

II. Psalms 25-29

Praying Psalm 25 with Jesus



¹All my longing is for you, O GOD, in you I trust.

²Do not let my enemies gloat over me. Do not fail me.

³Those who hope in you will not be disappointed.

Disgrace is for those who are wantonly unfaithful.

⁴O GOD, show me how to live. Teach me your way.

⁵Direct me to your truth, and guide me.

For you are God my saviour, my constant hope.

⁶O GOD, be mindful of your tender compassion,
your kindness since ancient times.

[⁷Remember me, not the sins of my youth
or the ways I have been unfaithful.]

⁸Good and upright is GOD, guiding those who stray.

⁹God leads the poor, guiding them along the right path.

¹⁰YOUR paths are faithfulness and love
for those who keep your covenant.

[¹¹pardon my guilt, for it is great.]

¹²For those conscious of God's awesome presence,
GOD will reveal the path to choose.

¹³They will live a full life, and their heirs will inherit the land.

¹⁴GOD counsels the faithful, instructing them through the covenant.

¹⁵My eyes are fixed on GOD, who will free me from the trap.

¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious, for I am lonely and afflicted.

¹⁷Relieve the troubles of my heart. Free me from my distress.

¹⁸Observe my affliction and my pain.

[¹⁸Forgive all my sins.]

¹⁹See how many are my foes.

How violent is their hatred towards me.

²⁰Rescue me and preserve my life.

Do not let me be put to shame.

In you I take refuge.

²¹May integrity and uprightness preserve me,

For in you, O God, I hope.

²²Rescue Israel from every danger.

¹All my longing is for you, O GOD, in you I trust.

The psalmist has a beautiful relationship with God. He keeps his gaze 'fixed on God' (verse 15), and knows God's 'tender compassion and kindness' (verse 6). As we pray the psalm with Jesus we ask him to share his faith with us, and pour his Spirit into our hearts that we may know and be drawn into his intimate communion with God.

The psalmist is the object of violent hatred (verse 19). He is feeling ‘lonely and afflicted’ (verse 16), and pleads with God to ‘observe my affliction and pain’ (verse 18), ‘relieve the troubles of my heart’ and ‘free me from distress’ (verse 17).

When we feel overburdened, Jesus asks us to come to him ‘for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your soul’ (Matthew 11:28-29).

4O GOD, show me how to live. Teach me your way.

5Direct me to your truth, and guide me.

The psalmist looks to God and is earnest in wanting to learn and do God's will (verses 4-5, 8-10, 12). He wants to be taught 'God's way' (verse 4). He wants God to direct him to God's truth and guide him (verse 5). This is a key theme of the psalm (see verses 8-12).

10YOUR paths are faithfulness and love
for those who keep your covenant.

The psalm highlights the covenant (verses 10 and 14) which is founded on God's covenant love, and to which we should respond with reverence (verses 12 and 14), trust (verse 2) and hope (verses 3, 5 and 21).

Jesus often spoke of his delight in doing his Father's will, and could say: 'The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him' (John 8:29).

As we pray this psalm with Jesus we hear him challenging and encouraging us to do the same. This is the only way to be part of God's reign of Love (Matthew 7:21).

The psalmist is aware of his sinfulness. He humbly seeks pardon, confident in God's merciful love. He appeals to God for forgiveness. We join the psalmist in praying: 'Remember me, not the sins of my youth, or the ways I have been unfaithful' (verse 7); 'Pardon my guilt, for it is great' (verse 11); 'Forgive my sins' (verse 18).

Jesus is silent when these words appear in the psalm, for he was innocent of sin (see the reflection on Psalm 6).

I have included these verses, but have put them in brackets. We need to pray them, and it is good to pray them in the silent company of Jesus who said that his mission was 'to call sinners to repentance' (Luke 5:32).

