

24. Psalms 70-73

Praying Psalm 70 with Jesus [= Psalm 40:13-17]



¹O God, hurry to free me. O GOD, make haste to help me.

²Let all those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion.

Let those who seek to harm me be repulsed and disgraced.

³Let those who jeer at me (Aha!) be turned back in shame.

⁴Let there be rejoicing and gladness for all who seek you.

Let those who love your saving presence
say continually, 'God is great!'

⁵As for me, I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God!

You are my help and my deliverer; O GOD, do not delay.

This is a plea for God's help. Note the contrast. The psalmist speaks of those who seek God (verse 4), not those who seek to harm him (verse 2): those who proclaim: 'God is great!' (verse 4), not those who jeer at him: 'Aha' (verse 3).

Psalm 70

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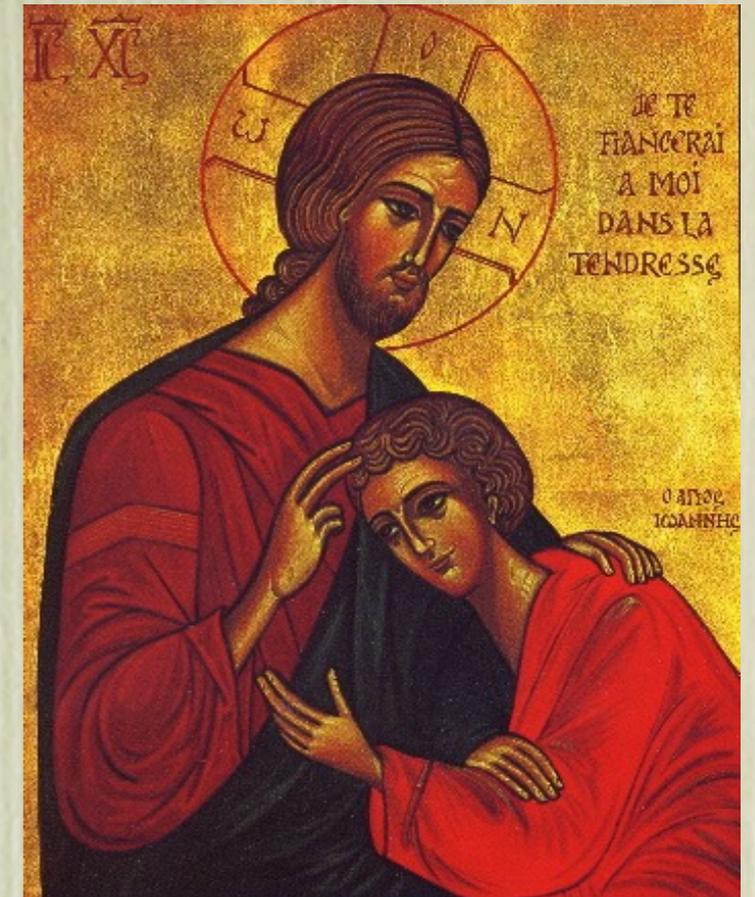
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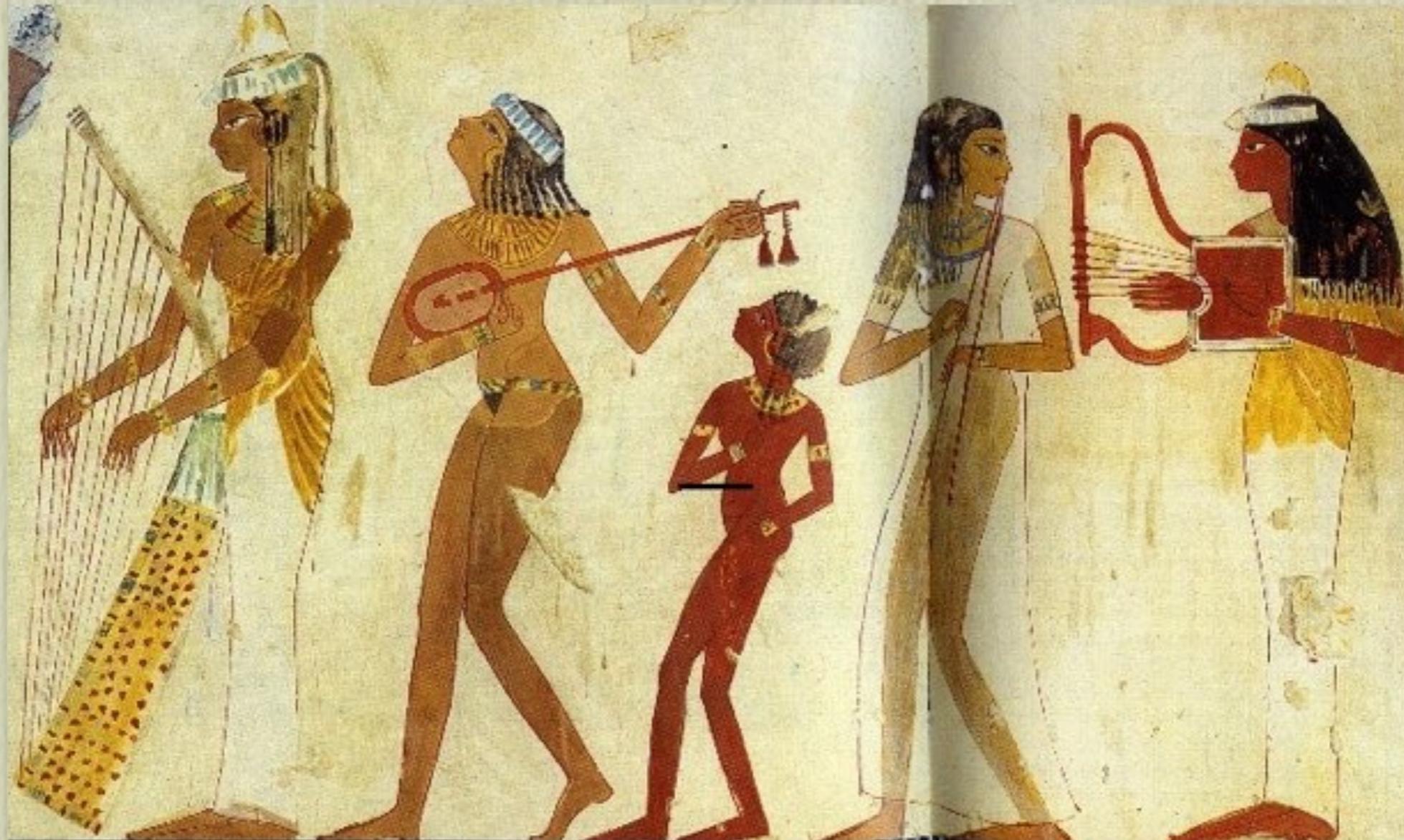
Praying Psalm 71 with Jesus

