

23. Psalms 68-69

Reflecting on Psalm 68 in Jesus' Company



Psalm 68 is a hymn of victory in the style of Exodus 15. The Exodus event explains many elements of the hymn: the presence of God in Sinai (verse 8), the departure, and journey through the wilderness (verse 7), the resistance by some kings (verses 11-12; eg Moab and Bashan, Numbers 21). At the end of the journey they found a cultivated and irrigated land (verses 9-10; see Deuteronomy 11), in which the people settled.

Psalm 68 is not a psalm that would find an echo in the heart of Jesus. The only time it is used in the Lectionary is on the twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary time, Year C, and then only the verses in *Cayenne* are prayed. The whole psalm is in the Office of Readings for Tuesday, Week 3, but hardly as a Christian prayer.

¹God rises up. The enemy scatters.

Let those who hate God flee.

²As smoke is blown away, so let them disappear.

As wax melts before the fire,

so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

³The just are filled with joy. They exult before God.

They celebrate with jubilant song, making music in God's honour.

⁴Lay down a road for the One who gallops over the plain.

GOD is with us. Let us all rejoice!

⁵Father of orphans and protector of widows

is God in the temple: the holy habitation.

⁶God gives the desolate a home, leads prisoners to freedom.

The rebellious are banished to dwell in a parched land.

⁷O God, you went out at the head of your people.

The earth quaked when you marched through the desert.

⁸The heavens poured down rain,

at the presence of the God of Sinai,

at the presence of the God of Israel.

⁹You showered down a generous rain,

restoring the land, your heritage, when it languished.

¹⁰It is there your flock found a home.

In your goodness you provided for the poor.

¹¹God* sounds the war cry.

Great is the company of those who bear the tidings:

¹²'Kings, armies, they flee, they flee!'

Houses and farms are divided as spoil –

and you stay among the sheepfolds!

Come, share the plunder:

¹³silver plated doves with wings of bright gold.

¹⁴The Almighty scatters kings, like snow on Mount Zalmon.

¹⁵O mighty mountain, mountain of Bashan.

O many-peaked mountain.

¹⁶Why do you look with envy,

at the mountain where God has chosen to dwell?

It is there that GOD will dwell forever.

¹⁷With chariots by the thousand, tens of thousands of archers,

God* came from Sinai into the holy place.

¹⁸You ascended the high mount, leading captives in your train,

receiving peoples as tribute, into your holy dwelling.

Paul adapts verse eighteen and applies it to the exalted Jesus ascending into heaven and pouring out the gift of God's Holy Spirit: 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people' (Ephesians 4:8). Instead of a procession of conquered kings bringing people as tribute to GOD, Paul presents Jesus as the one who has conquered death and is giving gifts to his people.

¹⁹Blessed be God*, who daily bears us up.

²⁰God is for us our Saviour. It is GOD who liberates from death,

²¹who shatters the heads of our enemies,
as they walk in their sinful ways.

²²God* said, 'I will bring them back from Bashan,
back from the depths of the sea.

²³that you may bathe your feet in blood,
that the tongues of your dogs may have their share of the foe.'

²⁴They witness your solemn procession,
the procession of God into the sanctuary:

²⁵singers in front, musicians behind,
between them girls sounding their timbrels.

²⁶Praise God in the great congregation.

Praise GOD in the assembly of Israel.

²⁷There is Benjamin, the least of them, at the head,
the princes of Judah in great numbers,
the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

²⁸Issue your commands, O God, from your temple in Jerusalem.

²⁹Reveal your great power, as you have done for us before.
Kings bear tribute to you.

³⁰Rebuke the wild animals that live among the reeds,
the herds of bulls, the calves of the peoples.

They fall prostrate before you those who lust after tribute.

Scatter the peoples who delight in war.

³¹Let bronze be brought from Egypt.

Let Sudan hasten to stretch out its hands to God.

³²Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to God*,

³³who rides through the ancient heavens,

causing his mighty voice to thunder.

³⁴Acknowledge the power of God who governs Israel;

whose authority is in the storm clouds.

³⁵Awesome is God in the sanctuary, the God of Israel;

giving power and strength to the people. Blessed be our God!

The God Jesus knows is not a Warrior Lord (verses 11-14, 17-18) who ‘gallops over the plain’ (verse 4), and ‘scatters the enemy’ (verse 1). Jesus does not want to see ‘the wicked perish at the presence of God’ (verse 2; see verse 21). He does not want us to ‘bathe our feet in blood, that the tongues of our dogs may have their share of the foe’ (verse 23). He does not ‘shatter the heads of our enemies, who walk in their sinful ways’ (verse 21). On the contrary he teaches us to love our enemies, because God loves them (see Matthew 5:44-48).

Jesus shared the people's faith in God who liberated their ancestors from slavery in Egypt and led them through the wilderness to the promised land. He shared their belief in God's choice to dwell in a special way in the Jerusalem temple, so long as it is 'a house of prayer for all the peoples' (Mark 11:17). Furthermore, as he said to the Samaritan woman: 'The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth' (John 4:23).

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

³The just are filled with joy. They exult before God.
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is God in the temple: the holy habitation.

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restoring the land, your heritage, when it languished.

¹⁰It is there your flock found a home.

In your goodness you provided for the poor.

Praying Psalm 69 with Jesus



¹Save me, O God. The waters have risen to my neck.