Psalm 25

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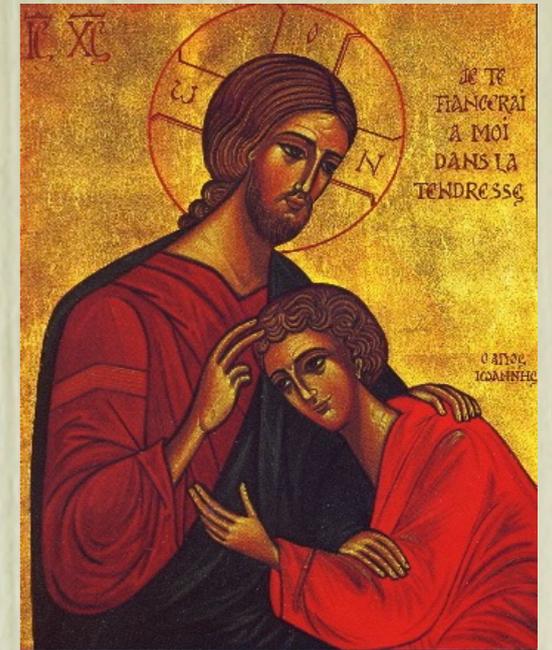
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In you I take refuge.

²¹May integrity and uprightness preserve me,

For in you, O God, I hope.

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Praying Psalm 26 with Jesus



¹Pass judgment on me, O GOD,
for I am living an honest life
I trust in YOU, O GOD, without wavering.
Put me to the test.

²Probe my feelings. Purify my heart.

³Your kindness is ever before my eyes.
I walk boldly in your faithfulness.

⁶I wash my hands, and take my place, O GOD, around your altar.

⁷I sing a song of thanksgiving, and recount your wondrous deeds.

⁸I love your dwelling place, O GOD, the home where your glory abides.

¹¹I live an honest life. Rescue me and be gracious to me.

¹²I continue to walk in an upright way.

In the great congregation I will bless You, O GOD.

Omitted

4I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites;

5I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked.

9Do not sweep me away with sinners,

nor my life with the bloodthirsty.

These verses do not have a place in the prayer of Jesus' disciples. The God Jesus knows does not 'sweep sinners away' (verse 9). His attitude towards sinners is very different from the psalmist. He sees his mission as 'sitting with sinners' (contrast verses 4-5), offering us the Love that alone can bring about repentance and open up for us the communion with him, and so with God, that we are yearning for.

We need Jesus to convince us of this.

This is an innocent person's appeal to God's judgment. The psalmist recognises that cult (verses 6-8) and ethical behaviour must go hand in hand. He contrasts his behaviour with that of evildoers and pleads not to be judged along with them (verses 4-5, which echo Psalm 1, and verses 9-10). He asks God to test him and, where necessary, purify him (verse 2), and prays that God will help him remain innocent (verse 11).

It is important to notice that while his conscience assures him that he is free of serious sin, the basis of his confidence is not his own innocence but God's faithfulness (verse 3), God's graciousness (verse 11). It is his trust in God that enables him to act morally and not waver (verse 1).

Some of the sentiments of the psalm could be part of Jesus' prayer. Jesus 'keeps God's kindness before his eyes, and walks in God's faithfulness' (verse 3). He sings 'songs of thanksgiving and recounts God's wondrous deeds' (v. 7). He 'loves the house in which God dwells, the place where God's glory abides' (verse 8).

Other parts we can pray in Jesus' company, as when we pray to God: 'Test me. Probe my feelings. Purify my heart' (verse 2).

Paul expresses some of the sentiments of this psalm:

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

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

⁶I wash my hands, and take my place, O GOD, around your altar.

⁷I sing a song of thanksgiving, and recount your wondrous deeds.

⁸I love your dwelling place, O GOD, the home where your glory abides.

¹²In the great congregation I will bless YOU, O GOD.