Harp

Lute

Oboe

Lyre



¹In you, O GOD, I seek refuge; I pray you do not fail me.

²In your justice set me free. Make me safe. Come close to hear me.

³Be for me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me.

You are indeed my rock, my fortress.

⁴Rescue me, O God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grip of the violent.

⁵For you, O God*, are my hope.

From my youth I have placed my trust in GOD.

⁶Upon you I have leaned from my birth.

It was you who took me from my mother's womb.

I will never stop praising you.

⁷Many look on me in awe, seeing that you are my refuge.

⁸I am full of praise for you. I can speak only good of you all day long.

⁹Do not cast me off now that I am old.

Do not forsake me now my strength is spent.

¹⁰My enemies speak ill of me,
those who want my end conspire against me.

¹¹'God has forsaken him, let us pursue him.
Let us seize him, for there is no one to defend him.'

¹²O God, do not leave me alone.

O my God, come quickly to help me!

¹⁴I will continue to hope. I will praise you more and more.

All day long, however inadequate my words.

¹⁵I will tell of your saving help.

¹⁶I will praise the mighty deeds of our GOD.

I will praise your justice, yours alone.

¹⁷You have taught me from my youth
to praise your wondrous deeds.

¹⁸O God, do not forsake me, now that I am old and my hair is grey.

