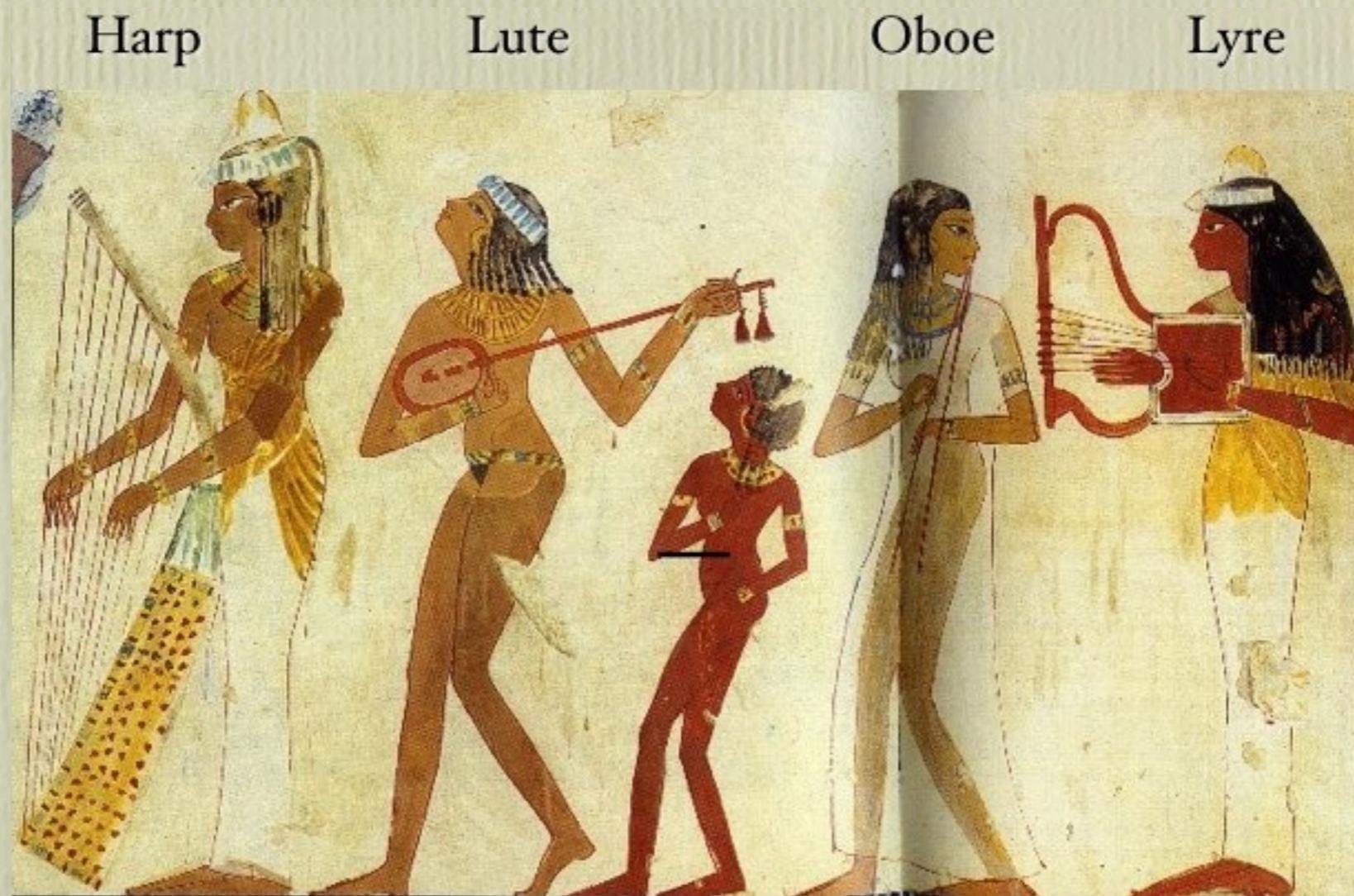


32. Psalms 98-100

Praying Psalm 98 with Jesus



¹Sing a new song to GOD.