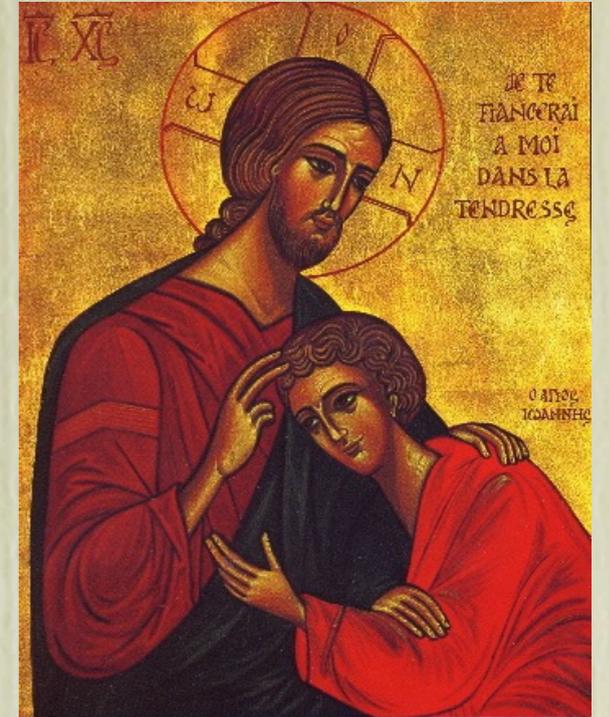
Praying these verses as Christians we think of baptism which cleanses us from sin and through which we are welcomed to join the assembly at the table of the Lord.

Psalm 26

¹Pass judgment on me, O GOD,
for I am living an honest life
I trust in YOU, O GOD, without wavering.
Put me to the test.

²Probe my feelings. Purify my heart.

³Your kindness is ever before my eyes.
I walk boldly in your faithfulness.



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¹¹I live an honest life. Rescue me and be gracious to me.

¹²I continue to walk in an upright way.

In the great congregation I will bless You, O GOD.

Praying Psalm 27 with Jesus



¹GOD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

GOD is the stronghold of my life;
before whom shall I shrink?

²When evildoers attack to devour me,
it is they, my adversaries and foes, who stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me, my heart will not fear.
Though I have to engage in battle, even then I will trust.

⁴One thing I ask of YOU, O GOD, for this I long:
to live in your house all the days of my life,
to behold your beauty while at prayer in your temple.

⁵You hide me there in the hour of danger.

There, set on a rock, concealed under the cover of your tent,

⁶I offer sacrifices with shouts of joy, to the sound of music,
praising GOD in song.

⁷Hear me, O GOD, when I cry to you,
be gracious and answer me!

⁸Your voice within me says, “Come, Seek my face!”
It is your face that my heart seeks.

⁹Do not hide from me. Do not turn your servant away.
Do not reject me, for it is you who uphold me.
Do not cast me off. Do not forsake me, O God my saviour!

¹⁰Even if my father and mother were to forsake me,
I know you would welcome me.

¹¹Teach me your way, O GOD, lead me on a safe path.

My enemies are waiting in ambush.

¹²Do not give me up to their will.

False witnesses have risen against me, breathing out violence.

¹³I believe that I will see the goodness of GOD
in the land of the living.

¹⁴Hope in GOD. Be strong. Be brave. Put your trust in GOD.

The psalmist finds himself assailed by evildoers determined to destroy him (verse 2). His 'enemies are waiting in ambush' (verse 11). 'False witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence' (verse 12). We reflected on the opposition suffered by Jesus when praying Psalm 3.

Jesus warned his disciples to expect similar opposition.

The psalmist is endeavouring to counter his fears (verses 1 and 3) by recalling his special relationship with God, ‘my light and my salvation ... the stronghold of my life’ (verse 1), ‘my help ... my Saviour’ (verse 9), to whom he turns, confident of being welcomed: ‘Even if my father and mother forsake me, GOD will welcome me’ (verse 10).

We reflected on Jesus’ intimate communion with God when praying Psalm 16, an intimacy we are invited to share.

¹GOD is my light and my salvation

As we pray this psalm with Jesus, we share his faith that God is our light, and that this light comes to us especially through Jesus.

