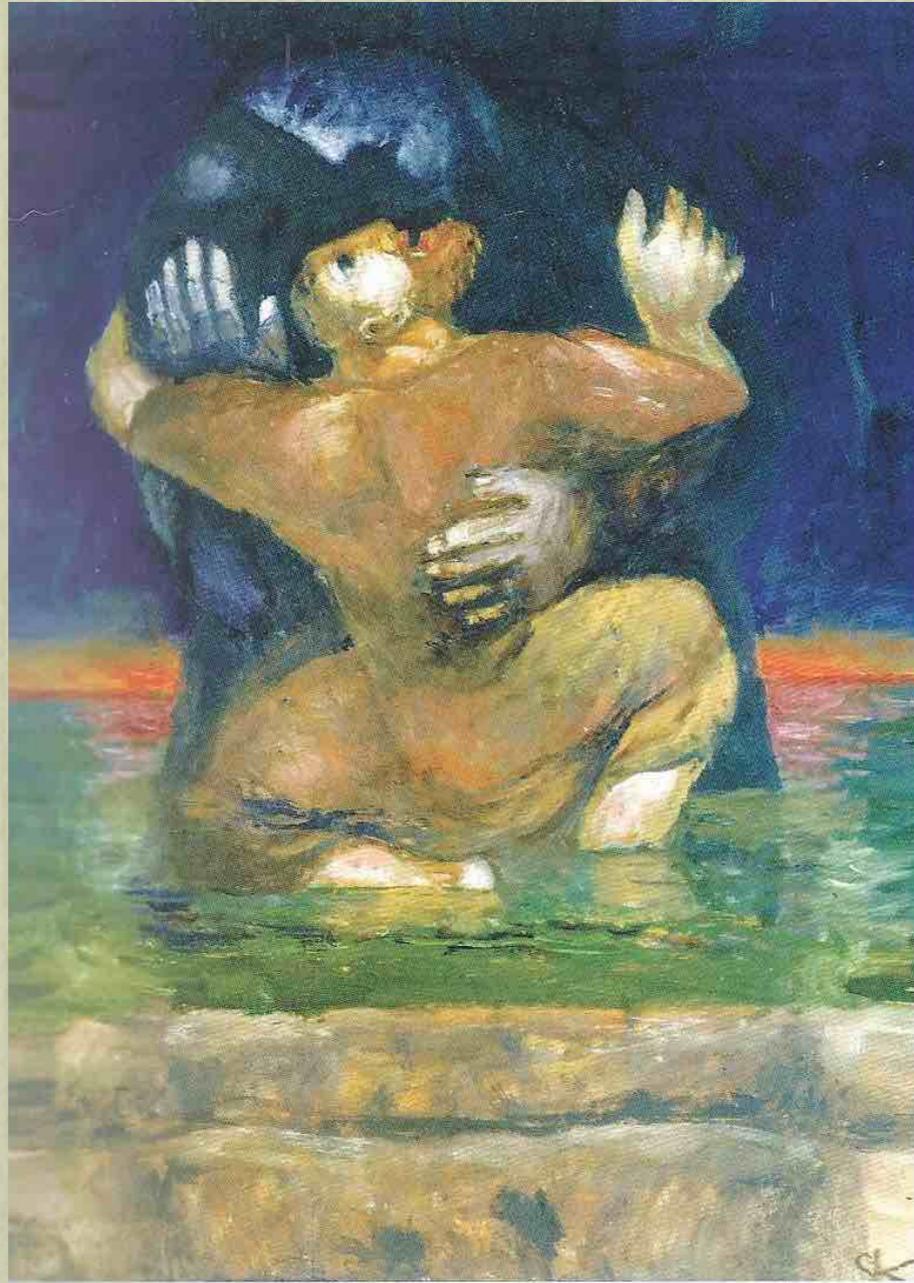


36. Psalms 109-110

Reflecting on Psalm 109 with Jesus



Psalm 109 is not used in the Church's liturgy, possibly because of the length of the section in which the psalmist speaks of the terrible way he is being treated, and possibly because verse 20 does not fit with Jesus' injunction that we love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). However, it has many verses that are quite moving.

Part 1. verses 1-19 The terrible way the psalmist is being treated

¹God (אֱלֹהֵי) to whom I pray, be not silent.

²For wicked and deceitful voices speak out against me,
pursuing me with lies.

³They beset me with words full of hate;
they attack me without cause.

⁴I treat them with love, but they still accuse me,
even while I pray for them.