Celebrate the wonderful deeds wrought by God's hand.

God's holy arm has achieved victory.

²You, O GOD, make known your saving action,
revealing justice to the nations,

³remembering your covenant love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.

The ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

⁴Shout with joy to GOD, all the earth!

Break forth into joyous songs of praise!

⁵Sing praises to GOD with the lyre,
with the sound of instruments.

⁶With trumpets and the sound of the horn
shout with joy before GOD, our king.

⁷Let the sea roar, and all that fills it,
the world and those who live in it.

⁸Rivers clap your hands! Hills ring out your joy!

⁹For GOD is coming, coming to judge the earth,
to rule the world justly, to govern the peoples with equity.

This is the sixth in a series of psalms celebrating the reign of God. Psalm 98 was perhaps composed to celebrate the restoration of Judah after the Babylonian Exile. God is returning to his city for all the world to see, to inaugurate his universal reign.

²You, O GOD, make known your saving action,
revealing justice to the nations,
³remembering your covenant love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.

The ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

GOD came to the help of Israel and achieved victory. God's faithful love for Israel has revealed God's justice for all the world to see.

¹Sing a new song to GOD.

Celebrate the wonderful deeds wrought by God's hand.

God's holy arm has achieved victory.

⁴Shout with joy to GOD, all the earth!

Break forth into joyous songs of praise!

⁵Sing praises to GOD with the lyre,

with the sound of instruments.

⁶With trumpets and the sound of the horn

shout with joy before GOD, our king.

The call to celebration is echoed in many psalms.

‘Good it is to give thanks to GOD, to make music in your honour, O Most High; to proclaim your kindness in the morning, and in the night your faithfulness, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the strumming of the lyre’ (Psalm 92:1-3).

‘I want to sing of kindness and right judgment.

To you, GOD, I will make music’ (Psalm 101:1).

Praise GOD [Alleluia]! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for God is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting’ (Psalm 147:1).

Praise GOD [Alleluia]! Praise God in the sanctuary; praise God in the mighty firmament! Praise God’s mighty deeds; praise God’s surpassing greatness! Praise God with trumpet sound; praise God with lute and harp! Praise God with tambourine and dance; praise God with strings and pipe! Praise God with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that breathes praise GOD! Praise GOD [Alleluia]!’ (Psalm 150).

We reflect on the reign of Christ who said: 'I have overcome the world' (John 16:33). We think of Jesus' resurrection and the fruits of Christ's victory for the blessed.

'And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: 'Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations!' (Revelation 15:3).

They sing a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation' (Revelation 5:9).

'I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth' (Revelation 14:2-3).

Psalm 98

¹Sing a new song to GOD.

Celebrate the wonderful deeds
wrought by God's hand.

God's holy arm has achieved victory.

²You, O GOD, make known your saving action,
revealing justice to the nations,

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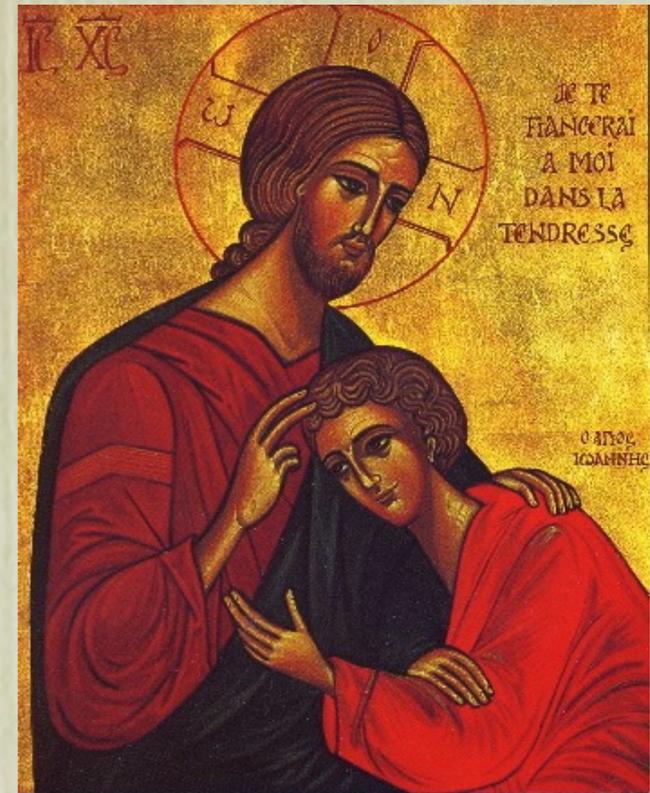
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⁷Let the sea roar, and all that fills it,
the world and those who live in it.

