

Praying Psalm 3 with Jesus



¹O GOD (יְהוָה), how daunting the forces massed against me!

²They jeer at me: 'God (אֱלֹהִים) will not save you!'

³But you, O GOD, are my shield, my glory.

You hold my head high.

⁴When I call you answer me
from your holy mountain.

⁵I rest easy at night and rise in the morning,
sustained by your protection.

⁶I am not afraid of those ranged against me.

⁷Rise up, O GOD, and rescue me.

⁸Saving help is from you.

Your blessing is for your people, for You are our Saviour.

Omitted

⁷For you strike all my enemies. You break the teeth of the irreligious.

¹O GOD, how daunting the forces massed against me!

‘The Pharisees conspired with the Herodians against him to destroy him’ (Mark 3:6).

They accused Jesus of ‘having an unclean spirit’ (Mark 3:30).

Even the people of Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown ‘took offence at him’ (Mark 6:3).

The Pharisees and Herodians tried to trap Jesus by seeking his opinion about paying taxes to the emperor (Mark 12:13-17).

This opposition came to a head two days before the Passover: ‘The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him’ (Mark 14:1-2).



‘Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him’ (Mark 15:29-32).

Jesus' response to the mockery was to plead with God to forgive them: 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

He cried out to God: 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' (Mark 15:34), but he never lost faith in his Father's love, and he handed over his life to God with the words: 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46).

‘In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission’ (Hebrews 5:7).

God took Jesus from the cross into his embrace. God will do the same for us, for God is, indeed, ‘our Saviour’ (verse 8).

When the cross weighs heavily upon us we can hear Jesus praying Psalm 3, and join him in recognising that, whatever we are suffering, God is, indeed, our ‘shield’, our ‘protection’, our ‘saviour’.

Like Jesus in his agony, we can plead with God to rescue us, and listen to Jesus praying for this with us. It is natural to experience fear, but, strengthened by the love poured into our hearts from the heart of the Risen Jesus, we can pray: ‘I am not afraid’.

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Psalm 3

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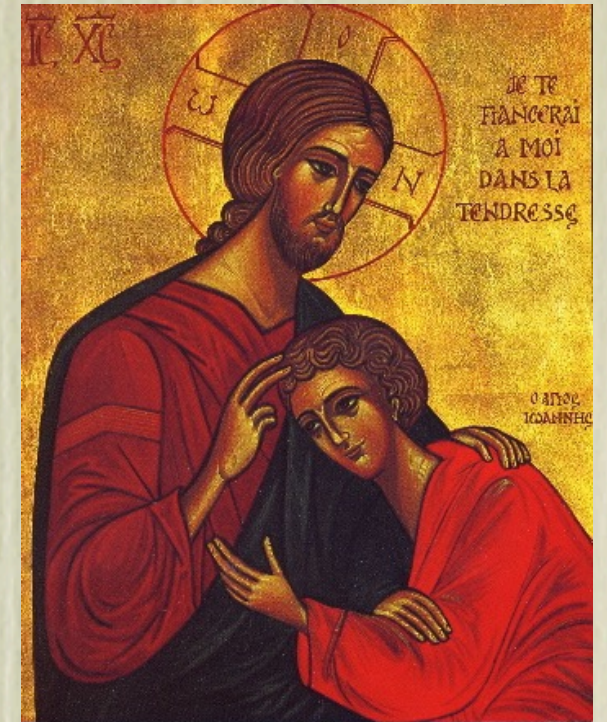
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04. Praying Psalm 4 with Jesus



¹Answer me when I call, O God (אֱלֹהֵי),
defender of my just cause.

You opened up an escape for me.

Be gracious to me. Hear my prayer.

²How long, proud fools, will you insult me?

How long will you love what is false and chase after lies?

³GOD has set me apart, for I am faithful.

I belong to GOD, who always hears my call.

⁴Tremble with fear and stop your sinning.

Commune in your heart and be silent.

⁵Worship with integrity, trusting always in GOD.

⁶Many ask themselves:

‘Who is going to enjoy a good life,
if the light of your face, O GOD,
does not shine upon us?’

⁷You give my heart more joy than all their grain and wine.

⁸I sleep secure at night.

For you, O GOD, are watching over me.

I place my trust in you.

