving this gracious gift. For a reflection on forgiveness see Psalm 65, page 200. Praying this psalm with Jesus we remember that 'He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world' (1 John 2:2). 'Christ gave himself a ransom for all' (1 Timothy 2:6). 'He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds' (Titus 2:14). 'By your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation' (Revelation 5:9).

'God has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' (Colossians 1:14).

While waiting with expectant hope for God's mercy, however, we are not to be presumptuous: 'Do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?' (Romans 2:4).

The sinner is watching eagerly for the dawning of God's mercy and the liberation this will surely bring. As Christians we think of the morning of Jesus' resurrection and we look forward to the morning of our own. For a reflection on longing (verse 5) see Psalm 11, page 45, Psalm 42, pages 132-134, and Psalm 63, pages 193-196.

For a reflection on hope (verse 7) see Psalm 62, pages 190-191.

In verse 7 personal prayer expands out to include the whole assembly. Forgiveness is an expression of God's covenant love and an experience of liberation (verse 7). For a reflection on covenant love see Psalm 85, pages 261-262.

Verse 8 is the only text in the Hebrew Scriptures in which redemption is extended to *all* guilt.

Praying Psalm 131 (130) with Jesus

**¹O GOD, I am not proud,
holding my head too high,
reaching beyond my grasp.**

**²I have calmed myself and stilled my longing.
I am at peace, like a weaned child
resting in its mother's arms.
My whole being is at rest.**

³O Israel, hope in GOD, now and for ever.

The psalmist is humbly aware of his limitations and dependence on God. His confidence is not based on himself but on God's presence and care for him.

In place of 'calmed' (verse 2) the Greek Septuagint has 'humbled' – one of only two texts in the Septuagint that use the verb 'tapeinophroneō', meaning 'to think of oneself in a lowly way'. The other text is Proverbs 29:23: 'One who is lowly in spirit will obtain honour.' In the Greek world humility was considered a vice, the equivalent of having low self-esteem. In Jesus it took on a new meaning. Jesus was happy to be dependent like a child. He delighted in calling God 'Abba!' for he knew God's unconditional love. He was content to rely on this love. For a reflection on humility see Psalm 18, page 67.

The child has been weaned, but the mother is still there for the child, who is calm, at peace, and 'resting in its mother's arms.' So the psalmist calms his desires, his irrational fears and the turmoil of his feelings, resting and placing his 'hope' in God. For a reflection on hope see Psalm 62, pages 190-191.

By extension one can see God as a mother and the psalmist as a child being calmed by God.

'It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took him up in my arms ... I led him with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to him like a person who lifts an infant to her cheek. I bent down to him and fed him' (Hosea 11:3-4).

'It was you who took me from the womb; you entrusted me safe on my mother's breasts. Placed on your lap from my birth, since my mother bore me you have been my God' (Psalm 22:9-10).

'You will be suckled and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you' (Isaiah 66:12-13).

Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall his words: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like a little child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:3).

Praying Psalm 132 (131) with Jesus

- ¹O GOD, remember David
and the many hardships he endured;
²and how he swore an oath to you,
O Mighty One of Jacob:
- ³I will not enter my house
or lie down on my bed;
⁴I will not close my eyes, nor will I sleep,
⁵till I find a place for GOD,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.'
- ⁶We heard of the ark in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Yearim.
- ⁷Let us go to GOD's house;
let us kneel at GOD's footstool.'
- ⁸Rise up, O GOD, and go to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.
- ⁹Let your priests be properly attired,
and your faithful shout for joy.
¹⁰For your servant David's sake
do not deny audience to your anointed one.
- ¹¹You once swore to David
and you do not break your word:
'A son of yours I will set on your throne.
¹²If your heirs keep my covenant
and the decrees that I have made,
their sons also, for ever more,
will sit on your throne.'
- ¹³GOD has chosen Zion for his residence:
¹⁴This is my resting place,
I have chosen to live here forever.

¹⁵I will bless it abundantly.

Its poor will have food.

¹⁶His priests I will clothe with salvation.

Its faithful will shout for joy.

¹⁷Here David's stock will flower.

I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.

¹⁸His enemies I will cover with disgrace,

but on him the royal crown will shine.'

Psalm 132 is a ceremonial chant recalling the transfer of the ark to David's city (2 Samuel 6) and then to the temple (1 Kings 8). It recalls the link between David's desire to build God a house and God's promise to build a house (that is, a dynasty) for David (2 Samuel 7).

The transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem is being recalled, and perhaps ceremonially re-enacted. 'Ephrathah' (verse 6) is the region of Bethlehem, just south of Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 4:4). David came from this area. 'Yearim' (verse 6) refers to Kiriath-yearim where the ark was installed after being captured back from the Philistines (1 Samuel 6:21 - 7:2).

The 'faithful' (verse 9; Hebrew *hasidim*) are those who welcome God's covenant love (Hebrew *hesed*) and are faithful to the covenant. For a reflection on 'faithful' (also verse 16) see Psalm 116, pages 357-359. For a reflection on covenant love see Psalm 85, pages 261-262. For covenant love and faithfulness see Psalm 61, page 187.

Verses 11-12 give a powerful affirmation of faith at a time when there was no king in Judah. God's promises are always unconditional. However they are effective only when welcomed - and this involves an 'if' - 'If your heirs keep my covenant and the decrees that I have made' (verse 12). The writers of the New Testament saw this promise realised in Jesus, the son of David. In his address on the Feast of Pentecost, Peter stated: 'Since he was a prophet, David knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne ... Let the entire house of Israel know that God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:30, 36).

'Its priests I will clothe with salvation' (verse 16). For a reflection on salvation see Psalm 62, pages 189-190.

'I have prepared a lamp for my anointed' (verse 17). See Psalm 18: 'It is you, O God, who light my lamp; it is you who illumine my darkness' (Psalm 18:28). For a reflection on light see Psalm 27, page 95.

Praying Psalm 133 (132) with Jesus

¹How good and pleasant it is to live in communion!

**²It is like precious oil poured on Aaron's head,
running down his beard and the collar of his robe.**

**³It is like the dew of Hermon,
falling on the mountains of Zion.
There the Lord gives blessing: life for ever.**

Psalm 133 is a celebration of family, of nation, of cultic community. As Christians we pray it with Jesus, thinking of the Church of the Risen Christ. Is the psalmist expressing longing for the reunification of northern and southern kingdoms? (see Isaiah 11:13 and Ezekiel 37:22-23). He is expressing the importance and joy of unity in the community. Praying this psalm with Jesus we think of Paul's beautiful words to the Christian community in Philippi: "If then there is any appeal in Christ, any consolation from love, any communion in the Spirit, any movements of compassion and feelings of love, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one soul and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Do not strive after or seek to find your value in things that are worthless, but in humility regard others above yourselves, so that not everyone is focused on themselves, but each is looking to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:1-5).

The fragrance of the 'precious oil' (verse 2) passes from the priestly mediator right through to the assembly. The collar of the priest's robe is embroidered with twelve precious stones for the tribes of Israel. Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall Paul's words: 'Through us Christ spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him' (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Our thoughts as we pray this psalm are on the Church, the Body of Christ: 'I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose' (1 Corinthians 1:10). 'Love never stops caring. Love always acts in a kind way. Love does not act out of jealousy or envy. Love does not boast, or behave in an arrogant way. Love does not act indecently, or insist on its own way. Love does not give way to irritation or brood over wrongs. Love takes no pleasure in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love has space enough to hold and to bear everything and everyone. Love believes all things, hopes all things, and endures whatever comes. Love does not come to an end' (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

For a reflection on the communion we have in God see Psalm 16, pages 59-60 and Psalm 73:23-28, page 222.