⁸Rivers clap your hands! Hills ring out your joy!

⁹For GOD is coming, coming to judge the earth,
to rule the world justly, to govern the peoples with equity.

Praying Psalm 99 with Jesus



This is the last in series of seven psalms celebrating the kingship of God. The key theme of Psalm 99 is God's holiness. The appropriate response to the transcendent God is one of awe.

¹GOD is king; let the nations tremble!

GOD sits enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth quake!

²YOU are great in Zion, exalted over all the peoples.

³Let them praise your great and awesome name! 'GOD is Holy!'

⁴Mighty King, lover of right judgment,
you have established equity.

You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

⁵Praise GOD, our God.

Bow down before Zion, God's footstool. 'GOD is Holy!'

⁶Moses and Aaron were GOD's priests.

Samuel was among those who called on GOD's name.

They cried to GOD, and were answered.

⁷GOD spoke in the pillar of cloud.

They kept the decrees and statutes,
given them by GOD.

⁸O GOD, you answered them.

For them you were a God who forgives;

Yet you punished all their offences.

⁹Praise GOD and worship at his holy mountain.

For GOD, our God, is holy.

‘The Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness’ (Isaiah 5:16).

‘Thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite’ (Isaiah 57:15).

‘I will display my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am GOD’ (Ezekiel 38:23).

‘I am God, the Holy One in your midst’ (Hosea 11:9).

‘Holy and awesome is God’s name’ (Psalm 111:9).

‘Through those who are near me I will show myself holy, and before all the people I will be glorified’ (Leviticus 10:3).

To understand holiness properly we must see that only God is holy. We recall the vision of Isaiah: ‘I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”’ (Isaiah 6:1-3).

The word ‘holy’ speaks of God’s transcendence. The people are told that they may not approach the mountain where God has chosen to reveal himself (Exodus 24:2). For the same reason the tent of meeting is to be pitched outside the camp (Exodus 33:7-11). The inner sanctuary in the temple, the ‘holy of holies’, is out of bounds for all but the high priest, and even his entry is severely restricted (Leviticus 16:2).

All this changed when 'the Word was made flesh and pitched his tent among us' (John 1:14). In Jesus we see that God wanted us to draw close. Jesus is 'the holy one of God' (Mark 1:24, John 6:69). He is the tent of meeting (John 2:21).

People had always recognised the immanence of God in creation and in history, but those who experienced Jesus came to see that we are drawn into communion with the Holy One not by withdrawal from the body, from the mind, from thoughts and feelings, but by allowing the Holy One to draw us into the heart of the created world where God will transform us. In the light of the Incarnation, we came to the astonishing insight that, in the words of Teilhard de Chardin, God is indeed the 'heart' as well as the 'beyond' of everything.

Jesus also astonished us by showing that this is true of sinners and that we sinners are invited to enjoy God's embrace: 'All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them"' (Luke 15:1-2).

We sinners are called to be in communion with Jesus and so with the Holy One: 'For their sakes I sanctify ['make holy'] myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth' (John 17:19).

'It is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (Hebrews 10:10).

‘This is the will of God, your sanctification’ (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

‘May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless’ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

‘God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple’ (1 Corinthians 3:17).

‘I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship’ (Romans 12:1).

‘God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love’ (Ephesians 1:4).

‘As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct’ (1 Peter 1:15).

