

Psalm 106

4th Thursday of Lent
Not in the Prayer of the Church

The psalmist offers us a historical survey of the ways in which the people of Israel persisted in breaking their covenant with YHWH in spite of YHWH's constancy to them. The psalmist prays that once again YHWH will show mercy to his people, and that he himself will enjoy YHWH's favour as part of the people. Compare Ezra 9:6-15; Nehemiah 9; Daniel 1:15 - 3:8; and Daniel 3:24-25 in the Septuagint version.

Praise followed by a confession of unworthiness is typical of a penitential rite. The recognition of God's greatness encourages confession of sin. The recognition of God's forgiveness encourages praise.

The individual is part of the community (see also verse 47).

The psalmist acknowledges that he and his contemporaries, like their ancestors, have sinned. Compare Ezra 9:6; Nehemiah 9:2; Daniel 9:6; Baruch 1:17,19.

The psalmist recalls the failure in faith of his ancestors when they came to the Red Sea (see Exodus 14).

¹Praise YH! O give thanks to YHWH*, for he is good; for his kindness* endures forever.

²Who can list the mighty deeds of YHWH, or fully praise him?

³Happy* are those who observe right judgment*, who act with justice* at all times.

⁴Remember me, YHWH, when you show favour to your people; help* me when you deliver them;

⁵that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may greet with shouts of joy your heritage.

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

⁷Our ancestors, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wonderful deeds; they did not remember the abundance of your kindness*, but rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea.

⁸Yet he saved them for the honour of his name, to make known his mighty power.

⁹He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the deep as through a desert.

¹⁰In this way he saved* them from the hand of the foe, and rescued them from the enemy.

Sins on the desert journey

¹¹The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them was left.

¹²When this happened our ancestors believed his words; they sang his praise.

¹³But they soon forgot his deeds; they lost faith in his designs for them.

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

¹⁵He gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them.

¹⁶They were jealous of Moses in the camp, and of Aaron, the holy one of YHWH.

¹⁷The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered over the followers of Abiram.

¹⁸Fire broke out amongst them; the flame consumed the wicked.

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.

²¹They forgot God, their Saviour*, who had done great things in Egypt,

²²wondrous works in the land of Ham, and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.

²³He spoke of destroying them, and would have done so had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn back his wrath*.

Because God is God, the ancestors were pardoned. God saved them and they learned to believe.

The ancestors, longing for the relative comforts of slavery, murmured against God, and suffered the consequences (see Numbers 11).

The story of Dathan and Abiram can be found narrated in Numbers 16.

The story of the golden calf can be found in Exodus 32.

God forgave the people because of Moses' intercession (see Exodus 32:11-14 and Ezekiel 13:5).

This goes beyond Numbers 14 or Deuteronomy 9. It is written in light of the exile and the dispersion.

The story is recounted in Numbers 25. It is another example of how the presence of one person who is just and open to grace brings about reconciliation. The classical example is that of Noah.

This scene is narrated in Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:1-13 and Deuteronomy 9:7-8. See also Psalm 81:7-8 and Psalm 95:8-9.

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 and so compromised 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 in sinful behaviour.

On the 'scandal' of mixed marriages see Ezra 9:2 and Nehemiah 13:3. On the dangers of inculturation see Deuteronomy 20:18.

²⁴Then they despised the pleasant land, having no faith in his promise.

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

²⁶Therefore he raised his hand and swore that he would make them fall in the wilderness,

²⁷and would disperse their descendants among the nations, scattering them over the lands.

²⁸Then they attached themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead;

²⁹they provoked YHWH to anger* with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them.

³⁰Then Phinehas stood up and interceded, and the plague was stopped.

³¹This act of righteousness* has been accredited to him generation after generation.

³²They angered YHWH 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.

³⁴They did not destroy the peoples, as YHWH commanded them,

³⁵but intermarried with the nations and learned to do as they did.

The constancy of YHWH

³⁶**They served their idols, which became a snare to them.**

³⁷**They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons;**

³⁸**they poured out innocent blood,**

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

³⁹**Thus they became unclean by their acts, and prostituted themselves in their deeds.**

⁴⁰**Then the anger of YHWH was kindled against his people, and he abhorred his heritage;**

⁴¹**he handed them over to the nations, so that those who hated them ruled over them.**

⁴²**Their enemies oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their power.**

⁴³**Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious in their purposes, and were brought low through their guilt*.**

⁴⁴**Nevertheless he attended to their distress when he heard their cry.**

⁴⁵**For their sake he remembered his covenant*, and showed compassion* according to the abundance of his kindness*.**

⁴⁶**He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive.**

⁴⁷**Save* us, YHWH our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.**

⁴⁸**Blessed* be YHWH, the God of Israel, for ever and ever. And let all the people say, 'Amen.' Praise YH!**

On human sacrifice see Deuteronomy 12:31; 32:17; Numbers 35:33; Leviticus 20:2; 2Kings 16:3; 17:31; 23:10; Jeremiah 7:30-32; 19:3-5; Ezekiel 16:20-21; Wisdom 12:4-6 and 1Corinthians 10:19-21.

This part of the verse seems to be a marginal note introduced by mistake into the text (a 'gloss').

God's displeasure is demonstrated in the victory of Israel's enemies.

The only constant in all this history is God's faithfulness, compassion and love.

Compare Exodus 3:7

See Leviticus 26:44-45; 1Kings 8:47-49.

Compare Baruch 2:17-18.

Verse 48 marks the conclusion to Book 4 of the Psalms.