Praying Psalm 134 (133) with Jesus

¹Come, praise GOD
 you who minister in GOD's house,
 who stand watch throughout the night.

²Lift up your hands in the holy place,
 and praise GOD.

³I pray that GOD, the Maker of heaven and earth,
 will bless you from Zion.

This is the last of the group of psalms (120-134) which bear the title 'A Song of Ascents.' The pilgrims have reached their destination, 'GOD's house' (verse 1), 'the holy place' (verse 2). They can rest secure because God is guarding them (see Psalm 121).

When we are invited to 'bless God' we are being invited to praise and thank God for the blessings that God showers upon us. Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall the welcome offered in Jesus' parable of the Final Judgment: 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 25:34). We recall also Paul's words: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 1:3).

Praying Psalm 135 (134) with Jesus

¹Praise GOD (Alleluia!), O servants of GOD,

²you who stand in the house of GOD,
in the courts of the house of our God.

³Praise GOD who is good;
sing to our beautiful GOD,

⁴who has chosen Israel as a treasured possession.

⁵I know GOD is great;
our God*, the greatest of the gods.

⁶Whatever GOD wills GOD does,
in heaven and on earth, and in the depths of the sea.

⁷GOD summons the clouds from the ends of the earth;
releasing lightning and rain, and wind from their storehouse.

The traditional saga

⁸It was GOD who struck down the first born of Egypt,
humans and animals alike;

⁹who sent signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt,
against Pharaoh and all his servants;

¹⁰who struck down many nations
and killed mighty kings,

¹¹Sihon, king of the Amorites, Og, king of Bashan,
and all the kings of Canaan;

¹²who gave their land to Israel for them to possess.

Verses 8-12 repeat the classical account of the miraculous beginnings of Ancient Israel. The account of GOD striking down the firstborn of Egypt is found in Exodus 12:29. It is a dramatic way of stating that God's chosen people (God's firstborn) are the Israelites, not the Egyptians. The story of the war between the Israelites and King Sihon is found in the Book of Numbers 21:21-32 and in Deuteronomy 2:26-37. The story of the war with King Og is found in the Book of Numbers 21:33-35 and in Deuteronomy 3:1-7. We are dealing here with legend, not history.

The Exodus occurred most probably in the Late Bronze period (13th century BC). The Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein and the Israeli historian Neil Silberman in their book *The Bible Unearthed* (The Free Press, 2001) write: 'Excavations at Tel Heshban south of Amman showed that there was no Late Bronze city there, not even a small village ... The plateau of Transjordan was very sparsely inhabited in the Late Bronze Age. In fact most parts of the region, including Edom, which is mentioned as a state ruled by a king in the biblical narrative, were not even inhabited by a sedentary population at that time. To put it simply, archaeology has shown that there were no kings of Edom there for the Israelites to meet' (page 64).

GOD did not 'strike down the firstborn of Egypt', nor did GOD 'strike down many nations and kill many kings.' GOD did not strike down 'all the kings of Canaan and give their land to Israel for them to possess.' In using this language, the psalmist is making sure that all credit for the founding of Israel must go to GOD. Unfortunately the cost for doing so is to distort the image of God as a warrior warlord. This is not Jesus' image of God, and so fails as Christian prayer.

**¹³Your name, O GOD, endures for ever,
your renown, throughout all ages.**

**¹⁴You vindicate your people,
and comfort your servants.**

**¹⁵The gods of the nations are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.**

**¹⁶They have mouths, but they do not speak;
eyes, but they do not see;**

**¹⁷ears, but they do not hear,
nostrils, but they do not breathe.**

**¹⁸Those who make them become like them,
as do all who put their trust in them.**

**¹⁹House of Israel, bless GOD!
House of Aaron, bless GOD!**

**²⁰House of Levi, bless GOD!
You that revere ['fear'] GOD, bless GOD!**

**²¹Blessed from Zion be GOD, who resides in Jerusalem.
Praise GOD! (Alleluia!)**

Psalm 135

Psalm 135 is an invitation to the assembly to praise GOD, the Creator and Liberator of his people Israel. It abounds in quotations and traditional statements of faith.

Praying it as Christians we think of the risen Jesus: 'He was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 1:4). 'He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (1 Corinthians 15:25).

The invitation to join in praising GOD is followed by an expression of faith in the fact that Israel is precious to GOD. 'Treasured possession' (verse 4) translates the Hebrew *sēgulla*, which occurs only here in the psalms and only a handful of times in the Hebrew Bible. The classical text is in the Book of Exodus: 'If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples' (Exodus 19:5). We find it in Deuteronomy: 'You are a people holy to GOD, your God, who has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession' (Deuteronomy 7:6; also 14:2; 26:18). The prophet Malachi declares: 'They shall be mine, says our Mighty GOD, my special possession' (Malachi 3:17).

For a reflection on 'comfort' (verse 14) see Psalm 86, pages 266-267.

Verse 18 ('Those who worship false gods become like them, as do all who put their trust in them') has a warning for us all. We are expert in creating false gods. We need to be constantly attentive and weed out our false images before they take deep root.

For a reflection on 'fear of GOD' (verse 20) see Psalm 2, page 23; also Psalm 33, page 109 and Psalm 47, page 145.

Praying Psalm 136 (135) with Jesus

Psalm 136 is a hymn of joyous admiration which finds expression in wave after wave of jubilant thanksgiving. It is possible that the litany form with the assembly proclaiming after each statement 'Your covenant love endures forever' was used with a variety of repeated responses in other psalms, without appearing in the text. The history of Israel is part of Jesus' history and so the history of his disciples. We can sing this hymn thinking also of the Passover effected by Jesus, and the many wonderful ways in which God has proved victorious in the obstacles that have faced us on our journey to the enjoyment of communion with God.

The response appears in other psalms: 'Give thanks to GOD who is good. Your covenant love endures for ever' (Psalm 106:1). 'Give thanks to GOD who is good. Your covenant love endures for ever' (Psalm 107:1). 'Give thanks to GOD who is good. Your covenant love endures for ever' (Psalm 118:1). 'Your covenant love, O GOD, endures for ever' (Psalm 138:8)

- ¹Give thanks to GOD who is good!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ²Give thanks to the God of gods!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!

Part One: God the Creator (verses 4-9)

- ⁴You alone create all that is!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ⁵Your wisdom it was made the skies!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ⁶You established the earth on the seas!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ⁷It was you who made the great lights!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ⁸The sun to rule in the day!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ⁹The moon and stars in the night!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!

Part Two: God the Liberator (verses 10-22)

- ¹⁰**Egypt's first born you struck!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ¹¹**You brought Israel out from their midst!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ¹²**All with your mighty power!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ¹³**You divided the Red Sea in two!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ¹⁴**You made Israel pass through the midst!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ¹⁵**You drowned Pharaoh and his army in the sea!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ¹⁶**Through the desert your people you led!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ¹⁷**Nations in their greatness you struck!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ¹⁸**Kings in their splendour you slew!**
Your great love endures for ever!
- ¹⁹**Sihon, the king of the Amorites!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ²⁰**Og, the king of Bashan!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ²¹**You let Israel inherit your land!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!
- ²²**To keep it as their own!**
Your covenant love endures for ever!