We are made in God's image for God creates us to be in communion with him. God, 'the fountain of all holiness' (Second Eucharistic Prayer) is constantly pouring the Spirit of love into our hearts, drawing us into God's own life and so sharing God's holiness with us. Especially significant for this intimacy are times of prayer when our mind and heart are turned to God in loving attentiveness. It is in prayer that we say Yes to the communion which God is offering us. It is in prayer that we open our souls to receive God's offer of God's Self. It is in prayer that we grow in holiness – a holiness that is expressed in every aspect of our lives.

To be holy is to be in communion with God. It is a communion of the real self with the real God. Since God is love, it is obvious that holiness is intimately related to love.

The Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium, 1964] reminds us that we are all called to a life of holiness: ‘The holiness of the Church is constantly shown forth in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful. And so it must be. It is expressed in many ways by those who, each in his or her own state of life, tend to the perfection of love’ (LG n.43).

Since holiness consists in tending to the perfection of love and since prayer is this experience of being in communion with the all-holy God who is love, the link between prayer and holiness should be obvious. To understand the place of prayer in our lives it is important to understand that we are called and graced to share in Jesus’ holiness, and so in the holiness of God.

When we speak of someone as being holy, or when we describe some place as a holy place (a 'sanctuary'), we are not speaking of a characteristic that is inherent in the person or place, or of something that can be acquired by endeavour or discipline. We are not the initiator of any attitude or action that can result in holiness. We are holy to the degree that God, the one who alone is holy, is dwelling in us in a communion of love which is transforming us into an ever more profound participation in the divine life. It is because God, the One who alone is holy, is present uniting us to Himself, that we are living in this divine communion. In prayer we consciously focus on this most profound dimension of our lives. In prayer we become holy.

In words spoken from her deathbed Therese of Lisieux (d.1897) tells us: 'Holiness does not consist in this or that practice. It consists in a disposition of the heart which makes us humble and little in the arms of God, well aware of our feebleness, but boldly confident in the Father's goodness.'

Jesus was speaking of holiness when he invited the Samaritan woman to drink from the well of his love: 'Drink of the water that I will give you and you will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life' (John 4:14).

To grow in holiness we must cooperate with grace. Since God is love, God's gracious initiative comes to us as an offering, an invitation. Since we are created by God and created precisely for this divine communion, the invitation finds an echo in our longing. However, we are free to reject or to accept God's loving invitation. The transformation which we call holiness and which is union with God occurs only to the extent that we welcome God's grace and open our minds and hearts and wills and bodies to the transforming action of God's Spirit - the Spirit of love.

Endeavour and discipline are needed if we are to remain attentive to grace and to allow God's grace to transform us. We must be careful to be attentive to grace so that our endeavour and discipline is indeed in response to grace and not coming from our own ego. The spring of divine life (the spring of holiness) issues from the Heart of God alone. We need to allow God the vine-grower to prune away whatever is dead wood, as well as whatever is bearing fruit, that it may bear more. We need to cooperate as God the gardener clears away whatever is blocking the spring or hindering the flow of water.

We need to keep responding to grace by cooperating in keeping the channels open and clear. We need to allow the water of life to penetrate the soil of our lives. But we do not hold the shears; we do not do the pruning; we do not create the water or initiate its flow. A holy person is not a humanly perfect person. A holy person is one who has allowed him/herself to be transformed by communion in love with God – a communion initiated and sustained by God.

Herein lies the challenge of becoming holy. We have to learn that we cannot initiate holiness. No amount of control exercised by ourselves can produce or achieve holiness. God is holy. God is utterly transcendent, utterly beyond anything we can initiate. God, however, can and does directly act in our lives.

We have to allow the self-as-initiator to be 'lost'. 'If you lose your life for my sake you will find it' (Matthew 10:39). We have to let go control.

We have to become like a little child and allow to happen whatever God wants to happen as a result of His love. 'Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it' (Mark 10:15).