⁵They return evil for good, and hatred for my love.

⁶They say: 'Appoint a crooked judge,
and have an accuser close by.

⁷When he is tried, let him be found guilty;
may his pleading be reckoned as sinful.

⁸May his days be few. May others fill his place.

⁹May his children be orphans, and his wife a widow.

¹⁰May they wander about and beg;
may they be driven out of the ruins they inhabit.

¹¹May the creditor seize all that he has.
May strangers plunder the fruits of his toil.

¹²May there be no one to do him a kindness,
nor anyone to pity his orphaned children.

¹³May his line end; may his name be blotted out
in the second generation.

¹⁴May the guilt of his father be remembered before GOD.

Do not let the sin of his mother be erased.

¹⁵May his memory be cut off from the earth.

¹⁶He did not remember to show kindness,
but pursued the poor and needy
and the brokenhearted to their death.

¹⁷He loved to curse; let curses rebound on his head.

He did not offer a blessing; may he not receive one.

¹⁸He clothed himself with cursing as his coat,
may it soak into his body like water, into his bones like oil.

¹⁹May it be like a garment that he wraps around himself,
like a belt that he wears every day.'

²⁰May what my accusers want for me

be Your payment for those who speak evil against me.

Part 2. Praying verses 21-31 with Jesus

²¹But you, O GOD (יְהוָה), my God* (אֱלֹהֵי),
act on my behalf for your name's sake.
Because you are good, rescue me.

²²For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded.

²³I am fading like a shadow at evening.
I am brushed aside like a locust.

²⁴My knees are weak through fasting;
my flesh has become gaunt.

²⁵I am an object of scorn to my accusers.
When they see me, they shake their heads.

²⁶Help me, O GOD (יְהוָה), my God (אֱלֹהֵי)!
Save me according to your covenant love.

²⁷Let them see your hand at work.
Let them know that you have acted.

²⁸They curse, but you will bless.

Let my assailants be put to shame.

May your servant be glad.

²⁹May my accusers be clothed with dishonour.

May they be wrapped in their own shame as in a mantle.

³⁰I raise my voice in thanks to GOD;

I praise my GOD in the midst of the throng.

³¹For GOD stands at the right hand of those in need,

to save them from those who would condemn them to death.

Psalm 109

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act on my behalf for your name's sake.
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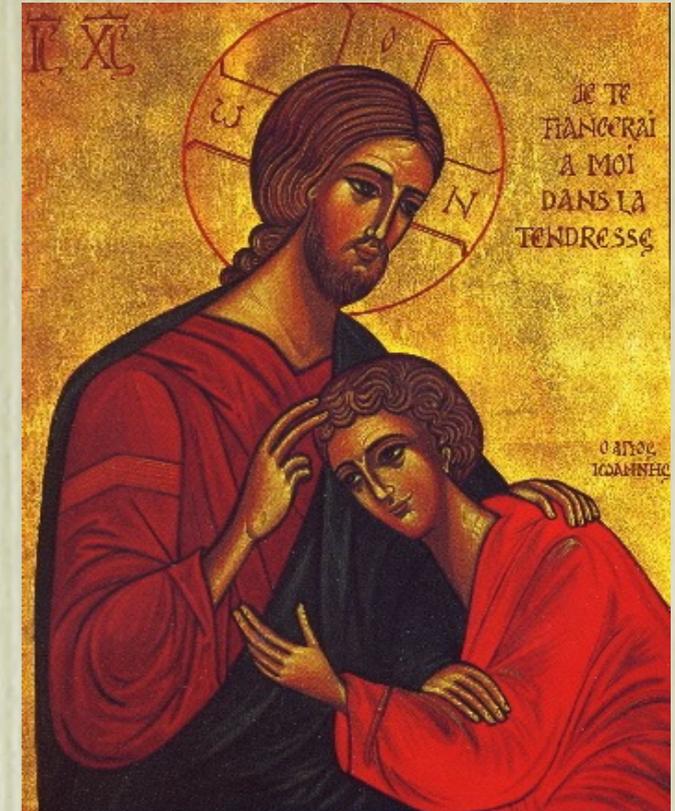
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Praying Psalm 110 with Jesus



This is a royal psalm. Other royal psalms are Psalm 2, which speaks of the rebellion of vassals, Psalms 20-21 which are prayers for before and after a battle, Psalm 45 on the occasion of a royal wedding, and Psalm 72 concerning just government.