For a reflection on the traditional saga of the beginnings of Ancient Israel see the commentary on verses 8-12 of Psalm 135, pages 412-413.

Part Three: Concluding Verses

²³You remembered us in our distress!

Your covenant love endures for ever!

²⁴You rescued us from our foes!

Your covenant love endures for ever!

²⁵You give food to all living things!

Your covenant love endures for ever!

²⁶We give thanks to our God in heaven,

Your covenant love endures for ever!

Praying these concluding verses with Jesus, we think of his agony and passion, and how God 'remembered him in his distress' (verse 23). and 'rescued him from his foes' (verse 24) in raising him from the dead.

God's 'giving food to all living things' (verse 25) is dramatically expressed in the scenes of the feeding in the wilderness. The first (Mark 6:30-44) is in Jewish territory; the second (Mark 8:1-10) is in Gentile territory. In both scenes Jesus is moved with God's compassion (see Mark 6:34 and 8:2). We also recall Jesus' words after the account of the multiplication of bread given us by John: 'My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven ... The one who eats this bread will live forever' (John 6:55-58).

Indeed, God's 'covenant love endures for ever.'

Praying Psalm 137 (136) with Jesus

¹By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept remembering Zion.

²On the willows we hung up our harps.

³Our captors called for songs of joy: 'Sing us a song of Zion!'

⁴How could we sing a song of our GOD on alien soil?

⁵If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

⁶If I fail to remember you, let my tongue cleave to my mouth –
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

(Verses 7-9 are not in the liturgy.)

⁷Remember, O GOD, the Edomites
on the day of Jerusalem's fall,
how they said, 'Tear it down! Tear it down!'
Down to its foundations!

⁸Babylon, you devastator!
Blessed and happy are those who repay you
for what you have done to us!

⁹Blessed and happy will they be who take your children
and dash them against the rock!

This is one of the finest lyric poems of the Psalter. It is a lament or elegy, a resistance song for those in exile who refused to give up hope of returning to Jerusalem.

For a reflection on Jesus' love for Jerusalem see Psalm 2, page 23.

In 1578 John of the Cross composed a ballad on Psalm 137. The first seven verses are inspired by Psalm 137 verses 1-2.

1. By the rivers of Babylon I sat down weeping,
there on the ground.
2. I remembered you, O Zion whom I love, and in that sweet memory,
I wept the more.
3. I removed my festive garments, and put on the clothes of a slave.
I hung on the green willows the music which gave me joy.
4. I put it aside in hope for that which I hoped for in you.
There love wounded me and took away my heart.
5. I begged love to kill me, since it had wounded me so.
I cast myself into its fire, knowing that it burned,
6. removing the guilt of the young bird that would die in its flame.
I was dying in myself, and breathing in you alone.
7. I died within myself for you, and for you I came back to life,
because the memory of you gave life and took it away.

From John's ballad, some further verses inspired by Psalm 137 verses 5-6:

11. May my right hand be forgotten
– the hand I used with such love when home in you –
12. if I do not remember you, my greatest joy,
or if I celebrate one day of festival, or feast at all without you.
13. Blessed is He in whom I have placed my trust.
14. He will gather his little ones, and me, who wept because of you,
to the rock who is Christ, for whom I abandoned you, O Babylon.

Praying Psalm 138 (137) with Jesus

¹I thank you, O GOD, with all my heart,
for you have heard me.
In the presence of the gods I sing of you.

²I bow toward your holy temple,
giving thanks for your covenant love and faithfulness.
You display to all the glory of your name and your word.

³On the day I called, you answered,
you increased the strength of my soul.

⁴All earth's kings will praise you, O GOD,
when they hear your word of command.

⁵They sing of your ways: 'How great is the glory of GOD.'

⁶Though high up, you watch over the lowly.
Though far away, you keep an eye on the haughty.

⁷Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you reach out and save me.

⁸You, O GOD, will fulfill your purpose for me.
Your covenant love, O GOD, endures for ever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

The psalmist is praising and thanking God for God's covenant love, trusting that God will not forsake him and 'will fulfil God's purpose for me' (verse 8). We recall the words of Jeremiah: 'Surely I know the plans I have for you, says GOD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope' (Jeremiah 29:11).

For a reflection on thanksgiving (verse 1) see Psalm 21, page 74.

The psalmist is placing GOD before other gods (verse 1) in obedience to the Decalogue (Exodus 20:3). Compare Psalm 96:4-5.

'Bowing toward the temple' (verse 2) was a traditional custom (see 1Kings 8:31, 33, 38,44, 48; Daniel 6:10).

For a reflection on 'covenant love' (verses 2 and 8) see Psalm 85, pages 261-262. For a reflection on 'covenant love and faithfulness' (verse 2) see Psalm 61, page 167. For a reflection on 'faithfulness' (verse 2) see Psalm 116, pages 357-359.

For a reflection on 'glory' (verses 2 and 5) see Psalm 57, pages 177-179.

Verse 8 lifts the psalm above the stereotyped earlier phrases, and is one of the finest expressions of hope in God to be found in the Bible. For a reflection on hope see Psalm 62, pages 190-191.

What God has done for us gives us the courage to keep trusting that the purpose of God, the 'Father of mercies' (2 Corinthians 1:3) will, finally, be realised in our lives. In the meantime, we are strengthened to trust that 'nothing will separate us from God's love' (Romans 8:35). 'I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ' (Philippians 1:6).

Praying Psalm 139 (138) with Jesus

¹O GOD, you search me and you know me.

²It is you who know when I sit and when I stand.
You discern my inmost thoughts.

³You know if I am journeying or resting.
You know everything I do.

⁴Even before a word is on my tongue,
you know, O GOD, what I am about to say.

⁵You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶I find this overwhelming,
beyond my understanding.

⁷Where can I go from your spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸If I scale the heavens, you are there;
if I lie in the grave, you are there.

⁹If I were to take the wings of the dawn
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

¹⁰even there you would lead me,
your right hand would hold me fast.

¹¹If I think night will hide me,
and darkness give me cover,

¹²to you darkness is not dark;
the night is as bright as the day.

¹³It was you who formed every part of me,
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I thank you for the wonder of my being,
for the wonders of all your creation.

¹⁴You watched my body taking shape,
when I was being formed in secret,
¹⁵You saw my body grow according to your design,
intricately woven, hidden from sight.

¹⁶All of my life was written in your book;
all the days that were prepared for me,
before any of them existed.

¹⁷How precious are your thoughts.
They are like countless grains of sand.

¹⁸To finish counting them
I would have to be, like you, eternal.

* * * * *

²³Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.

²⁴See if I follow crooked paths.
Lead me along your ancient way.

(Verses 19-22 are omitted. They are not used in the liturgy)

¹⁹O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would go away.

²⁰They speak of you maliciously,
and rise up against you to do evil!

²¹How I hate those who hate you, O God!
How I loathe those who defy you!

²²I hate them with a deadly hate.
I count them my enemies.

Psalm 139

This is one of the most beautiful of the psalms. From beginning to end it is a reflection on God's knowing us. In the Scriptures to 'know' is not the same as to 'know about'. True, as the psalm says, God does know all about us. But the focus is not so much on information as on intimacy (see especially verses 13-15). We cannot escape God's gaze. We cannot hide from God. For a reflection on Love's gazing see Psalm 11, page 46.