This self-denial is a denial or negating of the self (the ego): ‘If you want to become my followers, you must deny yourself’ (Mark 8:34). It is not a denial or negating by the self. It is allowing God to initiate. It is allowing grace to transform. It is accepting to be loved and to love only insofar as loving flows from the transformation. This requires attentive discipline of our natural tendency to take control. We must resist the temptation to want to ‘possess’ or ‘achieve’ holiness.

This is what it means to be 'poor in spirit' (Matthew 5:3). This is what it means to be detached, to be humble. This is what it means to be a child of God. This is what it means to cry out in childlike trust 'Abba!' – a cry that can be made only because the Spirit of Jesus has been poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5).

Saying Yes to God's gracious offer to transform us into God's Self through divine communion, we allow God to penetrate to the heart of our lives, and in so doing discover that God has drawn us to penetrate to the heart of God's life. Prayer is making space for God's transforming action in our lives. Prayer is giving ourselves, like a child, into his hands. Love will lead us along the path of holiness, for Love will take us ever more closely to God's heart.

Jesus is the mediator who shows us how to walk this journey. Through giving us his love, the Spirit of love which he shares with the Father, he draws us to his heart and so to the heart of God. The journey of becoming holy is a journey of being transformed into Jesus: 'All are called to union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and towards whom our whole life is directed' (Vatican II, LG n.3).

'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20).

Teresa of Avila (d.1582) insists that the path to holiness and so the journey of prayer is to be in the company of Jesus: 'It is for you to look at him. He never takes his eyes off you' (Way of Perfection 26,3). 'Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us' (Life 8.5).

Praying Psalm 99 with Jesus we reflect on the holiness of the Most Holy Trinity. Jesus addresses God as 'Holy Father' (John 17:11).

In the Book of Revelation we hear the hymn: 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come' (Revelation 4:8).

The song of the crucified and risen Jesus, addressed to ‘God the Almighty’, includes the words: ‘You alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed’ (Revelation 15:4).

In a later hymn we hear: ‘You are just, O Holy One, who are and were, for you have judged these things’ (Revelation 16:5).

Jesus is acknowledged as holy: ‘The child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God’ (Luke 1:35).

Peter says of Jesus: ‘We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God’ (John 6:69).

The Letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus as a high priest who is ‘holy’ (Hebrews 7:26).

The Spirit of love that is the communion between Jesus and his Father is called the 'Holy Spirit' 89 times in the New Testament, and many times as the Spirit who makes holy ('sanctifies'). Peter addresses his First Letter to: 'you who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance' (1 Peter 1:2).

Consequently those who are united to Jesus are drawn into this holiness and are regularly spoken of as holy ('saints'; see John 17:19; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 3:7; Ephesians 1:1 and 2:21; Colossians 1:2,12).

To quote again from Peter. 'As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written: You shall be holy, for I am holy' (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Paul writes: 'Now that you have been freed from sin and have accepted God as your Master, the advantage you get is sanctification [being made holy]. The end is eternal life' (Romans 6:22).

‘Mighty King, lover of right judgment, you have established equity. You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob’ (verse 4).

‘You love justice and hate wickedness’ (Psalm 45:7).

God establishes a system of justice on the earth.

‘Your throne is God’s throne; it endures forever.

Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity’ (Psalm 45:6).

God does this through the government of Israel.

‘Give the king your judgments, O God, and your justice to the king’s son, that he may judge your people with justice, and your poor with right judgment’ (Psalm 72:1-2).

Psalm 99

¹GOD is king; let the nations tremble!

GOD sits enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth quake!

²YOU are great in Zion, exalted over all the peoples.

³Let them praise your great and awesome name!