Psalm 110 opens with an oracle at the enthronement of the king. During the long centuries when Judah was under Persian, Greek and Roman rule Psalm 110 encouraged the community to hold on to their hope that one day they would be ruled again by a king of Judah.

¹A decree of GOD to my king:

‘Sit on my right. I will make you master of your enemies.’

²GOD will wield from Zion your sceptre of power.

will conquer your foes in battle.

³Your people will rally to you when you mobilise for war.

From the womb your majesty is sacred,

from your birth on the holy mountain,

your youth as fresh as the morning dew.

⁴GOD has sworn an oath and will not change:

‘You are a priest for ever a priest like Melchizedek of old.’

⁷The king will drink from a wayside stream, and rise up refreshed.

omitted (Verses 5- 6 are not in the Church's liturgy)

⁵God (אֱלֹהֵינוּ) is at your right
to crush kings on the day of judgment.*

⁶It is God who judges the nations.
shattering heads, heaping up corpses.*

The risen Jesus as Messiah

Once, in response to Jesus' question: 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered: 'The Messiah of God' (Luke 9:20). On that occasion Jesus seems to have been wary of the title, a wariness that stayed with him throughout his ministry. The term 'Messiah' meant different things to different people. Jesus was keen to carry on his ministry from God while avoiding being categorised. It was only after his death and resurrection that his followers embraced the title 'Messiah' ('Christ') for him, so much so that the community came to be called 'Christians' (Acts 11:26).

Peter's speech at Pentecost as presented by Luke includes the words: 'let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:36). Central to Paul's enlightenment was the recognition of the Risen Jesus as the promised Messiah, the one who, in his person, fulfilled the hopes expressed in the royal psalms. In his letters he refers to Jesus as 'the Christ' (the 'Messiah') nearly 400 times.

The New Testament frequently calls on verse 1 in relation to Jesus:

‘While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, ‘How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, **“The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.”** David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?’ (Mark 12:35-37).

‘You will see the Son of Man **seated at the right hand of the Power** and coming with the clouds of heaven’ (Mark 14:62).

‘The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and **sat down at the right hand of God**’ (Mark 16:19).

‘David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, **“The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool”**’ (Acts 2:34-35 [Peter on the day of Pentecost]).

‘Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is **at the right hand of God**, who indeed intercedes for us’ (Romans 8:34).

‘He must reign until **he has put all his enemies under his feet**.
The last enemy to be destroyed is death’ (1 Corinthians 15:25-26).

‘God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and **seated him at his right hand** in the heavenly places’ (Ephesians 1:20; see Colossians 3:1).

‘To which of the angels has he ever said, “**Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet**”?’ (Hebrews 1:13).

The Risen Jesus as High Priest

Verse 4 acclaims the king as ‘a priest forever, a priest like Melchizedek of old.’ Priesthood is about mediating the sacred. The Old Testament priests carried out their functions in the sanctuary. There they brought God to the people by mediating to them God’s word, God’s will and God’s blessing. They brought the people into communion with God by offering to God the sacrifices through which their lives were sanctified.

Being of the tribe of Judah, the king could not hold the office of a priest of Levi. His priesthood, however, was a superior one, for he was responsible not only to see that the Levitical priests cared for the holiness of the cult but also to be God's instrument in making holy the whole land and its people. The priesthood of the king is 'like Melchizedek of old', for Melchizedek was the priest-king of Jebusite Jerusalem at the time of Abraham (see Genesis 14:18-19).

In the Letter to the Hebrews verse 4 is applied to Jesus: ‘Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”’; as he says also in another place, “**You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek**” (Hebrews 5:5-6). The author is underlining the fact that the priestly mediation of Jesus is the mediation, not of the Levitical priests, but of the Messiah-king.

For Christians there is only one priest, one mediator, the exalted Christ (1 Timothy 2:5). From the sanctuary of heaven, Jesus speaks God's word and draws everyone to himself that we might make of our lives, as he did of his, a self-offering to God. His priesthood fulfils the functions of the Levitical priesthood, and transcends them, for his is the priesthood of the king: a royal priesthood 'according to the order of Melchizedek' (Hebrews 5:10). His priestly role is to mediate the sacred to the whole of creation.

This is the priesthood into which all the baptised are consecrated, called as Jesus' followers to carry the mission of Jesus to all the world. Jesus' disciples are graced to share in Jesus' priesthood. Jesus said: 'I am the vine, you are the branches' (John 15:5). His life, the life of the vine, is the Spirit of love that binds him in intimate communion with God, his Father. The branches share this Spirit and so share in Jesus' communion of love.