Not that the psalmist wants to escape or hide. He prays in the concluding stanza: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts' (verse 23). He is confident that he is not 'following crooked paths.' He wants God to 'lead me along your ancient way' (verse 24). The language is reminiscent of Jeremiah: 'Thus says GOD: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies, and walk in it, and find rest for your souls' (Jeremiah 6:16).

The psalmist senses GOD's hand upon him, and finds this 'overwhelming, beyond my understanding' (verses 5-6). He knows that GOD is leading him: 'your right hand holds me fast' (verse 10). How is it possible that the Transcendent God could have such a personal and intimate communion with us? We recall Paul's words: 'O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!' (Romans 11:33).

'To you darkness is not dark; the night is as bright as the day' (verse 12). In his First Letter John writes: 'God is light and in him there is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5). Nicodemus 'came to Jesus by night' (John 3:1). Jesus speaks to him about being 'born of the Spirit' (John 3:6), and goes on to say: 'This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God' (John 3:19-21). The psalmist wants God to scrutinize him. He is confident that God will see that he has not followed 'crooked paths' (verse 24). In the Book of Revelation the Risen Jesus declares: 'I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve' (Revelation 2:23).

Jesus wants his disciples to be 'the light of the world' (Matthew 5:14), and Paul pleads with the Christians of Philippi to be 'blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world' (Philippians 2:15).

Let us pray this psalm with Jesus, asking him to gaze into our hearts. Pray that he will pour his Spirit into our hearts to purify them of whatever it is that is blocking our welcoming of grace and our revealing this grace to others. Pray that he will find delight in seeing how transparent our souls are in knowing God, in knowing ourselves, and in knowing others.

Praying Psalm 140 (139) with Jesus

¹Deliver me, O GOD, from those who do evil;
protect me from the violent.

²They plan evil in their hearts;
they are always stirring up strife.

³Their tongues strike like a snake,
with the venom of the viper on their lips.

⁴Guard me, O GOD, from the hands of the wicked;
protect me from the violent, who plan my downfall.

⁵The arrogant have hidden a trap for me.
With ropes they have spread a net.
They have set snares along my path.

⁶I say to GOD, 'You are my God.
Listen to my supplications.'

⁷GOD, my God*, my strong deliverer,
on the field of battle you shield my head.

⁸Do not grant the desires of the wicked;
do not let their plots succeed.

(Verses 9-11 are omitted. They are not in the liturgy.)

⁹Let not those who surround me triumph;
let the mischief of their lips rebound to harm them.

¹⁰Heap burning coals upon them.
Let them be flung into pits, no more to rise.

¹¹Do not let the slanderer settle in the land.
Let evil stalk the violent and drive them to their ruin.

¹²I know that GOD upholds the cause of the needy,
and executes justice for the poor.

¹³The righteous give you thanks.
The upright live in your presence.

The psalmist is pleading for GOD's protection. As noted, verses 9-11 are not consistent with Jesus' response to the suffering inflicted on him, or of the response he asks from his disciples. We can pray verses 12-13. The psalmist is confident that GOD will hear his pleading. He 'knows that GOD upholds the cause of the needy, and executes justice for the poor' (verse 12). He identifies with 'the righteous who give thanks', the 'upright who live in God's presence' (verse 13).

Praying these words with Jesus we hear him say: 'Blessed and happy are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Matthew 5:8), and, 'If you love me, you will be loved by my Father, and I will love you and reveal myself to you' (John 14:21).

Praying Psalm 141 (140) in Jesus' Company

¹I call upon you, O GOD; come quickly to me!

Listen, as I call to you.

²Let my prayer rise to you like incense,
the lifting up of my hands like an evening sacrifice.

³O GOD, set a guard on my lips.

Watch my every word.

⁴Do not let my heart turn to any evil,
or consider doing what is wrong.

Let me never join the wicked
to indulge in their feasting.

⁵If the just correct me,

I take their rebuke as a kindness,

but the oil of the wicked will never anoint my head.

My prayer is continually against their wicked deeds.

⁶When they are handed over to those who will condemn them,
then they will learn that I have spoken the truth.

⁷Like a rock that one breaks apart and shatters on the ground,
so will their bones be strewn at the mouth of the grave.

⁸But my eyes are turned toward you, O GOD, my God*;

in you I seek refuge. Do not leave me defenseless.

⁹Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me,
from the snares of those who do evil.

(Verse 10 is omitted. It is not in the liturgy)

¹⁰Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I escape.

The psalmist is under pressure to join forces with ‘those who do what is wrong’ (verse 4). They are enticing him to ‘indulge in their feasting’ (verse 4). He is severely tempted to go along with them; hence the intensity of his plea.

‘Do not let my heart turn to any evil’ (verse 4). The psalmist wants GOD to keep guard not only over his mouth, but also over his heart that he will not let attachment to pleasures distract him from obedience to the Torah.

He would prefer that the ‘just’ correct him (verse 5) than that he would betray the Torah. The author needs their correction to strengthen him against the temptations of the ‘good life’. He continues to pray against the disgraceful behaviour of those attempting to win him over to their cause (verse 5). When they fall they will realise that he has, indeed, ‘spoken the truth’ (verse 6).

He anticipates the judgment of God upon the wicked. They will be flung headlong as from a precipice into the gaping hole of the realm of the dead (verse 7).

There are sentiments in this psalm that do not fit with Jesus’ prayer. Hence the title. But we can pray it in his company. The psalm is a reminder to us of the fact that, living as we do in a world polluted by sin, it is difficult to avoid breathing in the contagion. We need to correct each other in love. One would hope that there was someone in our lives who cared enough about us to point out the error of our ways. If we don’t care that someone is behaving badly, we must not love that person very much.

Matthew chapter 18 has some wisdom to offer us on this matter. Matthew 18:1-5 records Jesus’ call for humility. If we correct someone from an assumed position of superiority, it is surely not going to work, for we will be putting the other person down and the person who is being corrected will experience the need to protect himself or herself from our put down. If we lack humility, if we think that we are better than the other person, it is better for us to leave the correction to someone else. Our pride cannot but distort our judgment.

After speaking of the need for humility, Jesus goes on to warn against giving scandal (Matthew 18:6-9). It is true that sometimes people are scandalised even though what is happening is in fact very good. The Pharisees were scandalised when Jesus ate with sinners and when he healed on the Sabbath. This was because of their narrow view of God and their refusal to look at what was really happening. We cannot please everyone. However, if people of good will, the people Jesus describes as ‘the little ones who believe in me’, are scandalised by the way in which we correct others, we can be sure that there is something wrong with our way of going about things.

Finally, having warned us not to look down on any person, Jesus speaks about the shepherd who goes off searching for the one stray sheep and reminds us: ‘It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost’ (Matthew 18:14).

Psalm 141

Jesus also speaks about forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35). If we are going to correct people we must be ready to forgive them when they apologise and change their behaviour.

It is in this setting and against this background that Matthew gives us Jesus' words concerning how we should correct one another (Matthew 18:15-20).

