

Psalm 84

Feast of the Holy Family Year C
Morning Prayer Monday Week 3

The psalmist expresses his overwhelming delight at being able to be in the temple of YHWH in Jerusalem. He reflects on the happiness of those who make the pilgrimage to encounter God in his dwelling place. The pilgrimage is physical, spiritual and moral. The title reads ‘To the leader: according to The Gittith. Of the Korahites*. A Psalm*.’ ‘The Gittith’ is found also in Psalms 8 and 81.

Praying this psalm as Christians we see Jesus as the new temple (John 2:19,21; Apocalypse 21:22-23). We dwell in him as he dwells in us.

If you eat my flesh and drink my blood you abide in me, and I in you.

– John 6:56

Abide in me as I abide in you.

– John 15:4

We see the Church as the new Temple.

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

– Ephesians 2:21-22

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first born who are enrolled in heaven.

– Hebrews 12:22-23

The ultimate temple is heaven.

We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ... He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.

– 2Corinthians 5:1,5-6

In his commentary on this psalm, Saint Augustine writes:

‘To these there remains nothing to desire apart from God. They no longer love the earth; they love the One who created the heavens and the earth. They love Him, but they are not yet with him. From this arises their desire, a desire that is not immediately satisfied, and so it grows so that it can hold as much as it desires. It will not be little what God will give to those who nurture such a desire, nor will the food be scarce for those who are determined to make themselves capable of receiving such a great good. God will not give to his creatures anything less than Himself, the Creator of everything.

Pilgrimage

Train yourself, therefore, to welcome God. Long from afar for the Good that you are destined to possess for ever ...

Let us not tire of giving praise to God. If you lack love, you lack praise. However, if love is eternal, because the beauty of God is inexhaustible, then do not fear, because you will be able to praise forever the One whom you can love forever ...

People desire myriads of days and want to live long lives here below. Have scant regard for these myriads of days and long only for that day which knows no beginning and no end; that unique day, that eternal day, not issuing from a yesterday, and not leading into a tomorrow. May our desire be for that unique day.'

¹How lovely is your dwelling place, YHWH* of hosts*!

²With all that I am I long, indeed I faint, for the courts of YHWH; my heart* and my flesh* sing for joy to the living God.

³Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young at your altars, YHWH of hosts, my King and my God.

⁴Happy* are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.

⁵Happy* are those who draw their strength from you when they decide in their heart to make the pilgrimage.

⁶As they go through the Baka' valley they make it a place of springs; the early rain covers it with pools.

'Lovely, is an adjective from the Hebrew noun *yādîd* [יָדִיד]. It is the only time when the object of this love is a place and not a person, though the temple is loved because of the One who has chosen to dwell there.

Thus says the Lord YHWH: I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and your heart's desire.

– Ezekiel 24:21

'With all that I am I' in verse 2 translates the Hebrew *nepeš*. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction.

Happy the person whom you choose to bring near to live in your courts.

We are filled with the goodness of your house, with the holy gifts of your temple.

– Psalm 65:4

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shade of the Almighty, will say to YHWH, 'My refuge, my fortress; my God, I place my trust in you.'

– Psalm 91:1-2

The pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem is physical and spiritual.

These verses describe the spiritual pilgrimage in three stages. The first stage is hard, as we pass through the Baka' valley – a valley of trees that exude ('weep') gum, and so a symbol for passing through sorrow. The autumn rains bring some comfort.

Stage two takes us from garrison to garrison – ‘from strength to strength’.

Those who wait for YHWH shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

– Isaiah 40:31

The journey reaches its goal in the temple in Jerusalem – in union with God.

They shall see the glory of YHWH, the majesty of our God.

– Isaiah 35:2

I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

– Psalm 63:2

The psalmist prays for the king, God’s instrument in protecting his people, and God’s ‘anointed’ (‘Messiah’).

Being in the temple is a symbol of being in communion with God. Nothing else matters!

External action (pilgrimage) is not enough. We must live in a way that is in accordance with God’s will.

Once again the focus is on God’s power (‘Yahweh of hosts’, 84:1,3,8) and on the happiness (84:4,5) of those who trust in YHWH.

Those who are attentive to a matter will prosper, and happy are those who trust in YHWH.

– Proverbs 16:20

‘The one’ translates the Hebrew *’ādām* [אָדָם].

⁷They go from garrison to garrison.

The God of gods reveals himself in Zion.

**⁸YHWH God of hosts*, hear my prayer; listen, O God of Jacob!
⁹Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed*.**

¹⁰For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of the wicked.

¹¹For YHWH God is a sun and shield; he bestows favour and glory*. Nothing that is good does YHWH withhold from those who walk uprightly*.

¹²YHWH of hosts* happy is the one who trusts* in you.