Paul can say: 'It is Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2:19). Disciples share in Jesus' life according to the special grace each is offered, and according to the way in which each responds to this grace. In the community of the church we are the Body of Christ carrying out his mission in the world with all the creative power of God, through his Spirit poured out into the community.

In his First Letter, Peter writes: 'Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 2:4-5).

The communities to whom Peter is addressing this letter are feeling the rejection of their neighbours. By adhering to Christ through belonging to the Christian community they have turned their backs on many of the meanings and values that inform the culture to which they once belonged.

In doing so they have become the object of suspicion, rejection, harassment and even persecution. Peter tells them to come to Jesus. He was 'rejected', but not by God. He was 'chosen and precious in God's sight.' They are living in intimate communion with God because they are sharing in the life of Christ. This means that they, too, though suffering a similar rejection, are not being rejected by God. On the contrary, they, too, are 'chosen and precious in God's sight'.

Christ is an especially dressed stone (Greek: lithos), selected by God for a special purpose. The rejection is part of the chiselling that prepared the stone for God's purpose which is that he live the full life of resurrected glory. God is preparing them, as one dresses a stone, for the same fullness of life. Peter tells them to let God work on them as together they are being built by God into a 'house' which is 'spiritual', because it is being formed by the action of God's Spirit. It is also a temple in which God has chosen to dwell.

The Christian community, God's household, is present in the world as a temple. The whole community is to be a 'holy priesthood.' They are to offer sacrifices which are acceptable to the only true, living, God. They are to mediate God's grace to the world and draw all people into communion with God. The sacrifices are 'acceptable' because they, too, are 'spiritual', being inspired by the Spirit and expressive of the communion in the Spirit of love which is the very life of the community.

All of this – being 'living stones', welcoming God's action which is dressing them so as to build a temple, and offering their lives, like Jesus, as a sacrifice to God – all of this is 'through Jesus Christ'.

In the Book of Revelation we read: 'Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a **kingdom, priests** serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen' (Revelation 1:4-6).

Echoing Exodus 19:6, John says that the glorified Jesus makes the Christian assembly 'a **kingdom, priests** to his God and Father.' The kingdom of God is brought about by the redemption effected by the blood of Christ, that is to say, by his life-giving on the cross. The assembly recognises that it is in the Christian community that Christ reigns as Lord, and so it renews its commitment to live his life, and to carry on his mission of bringing about God's reign on earth.

John, the author of the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:1) reminds his listeners that Christ has chosen to exercise his priestly mediation through them. Christ has chosen to live in us. We are to live our lives in union with him in the presence of God. Sharing in Jesus' priesthood, we are called to mediate God's word, God's will, and God's blessing to the world. We are called to offer prayer and praise to God, to offer ourselves as a spiritual sacrifice and to draw others into communion with God. We are to show that God delights in all that he has made.

We are to mediate God's forgiveness, to reconcile the world with God, to draw people to a life of obedient faith in God and of love for each other, and so, throughout all the epochs of time, to effect redemption for humankind.

We are able to carry out this priestly function thanks to the grace and peace from God given us by Christ through the Spirit. Those who are listening to John's proclamation are suffering discrimination but they are not to be on the defensive. They are to resist the prevailing culture and continue to mediate the love of Christ and so convert their contemporaries to a life of grace.

There are as many different ways of carrying out Christ's priestly mediation as there are disciples of Jesus in the Christian community. One can think of all the many simple ways in which we are a sacrament to each other of God's love and consecrated into the priesthood of Jesus through our baptism. In all stages and forms of life, each disciple of Jesus has the unique opportunity to live out this priestly mediation in the world.

As sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, indeed every form of family relationship can answer this call to mediate love. Single people, devoted to Jesus, bring a particular focus with their presence in love. From her communion in the life of God, a wife and mother lives out the priestly mediation of Jesus by mediating God's love and God's word to her husband and children, and by welcoming their loving response she helps draw them into the communion of love which is Jesus' life. Likewise a husband and father for his wife and family. One can think of volunteers in all walks of life, teachers, nurses, politicians and public servants. Jesus is carrying on his priestly mediation through and in us, sanctifying the world through the holy lives which we live, lives which he makes possible by sharing his Spirit with us.

Psalm 110

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‘Sit on my right. I will make you
master of your enemies.’

²GOD will wield from Zion
your sceptre of power.
will conquer your foes in battle.

³Your people will rally to you
when you mobilise for war.

From the womb your majesty is sacred,
from your birth on the holy mountain,
your youth as fresh as the morning dew.

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