I want to proclaim your power to the next generation.

¹⁹Your might and your justice reach to the highest heaven.
The great things that you have done
are as high as the heavens, O God. Who can compare to you?

²⁰You have brought me through many troubles.

I know you will do so again. You will restore my life.

²¹You will increase my honour, and comfort me once again.

²²I will praise you with the harp, for your faithfulness, O my God.

I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel.

²³I will shout for joy. I will sing of how you saved me.

²⁴All day long I will tell of your justice.

Omitted

¹³*Shame those who seek to harm me.*

May they be covered with scorn and disgrace.

²⁴*Those who tried to do me harm*

have been put to shame and disgraced.

The psalmist is an old man who is pleading for God's help. As an old man he plays an important role in the community, and he senses that he has more to do in carrying out his responsibility to hand on the traditions to the young. He does not complain of sickness, only that his powers are diminishing and that there are people who want to see him dead. His trust in God and his maintaining of hope as an old man is impressive. Leaving aside the age factor, we can hear Jesus praying this psalm.

¹²O God, do not leave me alone.

O my God, come quickly to help me!

This expresses a sentiment found often in the psalms.

‘Come close to me. Trouble is near and I have no one to help me!’ (Psalm 22:11).

‘O GOD, do not leave me.

O my strength, come quickly to my aid’ (Psalm 22:19).

‘O GOD, you see it all! Do not be silent!

God*, do not be distant from me!’ (Psalm 35:22).

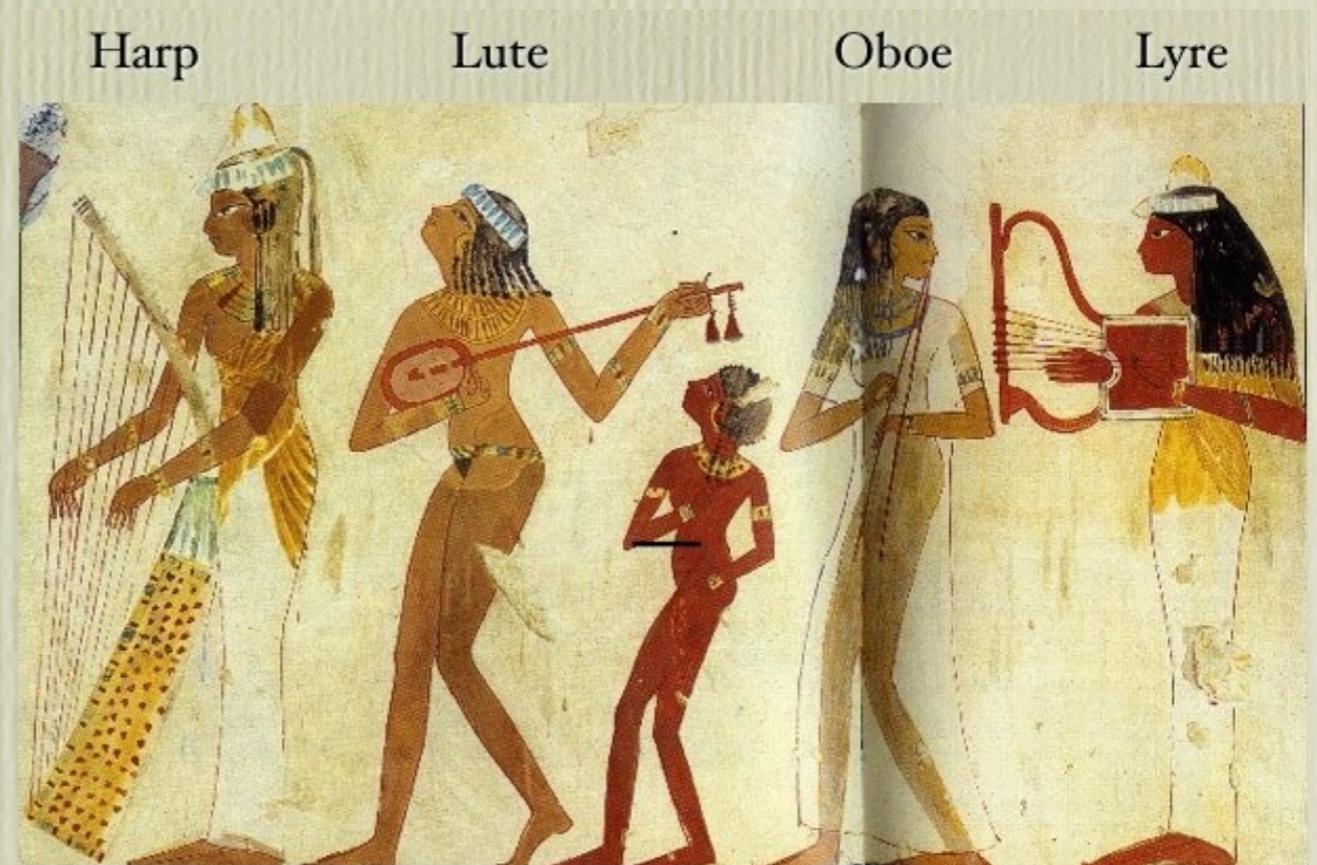
‘Your God will not forsake you.