In the Prologue to his Gospel, John writes: ‘The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world’ (John 1:9).

Jesus’ mission is ‘to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace’ (Luke 1:79).

As Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee, Matthew writes: ‘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).

Jesus came ‘as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness’ (John 12:46).

Jesus calls us to be 'light for the world' (Matthew 5:14).

Paul was enlightened by Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3). He was called 'to be a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth' (Acts 13:47).

He challenges the community in Rome: 'Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light' (Romans 13:12).

He speaks of 'the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2 Corinthians 4:4).

'God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:4).

It is a psalm of deep trust: ‘I will continue to trust’ (verse 3); ‘I will lift up my head’ (verse 6); ‘I believe’ (verse 13). ‘Hope in GOD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; hope in GOD!’(verse 14).

Throughout his life, culminating in his agony and crucifixion, Jesus turned to his Father, resolving to do his will, come what may (Luke 22:41-44), and entrusting himself into his Father’s hands (Luke 23:46).

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes: ‘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).

³even then I will trust

Jesus invites us to the same trust, a gift from his heart to ours: ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me’ (John 14:1). ‘Take courage; I have conquered the world’ (John 16:33).

Paul encourages the community in Corinth to ‘keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love’ (1Corinthians 16:13-14).

‘If God is for us, who is against us?’ (Romans 8:31).

⁸Your voice within me says, “Come, Seek my face!”

The psalmist’s response is an especially beautiful one: ‘It is your face that my heart seeks’ (verse 8).

He wants to dwell all his life in God’s presence: ‘One thing I ask of YOU, O GOD, this is what I seek: to live in the house of GOD all the days of my life, to behold God’s beauty, to admire God’s temple. For God will hide me and shelter me in the hour of danger; God will conceal me under the cover of the tent; and set me high on a rock’ (verses 4-5).

As we pray this psalm with Jesus we recall the scene of the Transfiguration, when 'his face shone like the sun' (Matthew 17:2).

The Book of Revelation, speaking of the Glorified Jesus writes: 'In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force' (Revelation 1:16).

We are invited to share the psalmist's longing, and that of Jesus. Likewise Paul: 'Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Gaze upon him as he gazes upon us.

The mission given us by Jesus is to reach out to all in love, in the hope that the Love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5) will alert them to their deepest longing, a longing we all share:

‘God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Psalm 27

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whom shall I fear?

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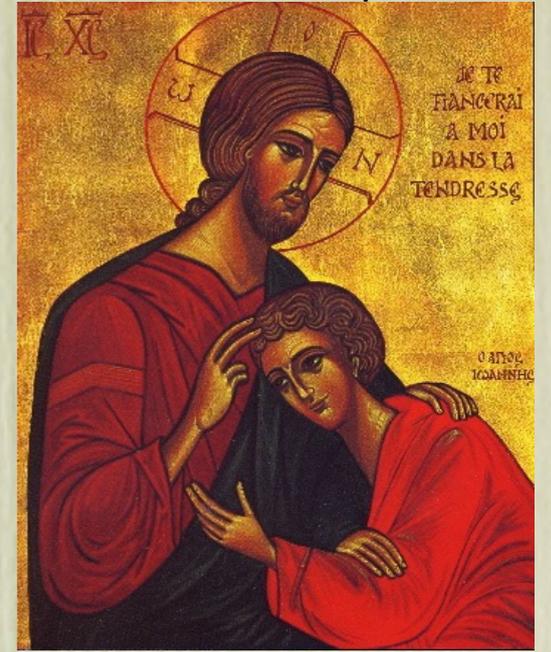
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in the land of the living.

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Praying Psalm 28 with Jesus



As Christians we can hear Jesus crying out in his agony and on the cross (verses 1-2). We can hear, too, his exultation, when God hears his cry (verses 6-8). We are invited to share this psalm with him.

¹I call on you, GOD, my rock. Do not refuse to hear me.
Do not be silent. Without you I will die.

²Hear the sound of my pleading, as I cry to you for help,
as I lift up my hands in prayer toward your temple.