We can hear the outpouring of Jesus’ heart in his psalm, pleading with God to answer his call, to respond with love to his prayer. He longed to see ‘the face of God’ and ‘placed all his trust in God.’ John speaks of Jesus as being ‘in the bosom of the Father’ (John 1:18). From this intimate communion Jesus could say: ‘The Father knows me and I know the Father ... The Father loves me’ (John 10:15, 17).

⁶Many ask themselves:

‘Who is going to enjoy a good life,
if the light of your face, O GOD,
does not shine upon us?’

‘May GOD bless you and keep you.

May GOD make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you.

May GOD lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace’ (Numbers 6:25-26).

At his baptism in the Jordan Luke tells us that Jesus was **praying**. In response to his prayer 'heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him' (Luke 3:21).

In his opening chapter Mark focuses on the power of Jesus' love to bring healing. He goes on: 'In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he was **praying**' (Mark 1:35). Understandably everyone wanted Jesus to stay, but in his prayer he discerned that God wanted him to move on 'to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do' (Mark 1:38).

His preaching flowed from his prayer, as did his healing. John puts it this way: 'He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure' (John 3:34).

Luke writes: 'the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and **pray**' (Luke 5:15-16).

Before choosing the Twelve 'Jesus went out to the mountain to pray and he spent the whole night in **prayer** to God' (Luke 6:12).

On another occasion 'Jesus was **praying** alone, with only his disciples near him' (Luke 9:18). He turned to them and asked what he meant to them. With great love Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah promised to Israel by God. Jesus then 'took with him Peter, John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray' (Luke 9:28). Something of the intimacy of his prayer shone from his countenance.

In the words of Psalm 4 '**the light of God's face shone upon him.**'

On another occasion '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).

Jesus' disciples came to realise that the secret of Jesus' life and ministry was in his prayer. They wanted him to teach them how to pray as he prayed (Luke 11:1).

Picking up the symbolism of God's gift of manna to the Israelites on their wilderness journey, and in words that echo Jesus' gift of himself at the Last Supper, the Gospel writers portray Jesus as feeding the people. After dismissing the crowd, 'Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came he was there alone' (Matthew 14:23).

Jesus' prayer issued from his 'heart' and so ranged through all the moods of the human heart. At the Last Supper, with a broken heart, he said to his companions: 'You will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone.' He went straight on to add: 'Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me'(John 16:32). We have already reflected on Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross (see Psalm 3).

In his agony and in his ecstasy and in the ups and downs of his daily life and ministry, Jesus remained 'faithful'. He knew the 'gladness of heart' of being in communion with God in whose love he 'placed all his trust'.

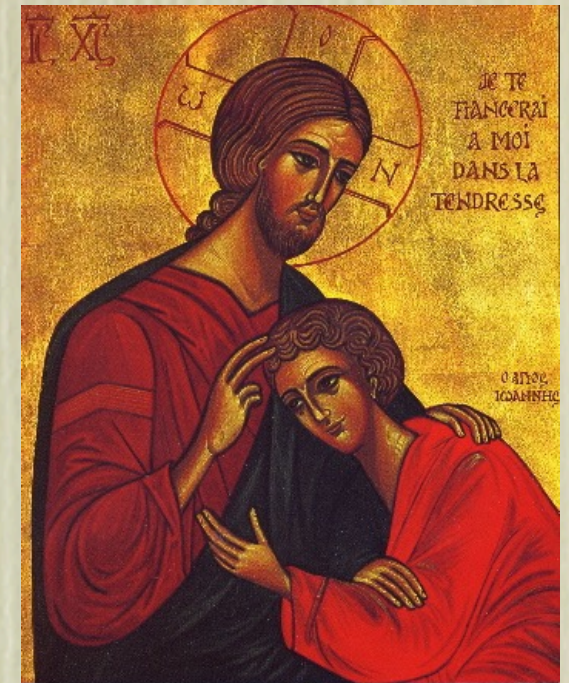
He invites us, in the words of Psalm 4: 'Put your trust in GOD'.

²How long, proud fools, will you insult me?

How long will you love what is false and chase after lies?

This calls to mind Jesus' heartfelt plea for the scribes and Pharisees to practise 'humility', and to learn 'justice, mercy and faith' (Matthew 23).