Jesus' suggestion is that if a problem arises between two members of the Christian family, they should try to sort it out between themselves, with all humility and respect and readiness to forgive. Normally this would resolve the matter. However, sometimes things are too confused to be resolved in this way. Jesus suggests that we then seek the help of two or three others. If that doesn't work the matter should be taken to the community of those whom he calls elsewhere his 'brothers and sisters' (Matthew 12:50). We are to be brothers and sisters to each other.

If the person who is being corrected refuses to take any notice of the community, he or she is to be treated as a 'Gentile or a tax collector' (Matthew 18:17). Jesus may be telling the members of the community that their obligation ceases and that they must leave the unrepentant person to God. Hopefully, the good shepherd (Matthew 18:12-13) will find other ways to bring the unrepentant sinner back.

Central to this matter is the presence of Jesus among his disciples. The psalmist tells us that 'GOD dwells in the holy temple' (Psalm 11:4). Rabbi Chanina ben Teradyon (died 135AD) says: 'When two are seated and discuss the Torah, the Shekinah resides among them' (The Sentences of the Fathers, III.3). Similarly, Jesus says: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.' One recalls the child whom Jesus placed 'among them' (Matthew 18:2). Gathered around Jesus, his disciples experience the glory of Jesus' humble prayer, and, in the words of Paul: 'All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another' (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Please God, within the community there will be people who know and love us and who are willing to point out when we are falling short of living the life of a disciple. They want to see us in close companionship with Jesus. Please God we, too, will have the courage and the concern to go out after the straying sheep and point out the way back to the community and to Jesus. May we all do this humbly and with love and ever eager to forgive and to welcome each other to reconciliation.

Praying Psalm 142 (141) with Jesus

¹I pray, O GOD, I plead, I cry for mercy.

²I pour out all my troubles and tell of my distress.

³My spirit is faint. You know how I live.

You know the traps laid to ensnare me.

⁴See what they are doing!

There is no one who takes my part.

I have no means of escape.

I have no one to care for me.

⁵Urgently I cry to you, O GOD: 'You are my refuge.

You are all I have in the land of the living.'

⁶Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low.

Rescue me from those who are hunting me down,
for they are too strong for me.

⁷Free me from this prison!

Then I will thank you.

The righteous will gather round me
to thank you for your kindness to me.

This is an intense plea – one of the most poignant and moving in the Book of Psalms. The psalmist is deeply 'troubled' and in severe 'distress' (verse 2). There is no escape. He cannot go forward. There is no going back because of those pursuing him (verse 6), and there is no help to right or to left. Help can come only from above. Note the lack of any plea that enemies be punished. We can surely pray this Psalm with Jesus in times of our own distress, trusting that God will hear our pleas.

Like Jesus on the cross, the psalmist is exhausted (verse 3). All he can do is cry out to God, which he does 'urgently' (verse 5). He is totally alone. 'No one takes his part'. There is 'no one to care for him' (verse 4), except God. Such is his trust in God's love that he can say: 'You are all I have in the land of the living' (verse 5). He begs God to free him (verse 7), and promises his own personal gratitude and that of the community. For a reflection on gratitude see Psalm 21, page 74.

Praying Psalm 143 (142) with Jesus

¹Hear my prayer, O GOD,
In your faithfulness be attentive to my prayer.
In your righteousness respond to my plea.

[²Do not judge me harshly, for no one is just in your sight.]

³The enemy pursues me, crushing my life to the ground,
making me sit in darkness like the dead, long forgotten.

⁴My spirit faints within me; my heart is numb.
⁵I remember the days of old. I ponder all your deeds.
I reflect on what you have done.

⁶To you I stretch out my hands.
For you I am thirsting like a parched and weary land.

⁷Answer me quickly, O GOD. My spirit is failing.
Do not hide your face,
or I shall be like those who go down to the grave.

⁸Let me hear of your covenant love in the morning,
for in you I trust.
Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

⁹Rescue me, O GOD, from my enemies.
I have fled to you for refuge.

¹⁰Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.
Let your good spirit lead me in ways that are level and smooth.

¹¹For your name's sake, O GOD, preserve my life.
In your righteousness rescue me from my troubles.

(Verse 12 is omitted. It is not in the liturgy.)

¹²In your covenant love cut off my enemies,
destroy all who are against me, for I am your servant.

This is a supplication of one who is in a grave situation, persecuted by enemies (verses 3 and 9). It is possible that he is to face judgment 'in the morning' (verse 8), and is pleading with God to be there on his side. He relies on the faithfulness and justice of GOD.

'In your faithfulness be attentive to my prayer' (verse 1). For a reflection on God's faithfulness see Psalm 61, page 187 and Psalm 116, pages 357-359.

Aware that he is not innocent, he pleads with God not to judge him harshly, for 'No one is just in your sight' (verse 2). This is quoted by Paul in Romans 3:20.

'To you I stretch out my hands. For you I am thirsting like a parched and weary land' (verse 6). The psalmist's plea is very real. It consumes his whole body. For a reflection on longing ('thirsting') for God see Psalm 11, page 45; also Psalm 42, page 132-134 and Psalm 63, page 196.

In his acute distress the psalmist prays to God: 'Do not hide your face' (verse 7). See Psalm 31, pages 104-105.

For a reflection on God's 'covenant love' (verse 8) see Psalm 85, pages 261-262.

For a reflection on 'trust' see Psalm 27, page 95.

'Teach me to do your will, for you are my God' (verse 10). For a reflection on obedience see Psalm 123, pages 393-397.

Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall the many times during his public ministry that he had to face criticism, rejection and persecution. We think especially of his trial before the Jewish Council and Pilate and his crucifixion. Though he felt abandoned even by God, he never lost faith in God's faithfulness and love. We ask Jesus to share his faith with us.

Praying Psalm 144 (143) with Jesus

¹Blessed be GOD, my rock, who trains my arms for battle,
²my covenant Lover, my fortress, my stronghold, my deliverer,
my shield, my refuge – You give me victory.

³O GOD, what are we human beings? Why do you care for us?
We are subject to death. Why do you think of us?

⁴We are no more than a breath; our days like a passing shadow.

⁵Lower your heavens, O GOD, and come down.
Touch the mountains. Wreath them in smoke.

⁶Flash your lightning. Rout the foe.
Let fly your arrows. Put them to flight.

⁷Reach down from on high. Rescue me from alien foes,
⁸*who speak nothing but lies, and swear that their words are true.*

⁹I sing a new song to you, O God.
I play on a ten-stringed harp.

¹⁰You are the one who gives victory to kings.
You rescue your servant David.

¹¹Save me from the cruel sword, deliver me from foreigners,
who speak nothing but lies, and swear that their words are true.

¹²May our sons flourish like saplings,
grown tall and strong from their youth.
May our daughters be graceful as columns,
adorned for a palace.

¹³May our barns be filled with produce of every kind.
May our sheep increase by thousands,
¹⁴and may our cattle be heavy with young.

May there be no breach in the walls,
no cry of distress in our streets.

¹⁵Blessed and happy the people on whom such blessings fall,
the people whose God is GOD.

Psalm 144 is a prayer for the prosperity of God's people, and the protection of the king. GOD is portrayed as a Warrior Warlord (verses 1-2 and 6). This is an image that we find throughout the psalms, but it does not fit with the God revealed by Jesus, and it is not appropriate as Christian prayer.

