

Psalm 66

6th Sunday of Easter Year A
14th Sunday Year C
Office of Readings Sunday Week 4

This is a hymn of thanksgiving. The psalmist invites the assembly to join him in thanking God who has heard his plea and brought him safely through a period of trial. The assembly calls on the whole world to join in thanking the God of the universe, who redeemed his people and who answers prayer. The title reads: 'To the leader. A Song. A Psalm*.'

The call to worship reminds us of Paul's hymn:

At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in
heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess that Jesus
Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

– Philippians 2:10-11

The psalmist recounts the reasons that inspire him to call for worship and praise. God's wonderful deeds are evident all over the inhabited world. See Exodus 14-15 for songs of thanksgiving at the crossing of the Red Sea.

God is continually scrutinising human behaviour. The pharaoh claimed 'I do not know YHWH' (Exodus 5:2), and he was humiliated!

Once again we are invited to praise God, the Lord of life.

For to this end Christ died and lived again,
so that he might be Lord of both the dead and
the living.

– Romans 14:9

Even when we were dead through our trespasses,
God made us alive together with Christ – by
grace you have been saved.

– Ephesians 2:5

**¹Acclaim God, all the earth,
play and sing the glory* of
his name, give him glory* and
praise.**

**²Say to God, 'How awesome are
your deeds!**

**³Because of your great power,
your enemies cringe before
you.**

**⁴All the earth worships you,
singing praise to you, singing
praise in your honour.**

**⁵Come and see what God has
done: he is awesome in his
deeds among us.**

**⁶He turned the sea into dry
land; they passed through the
river on foot – that was where
we celebrated him!**

**⁷By his might he rules for ever.
His eyes keep watch on the
nations, so that the rebellious
might not exalt themselves.**

**⁸Bless* our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be
heard.**

**⁹He has kept us among the liv-
ing. He has not let our feet slip.**

A thanksgiving sacrifice

**¹⁰You test us, O God, you try us
as silver is tried.**

**¹¹You place us in a prison;
you lay burdens on our backs;
¹²you let people ride over our
heads.**

**We pass through fire and
through water; yet you bring
us out to an open, spacious
place.**

**¹³I will come into your house
with burnt offerings to carry
out my vows to you,
¹⁴vows pronounced by my lips,
promises made when I was in
trouble.**

**¹⁵I will offer to you burnt of-
ferings of fatlings, with the
smoke of the sacrifice of rams,
I will make an offering of
bulls and goats.**

The psalmist turns to address God and gives a further motive for praise. Though God tests us, he brings us through the test and frees us.

I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand, you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.

– Isaiah 47:6

Your tormentors said to you: ‘Bow down, that we may walk on you’; and you have made your back like the ground and like the street for them to walk on.

– Isaiah 51:23

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

– Isaiah 43:2

They strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, ‘It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.’

– Acts 14:22

The ‘burnt offering’ (‘holocaust’, Hebrew **עֹלָה**) is distinctive in that the whole of animal was consumed by fire. Nothing was left for the person offering the sacrifice or for the sacrificing priest. The practice and the word seem to have been borrowed from the Canaanites. The symbolism is clear: the offerer was giving himself entirely over to God, keeping nothing back.

Once more the people are invited to hear of God's wonderful deeds.

This falls short of the understanding of God given by Jesus. God, the Lord [^adōnay [יְיָ], has heard his cry and the psalmist concludes from this that his heart must be without evil. Jesus showed us that God hears the cry of sinners. God listens to us sinners and offers us forgiveness. To receive what God offers requires a change on our part. God's grace is always given in love. It is never forced upon us. Though unconditionally offered, it is conditionally received – conditional upon our welcoming of grace, on our repentance.

Saint Augustine comments:

If that for which you make supplication is not removed from you, remain secure in your trust, for his mercy will not be removed.

¹⁶Come and hear, all you who fear* God, and I will proclaim what he has done for me.

¹⁷I cried aloud to him, and extolled him with my tongue.

¹⁸If I had cherished evil in my heart*, the Lord would not have listened.

¹⁹But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.

²⁰Blessed* be God who has not rejected my prayer, or removed from me his kindness*.