Psalm 4



¹Answer me when I call, O God,
defender of my just cause.
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For you, O GOD, are watching over me.

I place my trust in you.

Praying Psalm 5 with Jesus



¹O GOD, listen to my words,
give heed to my groaning.

²Attend to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God.

O GOD, it is to you I pray.

³In the morning hear my voice.

In the morning I plead my case, watching and waiting.

⁴You are not one who wills evil.

⁷Thanks to your great love,

I have access to your house.

I bow down toward your holy temple,
filled with awe in your presence.

⁸In your justice, O GOD, guide me.
Make clear your way before me.

⁹There is no truth in those who accuse me.
Inside they are only empty caverns.
Their throats, wide-open graves;
all honey their speech.

¹¹Let all who take refuge in you sing for joy.
Spread over them your protection,
that they may exult in you,
when they call on your name.

¹²You bless the just, O GOD;
you cover them from above.
You surround them
with the shield of your love.

Omitted

⁴The person who does evil is not your guest.

⁵The boastful will not stand before you; you detest those who do evil.

⁶You destroy those who lie. You abhor the bloodthirsty and deceitful.

This is based on an image of God that Jesus knew was wrong. A deeper appreciation of God's respect for human freedom, and a deeper awareness that God is love, lead us to realise that it is not God who '**destroys those who lie**'. We bring destruction upon ourselves when we do not live according to the truth.

Significant, too, is the fact that Jesus ate with sinners. No wonder those brought up on the sentiments of these verses were shocked at his behaviour: 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them' (Luke 15:2).

Omitted from liturgy

*¹⁰Make them suffer the consequences of their sin, O God;
bring to nothing their plotting.*

*Because of their many transgressions cast them out,
for they rebel against you.*

‘When Jesus was abused, he did not return abuse;
when he suffered, he did not threaten;
but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly’ (1 Peter 2:23).

Jesus is just as insistent that it matters how we behave and that we are judged according to what we do (see his parable on God's ultimate judgment, Matthew 25:31-46).

However, it is important to realise that it is not God who punishes. Punishment is self-inflicted. It is not God who 'casts the sinner out'. It is the sinner who obstinately refuses to welcome the grace offered by God. Nothing we do can change God's loving. We can, however, reject God's offer of life.

God's love is unconditionally offered. It is received conditional upon our welcoming it, for love does not force entry into our lives.

⁴You are not one who wills evil.

It is not God 'who wills evil'. God loves us into life and gives us the gift of freedom - not absolute freedom, for we are not independent, but real (though necessarily limited) freedom. Evil happens when we use our freedom to choose to reject God's love.

⁹There is no truth in those who accuse me.

When Jesus was falsely accused before the Jewish council ‘he was silent’ (Matthew 26:63). It was the same when he stood before Pilate (see John 19:9). He did not allow the false accusations to distract him from communion with God.

When we are falsely accused we are encouraged by Jesus’ words: ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you’ (Matthew 5:10-12).

Psalm 5

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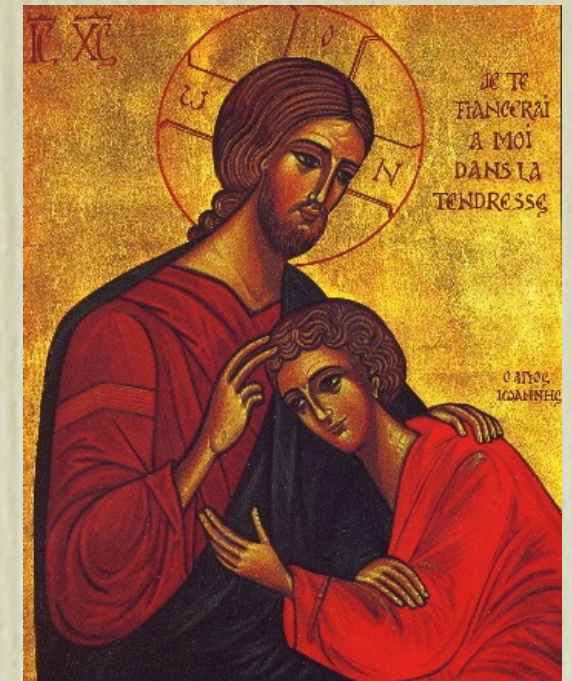
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