Your God is close’ (Psalm 38:21).

Psalm 71 is a supplication with an abundant amount of praise, beginning in verse 6: **‘I will never stop praising you.’**

The Hebrew title for the Book of Psalms is sêper tehillim (‘Book of Praises’). God is ‘enthroned on the praises of Israel’ (Psalm 22:3).

With rare exceptions the reference is to public, communal praise, expressed in song (‘I will praise God with a song’, Psalm 69:30), and with dancing and musical instruments (‘Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre’, Psalm 149:3).



We are moved to praise God because of the awesome power and beauty of God revealed in creation and in God's presence and action in history: 'In the midst of the congregation I will praise you' (Psalm 22:22).

Above all we praise God, because God's 'covenant love lasts forever' (Psalm 106:1). 'Praise GOD, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples! For great is God's covenant love toward us. The faithfulness of GOD endures forever. Praise GOD' (Psalm 117:1-2).

'Let them extol God in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders' (Psalm 107:32).

Besides our praise being a spontaneous response to the awesome power and beauty of God, it is also an expression of our gratitude: 'I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you' (Psalm 35:18).

'I will praise God with a song, with thanksgiving' (Psalm 69:30).

'Let them thank GOD for God's covenant love for God's wonderful works to humankind' (Psalm 107:32).

As we pray this psalm with Jesus we hear his heart overflow with gratitude to God: 'Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have ... revealed these things to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will" (Luke 10:21).

He delighted to hear the cry of children praising God (Matthew 21:16).

At the Last Supper, Jesus offered the simple food of bread and wine to his disciples, promising that he was offering himself to them and would continue to do so forever, whenever they came together to remember him. Before offering to his disciples the gift of himself, he 'gave thanks' to God (Luke 22:17, 19).

Paul is moved to praise God 'for God's glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved' (Ephesians 1:6).

Writing as a Jew he says: 'We, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of God's glory' (Ephesians 1:12). He goes on to include the Gentiles: 'In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory' (Ephesians 1:13-14).

To see what it means to live a life of praise of God's glory, we look at Jesus. We see Jesus living a life of intimacy with God, always listening in order to carry out God's will, and always receiving and giving love, whatever the situation he found himself in, even on Calvary. He loved God 'with all his heart, all his longing, all his mind and all his strength' (Mark 12:30), and he continued to give himself in love.

In his Letter to the Philippians Paul speaks of ‘the perfect goodness which Jesus, the Messiah, produces in us for the glory and praise of God’ (Philippians 1:11). Paul is calling us to welcome the Spirit of Love that bound Jesus to his Father, making space for Jesus to love in us and through us. Then our life becomes our worship, our prayer of praise. Paul wants the Christian community to live so beautifully that everyone will be moved to praise God.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 22:22, ‘In the midst of the congregation I will praise you’ (Hebrews 2:12).

James invites the community to ‘sing songs of praise’ (James 5:13).

In the Book of Revelation John hears a voice coming from God’s throne: ‘Praise our God, all you God’s servants’ (Revelation 19:5).

