

05. Psalms 6-8

Praying Psalm 6 with Jesus



[¹O GOD, rebuke me, but not in anger;
discipline me, but not in wrath!]

YHWH 'al-b^e'ap^eka tokîḥenî,
w^e'al-bah^amat^eka t^eyass^erenî

²Be gracious to me, O GOD, for I am languishing.

Heal me for I am shaking with terror.

³My whole being is racked with pain,

but you, O GOD – how long?

ḥonnenî YHWH kî 'umlal 'anî

r^epa'enî YHWH kî nibh^alû 'atsamay

w^e napshî nibh^alâ me'od w^e 'atâ YHWH 'ad-matay

⁴Turn to me, O GOD, hold back my life from the grave.

In your covenant love save me.

⁶I am exhausted with my groaning.

All night long I drench my pillow with tears,
I soak my couch with weeping.

⁷My eyes waste away with grief.

My life is ebbing away. Everything is against me.

⁸Depart from me, all you who do evil.

GOD has heard my weeping.

⁹GOD hears my pleading and welcomes my prayer.

¹⁰My enemies fall back, struck with terror,
foiled and suddenly confounded.

Omitted

⁵For in the realm of death no one calls on you; in Sheol who can give you praise?

The psalmist is grievously ill. His physical pain is accompanied by inner anguish and fear of death. He is feeling vulnerable before his enemies.

Seeing his suffering as God's punishment for his sins, he turns to God and pleads for forgiveness so that he will not die.

When we think of Jesus praying this psalm we must keep in mind two factors. The first is that Jesus himself was sinless. The second is that he identified with us who sin.

‘We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin’ (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus is innocent

‘In him there is no falsehood’ (John 7:18).

‘Which of you convicts me of sin?’ (John 8:46).

‘You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin’ (1 John 3:5).

‘You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot’ (1 Peter 1:18-19).

‘He committed no sin; no guilt was found on his lips’ (1 Peter 2:22).

‘Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God’ (1 Peter 3:18).

What sets Jesus apart – and it is an extraordinary and wonderful truth – is that while being human he did not sin. He was tested, as we are. He had to struggle, as we do. He succeeded in the struggle because he heroically and steadfastly clung to ‘every word that comes from the mouth of God’ (Matthew 4:4).

He did not sin, not because his humanity was of a different kind to ours, but because he refused to act from anything less than his humanity – something that we, sadly, find ourselves doing under the stresses of life.

He remained loving, even when circumstances tempted him to act otherwise. He remained prayerful, believing, gentle and truthful.

While giving expression in his life to God's being and to God's love and fidelity, he showed us how it is possible to respond to God in a fully human way, despite pressures to the contrary.

He can therefore 'sympathise with our weaknesses', for he experienced them. However he showed that, with faith, hope and love, we do not have to act out of them. It is possible to be human and not sin.

Sin has the effect of desensitising us. Being sinless, Jesus' heart remained sensitive to the horror of sin. Knowing our human condition from personal experience, his heart goes out to us who have been tested and have failed. He knows the price that sin demands of us. He knows that repentance will not be easy for us.

‘For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Paul is appealing to the Corinthians to ‘be reconciled with God’. The authority with which Paul makes his appeal is the authority of Christ whom God ‘made sin’ in the sense that he shared with us the consequences of the human condition.

In Romans 8:3 Paul dares to speak of Jesus' 'sinful flesh'. Like us, Jesus was a victim of sin, for it was sin that crucified him. Jesus experienced alienation from God ('My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?', Matthew 27:46).

He knew what it means to share our weaknesses, our temptations, our disappointments, our suffering and our dying. He embraced us in our sin, he took our part, he stood beside us, he ate and drank with us.

Yet in all this he remained sinless. He refused to stop loving. He refused to be distracted. He refused to seek substitutes. He did not give in to temptation. He kept believing in God and he kept believing in people. He kept loving, unto death.

That is why he can appeal to us, knowing that we know that he understands our condition and that he has shown us that there is another way to be human. We do not have to sin. Through his love and the gift of his Spirit we, like him, can be filled with the righteousness that God is offering us.

To dare to believe that God wishes us to be filled with ‘the righteousness of God’, we needed to be loved convincingly by one who, in God’s name, embraced us in our sin.

Though himself innocent of sin, Jesus embraced sinners and was condemned to death by people who accused him of being one.

Because he bore our condition without sinning, and because he loved us so intimately as to share with us the communion of love which he experienced in the Spirit, we can believe that, in union with him we are invited to share his righteousness. This is the message of the cross. This is the gospel preached by Paul.

In the Gospel of John we hear Jesus say: 'My soul is troubled' (John 12:27). The Synoptic Gospels develop this theme in their description of Jesus' struggle in the olive grove on the evening of his passion and death. He pleaded with his friends: 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here and stay awake with me' (Matthew 26:38). He pleaded with God: 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want, but what you want' (Matthew 26:39).

From the cross Jesus cried: 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' (Matthew 27:46). But he never lost faith in his God's love: 'Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46).