²I sink into the mud, and can gain no foothold.

You can see that I am struggling. The waters overwhelm me.

³I am weary with all my crying. Parched is my throat.

My eyes are swollen from looking for my God.

⁴More numerous than the hairs of my head

are those who hate me without cause. (John 15:25)

Those who attack me with lies are too much for my strength.

How can I restore what I did not take?

{5O God, you know my folly;
the wrong I have done is not hidden from you.
6O God*, do not let those who hope in you
be put to shame because of me.
Do not let those who seek you be dismayed because of me.}

I have placed in brackets verses 5-6. These are not verses that the innocent Jesus could pray But we can pray them, and it is good to pray them in Jesus' presence.

⁷It is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
that shame has covered my face.

⁸I have become a stranger to my family,
an alien to my mother's children.

⁹Zeal for your house has consumed me; (John 2:17)
the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. (Romans 15:3)

¹⁰When I humbled myself with fasting,
they insulted me for doing so.

¹¹When I made sackcloth my clothing,
I became the butt of their jokes,

¹²the gossip of those who sit at the gates,
the subject of drunkard's songs.

¹³I make my prayer to you, my prayer for your favour.
In your great love, answer me, O God,
with your help that never fails.

¹⁴Rescue me from sinking in the mire, from the deep waters.

¹⁵Let not the flood engulf me, or death swallow me up.

¹⁶Answer me, Lord, in your great covenant love,
according to your tender compassion.

¹⁷Do not hide your face from your servant,
for I am in distress – make haste to answer me.

¹⁸Come close. I long for you.

Redeem me. Free me from my enemies.

¹⁹You know the insults I receive. You know all my foes.

²⁰Insults have broken my heart.

I have reached the end of my strength.

I looked in vain for compassion,
for comforters, but none could I find.

²¹They gave me poison for food,

and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. (Matthew 27:34)

²⁹I am brought low and in pain.

Let your salvation, O God, protect me.

³⁰Then I will praise your name in song;

I will acknowledge your greatness with thanksgiving.

³¹This will please GOD more than oxen,
more than beasts prepared for sacrifice.

³²Let the oppressed see it and be glad.

You who seek God, let your hearts revive.

³³For GOD hears the needy,

and does not despise those who are in bonds.

³⁴Let heaven and earth praise God,

the sea and all its living creatures.

³⁵For God will rescue Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah.

God's servants will live there;
the land will be their possession.

³⁶Their offspring will inherit it,
and those who love God will dwell there.

Verses not used in the Church's liturgy

²²Let their table be for them a trap, a snare for their allies.

²³Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see.

quoted by Paul to illustrate the hardened hearts of those who rejected the covenant (Romans 11:9-10)

²⁴Pour out your indignation upon them;

let your burning anger overtake them.

²⁵Let no one live in their tents.

quoted by Luke, referring to Judas: 'It is written in the book of Psalms: "Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it" (Acts 1:20).

²⁶They persecute those whom you have struck down,

and those whom you have wounded they attack still more.

²⁷Add guilt to their guilt. May they have no acquittal from you.

²⁸Let them be blotted out of the book of the living.

Let them not be enrolled among the just.

The life of the psalmist is under threat because of the stand he is taking in obedience to God's will. He pleads for God's help, trusting that in God's good time it will be forthcoming, for he believes that **'GOD hears the needy and does not despise those who are in bonds'** (verse 33). The psalm could have been composed by Jeremiah (see, for example Jeremiah 38:6). It could also have been composed by one of the leaders of the exiles in Babylon in the early years of exile prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. He was being ridiculed because he refused to give up hope that **'God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah'** (verse 35).

Much of the psalm can be prayed while thinking of Jesus in his passion

Psalm 69

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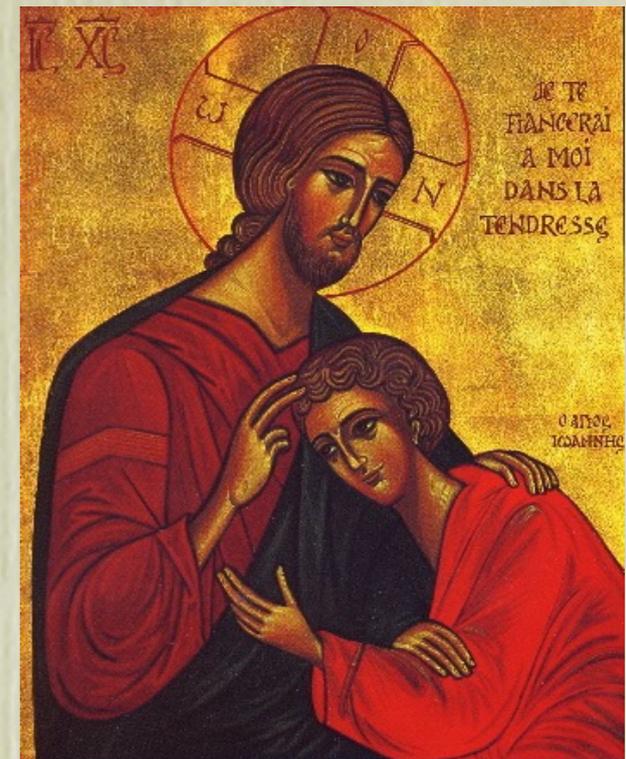
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