Psalm 71

¹In you, O GOD, I seek refuge;

I pray you do not fail me.

²In your justice set me free.

Make me safe. Come close to hear me.

³Be for me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me.

You are indeed my rock, my fortress.

⁴Rescue me, O God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grip of the violent.

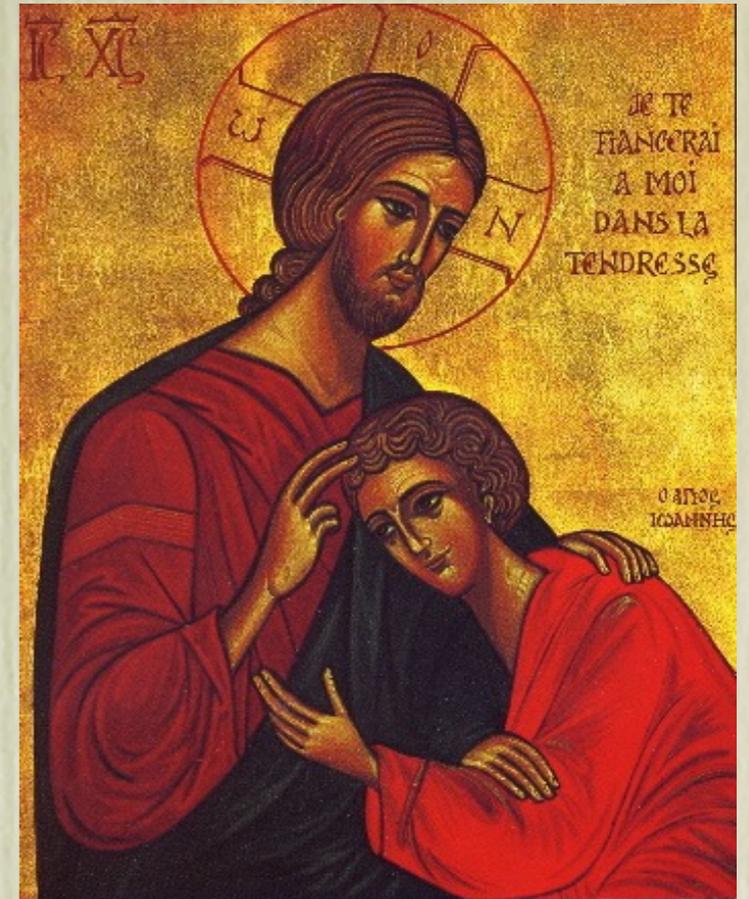
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I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel.

²³I will shout for joy. I will sing of how you saved me.

²⁴All day long I will tell of your justice.

Praying Psalm 72 with Jesus



¹O God, give your judgment to the king,
your justice to the king's son,

²that he may judge your people with justice,
and your poor with right judgment.

³May the mountains yield peace for the people.

⁴May the king defend the cause of the poor,
help needy families, and crush the oppressor.

⁵May he live while the sun endures,
as long as the moon lasts, from age to age.

⁶May he be like rain falling on the grass,
like showers that water the earth.

⁷In his days may justice flourish
and peace abound, until the moon fails.

- ¹²He rescues the needy when they call,
and those who have no one to defend them.
- ¹³He has pity on the weak and needy, and saves them.
- ¹⁴He liberates them from oppression and violence
for they are precious to him.
- ¹⁵Long may he live! May prayer be made for him continually,
and blessings invoked for him all day long.
- ¹⁶May there be abundance of grain in the land,
waving to and fro to the tops of the mountains.
May its fruit be luxuriant like that of Lebanon,
and its sheaves like the grasses of the field.
- ¹⁷May his name be blessed for ever,
his fame endure like the sun.
May all nations in him be blessed,
as they call down blessings upon him.

Verses 18-19 conclude Book 2 of the Book of Psalms.

¹⁸Praised be GOD, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.

¹⁹Praised be God's glorious name forever.
May God's glory fill all the earth. Amen. Amen.