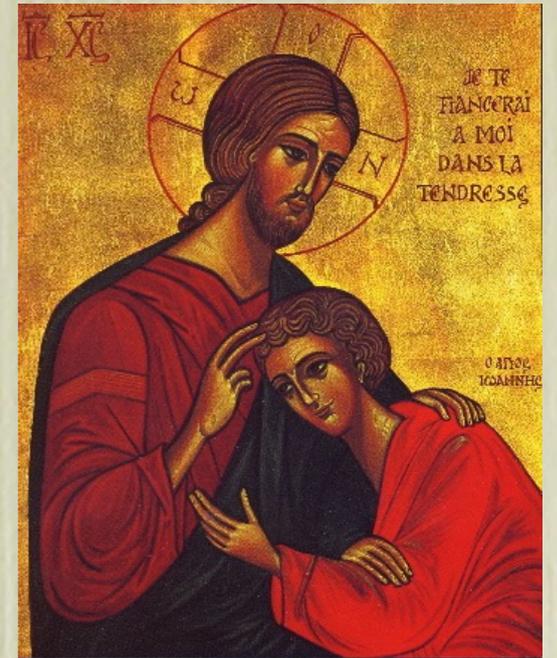
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They cried to GOD, and were answered.

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They kept the decrees and statutes,
given them by GOD.

⁸O GOD, you answered them.

For them you were a God who forgives;

Yet you punished all their offences.

⁹Praise GOD and worship at his holy mountain.

For GOD, our God, is holy.

Praying Psalm 100 with Jesus



¹Cry out with joy to GOD all the earth.

²Serve GOD with gladness.

Come into the Presence singing for joy.

³Know that GOD is God,
our maker, to whom we belong.

We are the flock. GOD is our shepherd.

⁴Enter the temple gates with thanksgiving,

Enter the courts with songs of praise.

Give thanks and bless GOD's name.

⁵Indeed how good is GOD,
whose covenant love is eternal,
who is faithful from age to age.

The psalmist is overwhelmed with a joy that is beyond words. Compare the following: 'Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy' (1 Peter 1:8).

'We give thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light' (Colossians 1:12).

'Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope' (Romans 12:11-12).

God is our Maker, our Shepherd (verse 3).

'Come, let us worship and bow low, let us kneel before GOD, our Maker! This is our God, our Shepherd. We are the sheep fed by God's hand' (Psalm 95:6-7).

‘From one ancestor God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth’
(Acts 17:26).

‘I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd’ (John 10:14-16).

‘How good is GOD’ (verse 5)

‘Jesus said to the man: No one is good but God alone’ (Mark 10:18).

‘You may grow into salvation, if you have tasted that God is good’ (1 Peter 2:3).

Praying the psalm with Jesus we share his joy in knowing how good God is, in knowing that God is Love.

Psalm 100

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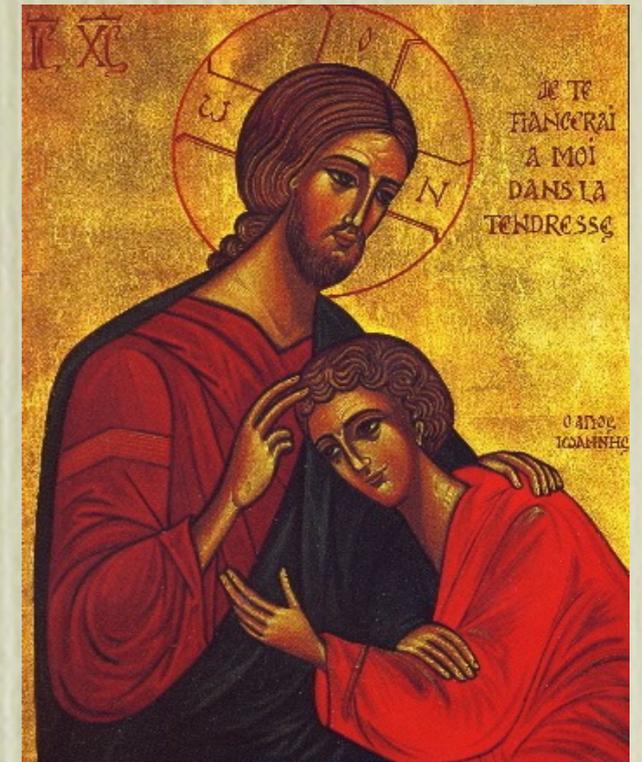
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The Lord is my Shepherd