The psalmist is amazed that the Transcendent God would care for us mortal human beings. This is a theme that recurs in the psalms: 'What are we, mortal human beings, that you are mindful of us, that you care for us?' (Psalm 8:4). 'We human beings are no more than a breath. We pass away like a shadow' (Psalm 39:5-6). 'Our years come to an end like a sigh' (Psalm 90:9). 'My days are like a lengthening shadow; I wither away like grass' (Psalm 102:11).

His foes raise their right hands and swear by God, but their words are not to be trusted. Their right hand holds a sword that they turn against their king (verses 8 and 11).

In verses 12-15 the psalmist prays for God's blessing. Praying this psalm with Jesus we reflect on the blessings poured out on us from the Risen Jesus:

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessing us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love, destining us for adoption as sons for himself through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he determined in himself as a plan for the fullness of time. His plan is to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we Jews, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you Gentiles also, hearing the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believing in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory' (Ephesians 1:3-14).

Praying Psalm 145 (144) with Jesus

¹I will extol you, my God and king,

²and never cease praising you.

³GOD is great and greatly to be praised;

a greatness that cannot be measured.

⁴One generation proclaims to the next what you have done,
recounting your mighty deeds.

⁵I ponder on the glorious splendour of your majesty.

I tell the tale of your wonderful deeds.

⁶They manifest your awesome power,
revealing your greatness.

⁷They celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and sing of your justice.

⁸GOD is gracious and tenderly compassionate,
long-suffering, abounding in covenant love.

⁹GOD is good to all, tenderly compassionate to all creation.

¹⁰All your creation praises you, O GOD,
and all your faithful bless you.

¹¹They speak of the glory of your reign,
and tell of your might.

¹²They make known to all people your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendour of your reign.

¹³Yours is an everlasting kingdom,
your dominion endures through all generations.
YOU are faithful in all your words, gracious in all your deeds.

¹⁴GOD upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵The eyes of all creatures look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.

¹⁶You open wide your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.

¹⁷GOD is just in every way,
offering covenant love in everything GOD does.

¹⁸GOD is near to all who call,
who cry to God from their hearts.

¹⁹GOD fulfills all our desires; hears our cry and saves us.

²⁰GOD watches over all who love,
but the wicked are destroyed.

²¹My lips will praise GOD,
and everyone will bless GOD's holy name
forever, for ages unending.

Psalm 145

A key theme in Psalm 145 is that of totality and comprehensiveness. This is expressed by the acrostic form (the first verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet; the second verse with the second letter; and so on). Totality is also clearly stated in the following verses:

‘I will extol you, my God and king, and never cease praising you’ (verses 1-2).

God is faithful in all his words, loving in all his deeds’ (verse 13).

‘Everyone will bless GOD’s holy name forever, for ages unending’ (Psalm 21).

Psalm 145 is a psalm praising GOD, the king:

‘I will extol you, my God and king’ (verse 1).

They speak of the glory of your reign,
and tell of your might.

They make known to all people your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendour of your reign.

Yours is an everlasting kingdom,
your dominion endures through all generations’ (verses 11-13).

The reign of GOD is gracious, for he cares for and saves especially the weak and needy:

GOD upholds all who are falling,
and raises up all who are bowed down.
The eyes of all creatures look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
You open wide your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing’ (verses 14-16).

‘GOD fulfills all our desires; hears our cry and saves us.
GOD watches over all who love’ (verses 19-20).

Various characteristics of GOD are praised:

1. GOD is great and powerful.

‘GOD is great and greatly to be praised;
a greatness that cannot be measured.
One generation proclaims to the next what you have done,
recounting your mighty deeds.
I ponder on the glorious splendour of your majesty.
I tell the tale of your wonderful deeds.
They manifest your awesome power, revealing your greatness.

‘They speak of the glory of your reign, and tell of your might.
They make known to all people your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendour of your reign’ (verses 11-12).

2. GOD's glory.

'I ponder on the glorious splendour of your majesty' (verse 5).

'They speak of the glory of your reign, and tell of your might.
They make known to all people your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendour of your reign' (verses 11-12).

3. GOD is good.

'They celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness' (verse 7).

'GOD is good to all' (verse 9).

4. GOD is just.

'They sing of your justice' (verse 7).

'GOD is just in every way' (verse 17).

5. GOD is gracious.

'GOD is gracious' (verse 8).

'YOU are gracious in all your deeds' (verse 13).

6. GOD is tenderly compassionate.

'GOD is tenderly compassionate (verse 8).

'GOD is tenderly compassionate to all creation' (verse 9).

7. GOD is long-suffering.

'GOD is long-suffering' (verse 8).

8. GOD's covenant love

'GOD is abounding in covenant love' (verse 8).

'GOD offers covenant love in everything GOD does' (verse 17).

9. GOD is faithful.

'You are faithful in all your words' (verse 13).

10. GOD is close.

'GOD is near to all who call, who cry to God from their hearts' (verse 18).

11. GOD is holy.

'Everyone will bless GOD's holy name' (verse 21).

Psalm 145

'GOD is gracious and tenderly compassionate, long-suffering, abounding in covenant love' (verse 8). This is the creedal formula found throughout the Hebrew Bible. See reflection on Psalm 85, pages 261-262. As we pray this with Jesus we recall scene after scene where we see Jesus' tender compassion, remembering Jesus' words: 'If you see me, you see the Father' (John 14:9).

Commenting on God's tender compassion and long suffering love (verse 9), Origen, the first great Christian Scripture scholar, in his commentary on Ezekiel writes:

'The Father, God of the universe, long suffering, full of mercy and compassion - is it possible that he does not suffer in any way? Do you not know that when he undertook human affairs he underwent human suffering? If people call on him he is moved with compassion and shares their pain, he suffers greatly from love and enters into the experience of things which, because of the greatness of his nature, he cannot of himself experience. For our sakes he takes upon himself human suffering' (PG 13,715).

'All your faithful bless you' (verse 10). These are the *hasidim* – those who welcome God's covenant love (*hesed*) and are faithful to the covenant.

'You are faithful in all your words' (verse 13). For a reflection on faithfulness see Psalm 116, pages 357-359.

'You satisfy the desire of every living thing' (verse 16). For a reflection on longing see Psalm 11, page 45; also Psalm 42, pages 132-134 and Psalm 63, pages 193-196.

For a reflection on God's covenant love' (verses 8 and 12) see Psalm 85, pages 261-262).

'GOD is near to all who call, who cry to God from their hearts' (verse 18). How the psalmist would have loved to see Jesus! Jesus himself said: 'Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it' (Matthew 13:17). How near God comes to us in Jesus!

'Everyone will bless GOD's holy name' (verse 21). For a reflection on holiness see Psalm 99, pages 303-307.

Praying Psalm 146 (145) with Jesus

¹Praise GOD (Alleluia). Praise GOD, O my soul!

²I will sing praises to GOD all my life long,
making music to my God while I live.

³Put no trust in princes, in human beings who must die.

⁴When their breath departs, they return to the earth;
on that day their plans come to nothing.

⁵Blessed and happy are those who are helped by Jacob's God,
whose hope is in GOD,

⁶who made the heavens, the earth and the seas,
and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever.

⁷GOD keeps faith forever.

GOD is just to the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry, and sets prisoners free.

⁸GOD opens the eyes of the blind.

GOD lifts up those who are bowed down.
GOD loves the righteous.

⁹GOD watches over strangers

and upholds the orphan and the widow.
GOD thwarts the path of the wicked.