Omitted

⁸*May he have dominion from sea to sea,
from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.*
⁹*May the desert tribes bow down before him,
and his enemies lick the dust.*

¹⁰*May the kings of Tarshish and the sea coasts pay him tribute.
May the kings of Sheba and Seba bring him gifts.*
¹¹*May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him.*
¹⁵*May gold of Sheba be given to him.*

The title reads: ‘**Of Solomon**’, presenting this as David’s prayer for the son who is to succeed him. It is a prayer for whoever carries on the dynasty of David, a prayer for prosperity. This is made on the assumption that the king exercises his power in favour of the poor and needy, in accordance with the commission given him by God.

Since ‘Christ Jesus intercedes for us’ (Romans 8:34), we can hear him praying this psalm for those who are in positions of leadership in the community.

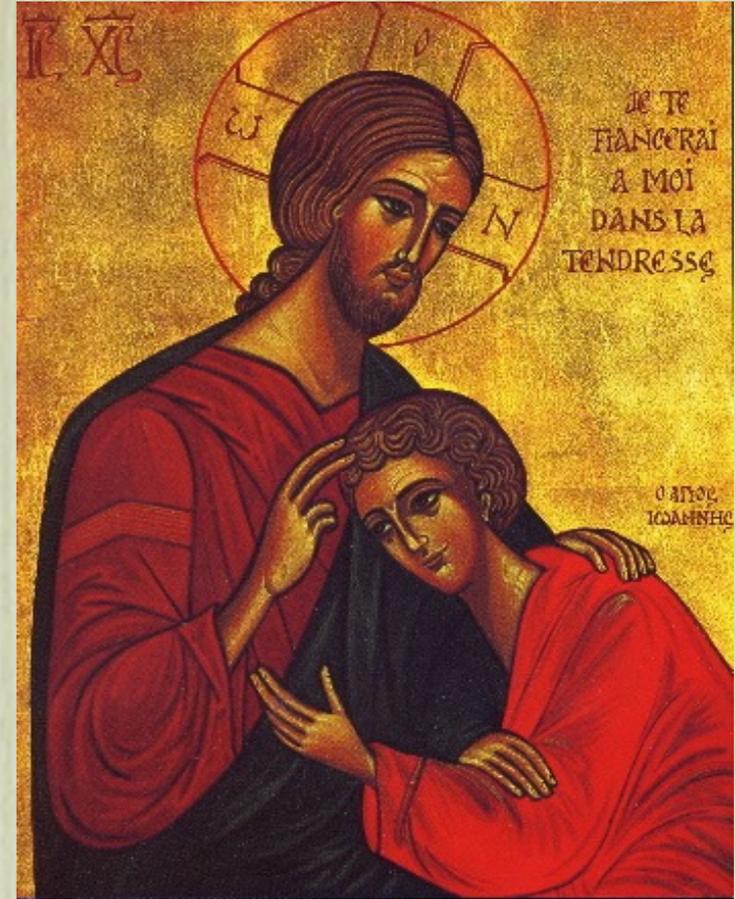
Paul invites us: ‘Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints’ (Ephesians 6:18). In a special way we should pray for those whose decisions affect the whole community.

Paul exhorts the Christian community in Rome to ‘be subject to the governing authorities’ (Romans 13:1). This is on the assumption that the ‘rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad’ (Romans 13:3). We can pray that the judgments made by our political leaders are God’s judgments (verse 1). We can pray that they recognise that the people they govern are God’s people (verse 2). We can pray that they ‘defend the cause of the poor, help needy families’ (verse 4). We can pray that our political leaders ‘rescue the needy when they call, and those who have no one to defend them; that they have pity on the weak and needy, and liberate them from oppression and violence’ (verses 12-14). We can pray for peace and prosperity (verses 3 and 16).

We can also pray this psalm in the light of Jesus’ mission. Mark writes: ‘Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news from God, and saying, “The time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand” (Mark 1:14-15).

Psalm 72

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your justice to the king's son,
²that he may judge your people with justice,
and your poor with right judgment.
- ³May the mountains yield peace for the people.
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help needy families, and crush the oppressor.
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and its sheaves like the grasses of the field.
- ¹⁷May his name be blessed for ever,
his fame endure like the sun.
May all nations in him be blessed,
as they call down blessings upon him.