³Do not drag me away with the wicked,
with those who speak peace to their neighbours,
while mischief is in their hearts.

⁶Blessed are you, O GOD. You hear the sound of my pleading.
⁷YOU are my strength and my shield, in whom my heart trusts.
When help comes to me, my heart exults,
and with my song I give God thanks.

⁸YOU are the strength of the people,
the saving refuge of God's anointed.

⁹Help your people, and bless your heritage.
Sustain them. Be their shepherd for ever.

Omitted

*⁴Repay them according to what they do,
the evil of their deeds.*

*Repay them according to their actions;
repay them as much as they deserve.*

*⁵Because they have no regard for what GOD is doing,
for the work of God's hands,
God will break them down and not build them up again.*

These verses present an image of God that could find no place in Jesus' prayer, and should not find a place in ours. The psalm is not used in the Church's lectionary, and the only time we find it in the Prayer of the Church is on Friday Week 1 in the Prayer during the Day, when verses 4 and 5 are omitted.

It is not God who **'breaks sinners down'**. It is not God who punishes. We do this to ourselves when we stubbornly and persistently block God's love out of our lives.

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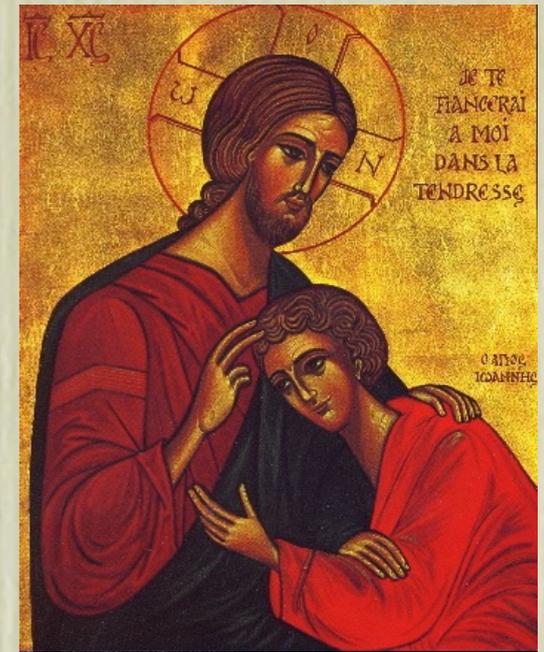
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and with my song I give God thanks.

⁸YOU are the strength of the people,
the saving refuge of God's anointed.

⁹Help your people, and bless your heritage.
Sustain them. Be their shepherd for ever.

Psalm 28



Praying Psalm 29 with Jesus



¹Acclaim GOD, you beings of heaven.

Acclaim the glory and might of GOD.

²Acclaim GOD's glorious name.

Prostrate yourselves in GOD's holy temple.

³The voice of our glorious God
thunders above the mighty waters!

⁴The voice of GOD, full of power.

The voice of GOD, full of splendour.

⁵The voice of GOD shatters the cedars of Lebanon,

⁶makes Lebanon leap like a calf,

Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷The voice of GOD flashes flames of fire,

⁸shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

⁹GOD's voice rends the oak tree,

and strips the forest bare.

In your temple, O GOD, all cry: 'Glory!'

¹⁰For you rule over the mighty waters.

Your rule is for ever.

¹¹Give strength to your people, O GOD.

Bless your people with peace.

This is a psalm to the cosmic God of the storm. The numinous quality of a tempest reveals the sacred. Though the expression 'Fear of GOD' is not found here, this psalm captures well the sense of awe and wonder that characterise our response to God's presence. We reflected on the expression 'Fear of GOD' when praying Psalm 2.

As we pray this psalm with Jesus we recall the following scene: 'A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him up, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm' (Matthew 8:24-26).

Matthew uses similar imagery to highlight the earth-shattering significance of Jesus' death: 'The earth shook, and the rocks were split' (Matthew 27:51).

Psalm 29

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