¹⁰GOD reigns forever,

your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise GOD (Alleluia)!

Psalm 146

Psalm 146 is an invitation to praise GOD because of who GOD is – a God who cares for those who place their trust in him.

‘Blessed and happy are those who are helped by Jacob’s God’ (verse 5). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes: ‘Let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need’ (Hebrews 4:16).

In verses 7-9 the psalmist lists ten characteristics of GOD.

1. ‘GOD keeps faith forever’ (verse 7). This means that God will keep all the promises he has ever made to you and to your children and to the world. We will never be without God’s love, no matter how dark the road may seem. Can we believe this when things are going hard for us? Sometimes we have found ourselves unable to keep promises we have made - and sometimes it is because the promises turned out to be unwisely made. Sometimes circumstances that are too complex to unravel have simply brought us to exhaustion and we have had to let promises go. Could we look at the central promises that are still functioning in our lives? Relying on God’s grace could we ask to be more open to the Spirit which God is certainly offering us to find more effective ways of keeping the promises which we made in baptism and confirmation to carry on Jesus’ mission of love in this world. Praying the psalm with Jesus we hear his exhortation: ‘Believe in God and believe in me’ (John 14:1).

2. ‘GOD is just to the oppressed’ (verse 7). If we believe that God executes right judgment for the oppressed, then a lot of people must not be listening or responding to grace. If we were, the world would not be such an unjust place. Is God asking me or you to reach out in one or other area of oppression and do what we can, always respecting persons and in love, to put injustices right? Little help is gained by being overwhelmed by a huge list. God is the one who is just to the oppressed, so the real question is: Is God inspiring me, or us as a community, to do something in a specific area. If so am I willing to listen and to begin responding? We are mindful of Jesus’ words: ‘Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?’ (Luke 18:7).

3. ‘GOD gives food to the hungry’ (verse 7). Praying this with Jesus we recall the scenes where Jesus gave food to the hungry (See Mark 6:34-44; 8:1-10). We recall also the Last Supper when, in ritual, Jesus gave himself in such a way that he would always be with us, nourishing a hunger and a thirst that is for more than food and drink. Can we love God without sharing his longing to reach out to meet people’s hunger - for bread, for love, for a listening ear, for dignity, for a place and a home?

4. ‘GOD sets prisoners free’ (verse 7). If so many people are locked into racism and prejudice and destructive addictions, and inability to forgive, it is not because grace is lacking. It must be because so many are insensitive to grace and failing to respond to the inspiration of God’s loving Spirit to go out and help unlock the prisons that we create in our fear.

We recall Matthew's introduction to Jesus' ministry in Galilee: 'The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned' (Matthew 4:16). Luke sets out Jesus' agenda in a scene in the Capernaum synagogue: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free' (Luke 4:18).

5. 'God opens the eyes of the blind' (verse 8). Jesus caused the 'blind' to 'see' (Matthew 9:30; 11:5; 20:29-34). We think too of Paul's enlightenment on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:3).

6. 'God lifts up those who are bowed down' (verse 8). We recall Jesus' words as he heals a crippled woman: 'Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?' (Luke 13:16).

7. 'God loves the righteous' (verse 8). Jesus made it clear that God loves everyone, including those we might think of as God's enemies. What is special about the 'righteous' is that they welcome God's love, whereas the unrighteous are closed to it.

8. 'God watches over strangers' (verse 9). We think of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Also Jesus' exhortation: 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind' (Luke 14:12-13). Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall Jesus' parable about the Ultimate Judgment: 'The king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me' (Matthew 25:34-36).

9. 'God upholds the orphan and the widow' (Verse 9). Jesus points to a widow as the one who perfectly exemplifies the essence of discipleship: 'A poor widow came and put in two copper cent pieces. Jesus called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury' (Mark 12:42-43).

10. 'God thwarts the path of the wicked' (verse 9). The scene of the repentant thief who was crucified with Jesus reveals God's love for each of us, right to the end (Luke 23:39-43). But love does not impose itself. Like the thief we must open our hearts to welcome the love we are offered. The path of sin leads only to death, the death of separation from God.

'God reigns forever' (verse 10). 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever' (Revelation 11:15).

Praying Psalm 147 (146 and 147) with Jesus

For the second time, the Greek Septuagint has two psalms where the Hebrew has one (see Hebrew Psalm 116, which is Greek Psalms 114 and 115). The result is that by the end of Psalm 147, the Greek is no longer numbered one behind the Hebrew.

Part One (verses 1-11; Greek Bible Psalm 146)

Part One is a call to praise GOD who sustains his creation and cares for those who look to him for love.

¹Praise GOD (Alleluia)!

**How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for our God is gracious. To God our praise is due.**

²GOD builds up Jerusalem, and bring back Israel's exiles.

³GOD heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.

**⁴GOD determines the number of the stars,
calling each by name.**

**⁵Great and almighty is our God*,
with wisdom that can never be measured.**

**⁶GOD lifts up the oppressed,
[but humbles the wicked to the dust.]**

**⁷O praise GOD in song,
giving thanks with all your heart.
Make melody to our God on the lyre.**

**⁸It is GOD who covers the heavens with clouds,
preparing rain for the earth, making grass grow on the hills.**

**⁹GOD gives the animals their food,
and the young ravens when they cry.**

¹⁰GOD's delight is not in horses, or in a warrior's strength.

**¹¹GOD takes pleasure in those who revere ['fear'] GOD
in those who trust in GOD's covenant love.**

* * * * *

Part Two (verses 12-20; Greek Bible Psalm 147: 1-9)

Part Two continues the theme of GOD as creator with the focus more on Jerusalem and on the special care GOD has for his chosen people.

¹²**Praise GOD, Jerusalem! Zion, praise your God,
¹³who strengthens the bars of your gates,
and blesses your children within you.**

¹⁴**GOD grants peace on your borders,
and feeds you with finest wheat.**

¹⁵**GOD sends out a word to the earth,
¹⁶showers down snow like wool,
and scatters hoar-frost like ashes.**

¹⁷**GOD hurls down hail like crumbs.
The waters are frozen at GOD's touch.
¹⁸GOD sends out the command, and melts them.
At GOD's breath the ice melts and the rivers flow.**

¹⁹**GOD speaks words to Jacob, statutes and ordinances to Israel –
²⁰words unknown to other nations. Praise GOD (Alleluia)!**

Psalm 147

‘God builds up Jerusalem, and bring back Israel’s exiles’ (verse 2). There were those in the early Christian community who shared the perspective of the psalmist. Others saw that the God revealed by Jesus welcomed people into communion as they are. They did not need to change their culture to belong to the Christian movement. What was required of them was that they open their hearts to Jesus’ Spirit and learn to love as Jesus loved.

‘God heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds’ (verse 3). We see this beautifully revealed in the ministry of Jesus. Matthew writes: ‘When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd’ (Matthew 9:36). ‘Jesus saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick’ (Matthew 14:14). ‘Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way”’ (Matthew 15:32).

Paul calls on us as disciples of Jesus to open our hearts to make space for Jesus’ compassion: ‘As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion’ (Colossians 3:12).

For a reflection on ‘Fear of GOD’ (verse 11) see Psalm 2, page 23; also Psalm 33, page 109 and Psalm 47, page 145.

For a reflection on ‘covenant love’ (verse 11) see Psalm 85, pages 261-262.