Reflecting on Psalm 73:1-22 in Jesus' company



In the first part of the psalm (verses 1-22) the psalmist is sharing his pondering of a problem that he was finding **'too hard for me to understand'** (verse 16). We may share his concern, and, if we do, it is good to ponder the question in Jesus' company.

¹Truly our God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart.

²As for me, as I walked I almost stumbled,

³I was envious of the arrogant,

of how those who disregarded God were prospering.

⁴They have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek.

⁵They are not in trouble. They are not stricken like other people.

⁶They wear pride as a necklace, violence covers them like a garment.

⁷Their eyes swell up as they live on the fat of the land.

Their hearts are full of folly.

⁸They scoff with malice.

From on high they threaten oppression.

⁹They boast that heaven is on their side.

They lay claim to the world.

¹⁰People follow them and swallow what they say.

¹¹They ask, 'How can God know?

Does the Most High take any notice?'

¹²Such are the wicked; at ease as they accumulate wealth.

¹³So why keep my heart clean, washing my hands in innocence,

¹⁴when I was stricken all day long, punished day after day.

¹⁵Then I said: 'If I should speak like that

I should abandon the faith of your people.'

¹⁶I strove to fathom this problem,

too hard for me to understand.

¹⁷Then I penetrated the mystery of God,

and understood where these people were heading.

²¹When my heart was embittered, when my feelings were disturbed,

²²I was stupid and ignorant. I was like a brute beast toward you.

Because of the contrast between the prosperity of those who have no regard for God, and the apparent uselessness of his own fidelity, the psalmist was on the brink of abandoning his faith. He ‘**almost stumbled**’ (verse 2). He was in danger of ‘**abandoning the faith of my people**’ (verse 15). After describing the apparent prosperity of those who have no regard for God (verses 4-12), the psalmist says of his life: ‘**I was stricken all day long, punished day after day**’ (verse 14).

He comes to see that despite appearances, there is no good fortune in the destiny of the irreligious (verses 18-20 and 27). I have omitted these verses because the assumption behind them is that God controls whatever happens, and that God will certainly punish ‘**those who disregard God**’ (verse 3). Our behaviour has consequences, but these are self-inflicted, not expressions of God’s will.

Praying Psalm 73:23-28 with Jesus

²³ Yet I am continually with you;
you hold me by the hand.

²⁴ You guide me according to your plan.
You carry me to a glorious destiny.

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
What does the earth mean to me without you?

²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

²⁸ For me it is good to stay near you, my God.
I have made you my refuge.
I want to tell of all that you have done.

The prayer (23-26 and 28) is among the most beautiful statements of faith in the psalms. It describes the value of 'keeping one's heart clean, and washing one's hands in innocence' (verse 13). We may not prosper here and now the way the faithless prosper, but the prosperity of those who disregard God is short-lived and is not to be compared with the intimacy that the psalmist experiences with God: 'I am continually with you; you hold me by the hand. You guide me according to your plan. You carry me to a glorious destiny' (verses 23-24). This is 'the faith of my people' (verse 15), and the psalmist chooses to re-commit himself to his ancestral faith.

He continues his prayer: 'Whom have I in heaven but you? What does the earth mean to me without you?' (verse 25). Then, once again, he addresses us: 'My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever' (verse 26). His final words are addressed to God: 'For me it is good to stay near you, my God. I have made you my refuge. I want to tell of all that you have done' (verse 28).

Let us listen to Paul: 'Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through the faith of Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith' (Philippians 3:7-9).

Let us pray verses 23-28 of the psalm with Jesus, re-committing ourselves to our ancestral faith, the faith of Jesus which he pours into the hearts of all his disciples (Romans 5:5). This is the faith of the Christian community.

Psalm 73

- ²³I am continually with you;
you hold me by the hand.
- ²⁴You guide me according to your plan.
You carry me to a glorious destiny.
- ²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you?
What does the earth mean to me without you?
- ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.
- ²⁸For me it is good to stay near you, my God.
I have made you my refuge.
I want to tell of all that you have done.