* * * * *

A reflection on Psalm 148

Humankind, acting like a conductor, summons all of creation to offer praise to God, and orchestrates the choirs of heaven and of earth to produce a cosmic harmony in honour of the Creator.

The disciples’ experience of Jesus led them to expand their notion of God to include Jesus. Paul invites us to praise God incarnate in Jesus: ‘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).

Praying Psalm 148 with Jesus

¹Praise GOD (Alleluia)! Praise GOD from the heavens,
from the heights.

²Praise GOD, all you angels,
all you heavenly beings!

³Praise GOD, sun and moon.
Praise GOD, you glittering stars.

⁴Praise GOD, you highest heavens
and you waters above the heavens!

⁵Let them praise GOD,
for GOD commanded and they were created.

⁶It was GOD who established them,
fixing their place for ever and ever.

⁷Praise GOD from the earth!
you creatures of the deep,
⁸fire and hail, snow and frost,
storms and winds, carrying out GOD's commands.

⁹Praise GOD you mountains and hills,
you fruit trees and cedars,
¹⁰you wild beasts and tame, reptiles and birds.

¹¹Praise GOD you princes and judges,
you rulers and subjects,
¹²men and women, old and young.

¹³Let them praise GOD, who alone is exalted,
whose glory is above the earth and the heavens.

¹⁴GOD gives strength to the nation,
and glory to the faithful of Israel,
a people who are close to GOD.
Praise GOD (Alleluia)!

Praying Psalm 149 with Jesus

¹Praise GOD (Alleluia)! Sing to GOD a new song.
Praise GOD in the assembly of the faithful.

²Let Israel exult in its Maker.
Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.

³Let them dance for GOD,
make melody with timbrel and harp.

⁴GOD delights in the people, and crowns the poor with victory.

⁵O you faithful exult in your glory. Take your rest and sing for joy.

⁶Let the praises of God resound on your lips.

Verses 7-9 are omitted

⁷Brandish swords in your hands,
to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,

⁸to bind their kings in chains, and their nobles in fetters of iron,

⁹to execute on them the judgment decreed.

This is your glory, you faithful of God. Praise GOD (Alleluia)!

'Praise GOD in the assembly of the faithful' (verse 1). The 'faithful' (hasidim) are those who live by the 'covenant love' (hesed) of God. The psalmist is calling on them to defend Zion with their lives (verses 7-9).

'Let them dance for GOD' (verse 3). Is this a sword dance – a ritual celebration of victory in battle?

The sentiments of verses 7-9 need radical re-interpretation in the light of Jesus' teaching. During his arrest in Gethsemane Jesus said to one of his followers: 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword' (Matthew 26:52). Paul speaks about 'the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' (Ephesians 6:17). In the Letter to the Hebrews, too, the 'sword' is God's word (see Hebrews 4:12). Also in the Book of Revelation: 'From his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force' (Revelation 1:16; see 2:12).

Praying Psalm 150 with Jesus

¹Praise GOD (Alleluia)! Praise God in the sanctuary!
Praise God in the mighty firmament!

²Praise God's mighty deeds!
Praise God's surpassing greatness!

³Praise God with trumpet blast!
Praise God with lute and harp!

⁴Praise God with tambourine and dance!
Praise God with strings and pipe!

⁵Praise God with the beating of drums!
Praise God with the clashing of cymbals!

⁶Let everything that lives and breathes praise GOD!
Praise GOD (Alleluia)!

This, the last psalm in the psalter, is a hymn praising GOD in the temple that GOD has chosen as his abode. The psalmist, however, is going beyond the temple building. He is calling on the temple of heaven (verse 1), and the temple of the whole of creation (verse 6) to acclaim God's 'surpassing greatness' (verse 2).

As we come to this psalm, praying it with Jesus, we pray that our whole lives will be, in Paul's words, for the praise of God's glory: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessing us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love, destining us for adoption as sons for himself through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he determined in himself as a plan for the fullness of time. His plan is to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we Jews, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you Gentiles also, hearing the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believing in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory' (Ephesians 1:3-14).

Topic Index

Topic	Psalm	Pages
Absence of God	77	232-234
Accused wrongly	17	62
Anger of God	2	20-23
Ascension of Jesus	47	141-145
Asking Forgiveness [brackets]	25	91
Blessed and happy	1	18
Brevity of Life	90	283-284
Bridegroom	45 and 77	141 and 232
Christian (Temple)	48	150
Christian Morality	24	86-89
Church (Temple)	48	148-150
Church as Bride and Mother	128	402-403
Comfort (Consolation)	86	266-267
Communion with God	16	58-60
Communion with God	73:23-28	222
Compassion	102	313
Confession of sin	32	107
Control	2	20-22
Correction	141	429-430
Covenant Love	85	261-262
Covenant: New	111	348
Covenant Love & Faithfulness	61	187
Death	49	153
Face of God	31	104-105
Faith	116	357-359
Father-God	103	318-319
Fear of GOD	2	23
Fear of GOD	33	109
Fear of GOD	47	145
Forgiveness	65	200
Fount of Life	36	117
Gentleness	101	310
Glory	57	177-179
God: OT creed	85	261-262
God as Father	103	318-319

Topic	Psalm	Pages
God as guard	121	390-391
God does not control	2	20-22
God of Jesus	14	53-54
God's Absence	77	232-234
God's Justice	82	249-251
God's Justice	9	41
God's secret hiding place	31	105
Good Shepherd	23	83
Government	101	310
Gracious	85	261-262
Heaven	21	75
Heaven	48	147-149
Heaven (Jesus and us)	42	173-175
Heaven (Temple): Jesus and us	48	147-148
Holiness	99	303-307
Hope	62	190-191
Humility	18	67
Humility	131	407
Jesus and children	8	39
Jesus and God's will	Intro	11
Jesus as Son	2	24
Jesus is sinless & compassionate	6	33-34
Jesus not claiming equal with God	Intro	10-11
Jesus on Calvary	22	78-81
Jesus the Bridegroom	45	141
Jesus the Messiah	2	19
Jesus' Baptism and Religious Experience	1	17
Jesus' love for Jerusalem	2	23
Jesus' Prayer	4	28
Jesus' Spirit	65	201
Joy	65	201
Justice	82	249-251
Kingdom of God	93	290
Law	119	366-370
Light	27	95

Topic Index

Topic	Psalm	Pages
Living in an unjust world	37	120-121
Longing	11	45
Longing	42	132-134
Longing	63	193-196
Look to God and be radiant	34	111
Love's Gazing	11	46
Meditate	63	196
Messiah	110	343
Obedience	123	393-397
Opposition	3	25-26
Peace	85	263
Petition	20	72
Pilgrimage to the temple	84	257-259
Political Leaders	72	218-219
Poor	82	251-254
Praise	71	215-216
Priest	110	344-346
Repentance	51	161
Resurrection	30	101
Resurrection	88	274-275
Rich and poor	52	163-165
Salvation	62	189-190
Salvation universal	87	268-272
Seeking God's face	27	96
Shade of God's wings	61	186
Sharing Jesus' intimacy with God	16	59-60
Sin	65	200
Thanksgiving	21	74
Thirst for God	42	132-134
Trinity	Intro	12-15
Trust	27	95
Truth	12	47-49
Universe and Torah reveal God	19	70
Virtue	15	56-57
Wisdom	51	160
YHWH	Intro	16