We cannot avoid the effects of our sin. Jesus revealed a God who does not hold back love from a sinner. Love, however, cannot impose itself. God respects our freedom, and if we obstinately reject grace, we cannot avoid the consequences of this rejection. Of those who fail to love, Jesus says: 'I will declare to them, I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers' (Matthew 7:23 = Luke 13:27).

Jesus is not rejecting anyone. Rather, he is warning us that it matters how we live, and that what we do has consequences. God respects our freedom, and constantly pours grace upon us that we may turn away from sin. If we are obstinate in rejecting God's love we, too, will '**fall back, struck with terror**' (verse 10).

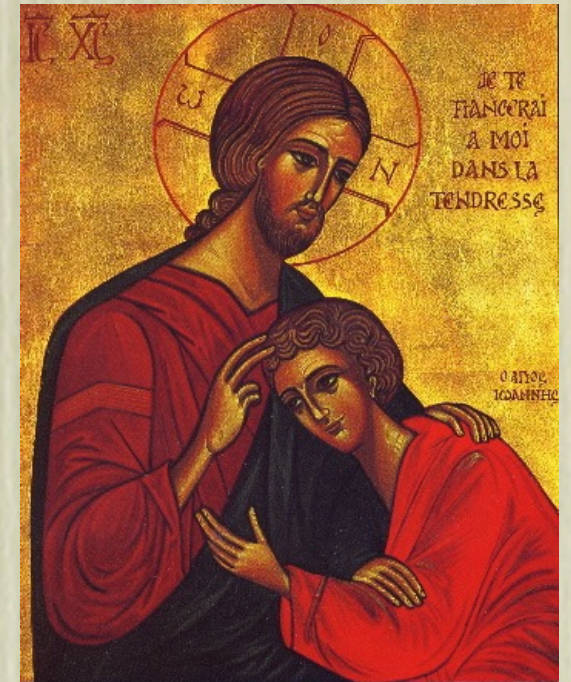
Psalm 6

[¹O GOD, rebuke me, but not in anger;
discipline me, but not in wrath!]

²Be gracious to me, O GOD, for I am languishing.
Heal me for I am shaking with terror.

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Praying Psalm 7 with Jesus



¹O GOD, in you I take refuge;
save me from those who pursue me,
²lest like a lion they tear me to pieces,
and drag me off with no one to save me.

³O GOD, if I have done this,
if there is crime on my hands,
⁴if I have repaid with harm one who has come to me in peace
or taken advantage of one who has attacked me without cause,
⁵then let the enemy pursue and overtake me,
let them trample my life to the ground, and lay my entrails in the dust.

⁶Rise up, O GOD, stir yourself against the fury of my enemies;
awake, O my God, and pronounce in my favour
in the judgment to which I am summoned.

⁷An assembly of nations gathers around you.
Take your seat above them on high.

⁸O judge of the nations.

Declare me innocent, O GOD.

⁹Uphold the just, you who test mind and heart.

¹⁰My shield is God, who saves the upright of heart,

¹¹ who pronounces a judgment that is just.

¹⁴Look at them! They conceive evil.

They are pregnant with malice, and give birth to lies.

¹⁵They made a pit, dug it deep,
but fell into the trap they made.

¹⁶Their wicked deeds recoil upon themselves.

On their own heads fall their cruel blows.

¹⁷I celebrate GOD's justice and sing in praise: 'GOD Most High.'

Omitted

¹¹God gives a verdict of condemnation every day.

¹²If they do not change their ways, God will whet the sword;

God will bend the bow, straight to the target;

¹³God is preparing for them deadly weapons, arrows barbed with fire.

Contrast this with Jesus' prayer 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

Of the innocent Jesus, Peter says: 'When he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly' (1 Peter 2:23).

¹O GOD, in you I take refuge;
save me from those who pursue me,
²lest like a lion they tear me to pieces,
and drag me off with no one to save me.

Mark and Matthew encourage us to hear Jesus praying these words from the cross, by directing us to Psalm 22 which begins: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

Psalm 22 goes on to portray those responsible for Jesus’ death as rejoicing to see him humiliated. He had claimed an intimate relationship with God. They mocked him: ‘Commit your cause to GOD. Let God rescue the one in whom God delights!’ (Psalm 22:8).

^{II}God pronounces a judgment that is just.

To say that God is just is to say that God always acts according to God's nature, and Jesus knew that it is God's nature to be merciful. Mercy focuses, not on God's response to our behaviour, but on God's initiative, which is always loving.

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God's covenant love embraces all of creation. Love cannot impose itself. If we close ourselves off from this love, we are responsible for the consequences of rejecting love.

As we pray this psalm let us join Jesus in his agony, as he was dragged before the Jewish Council, as he was stripped and scourged at Pilate's command, as thorns were driven in mockery into his head, and as he was dying, nailed to the cross. Let us join Jesus in crying out to God when we are unjustly accused, and let us join Jesus as he continues to 'celebrate GOD's justice', and 'sing GOD's praise' (verse 17).

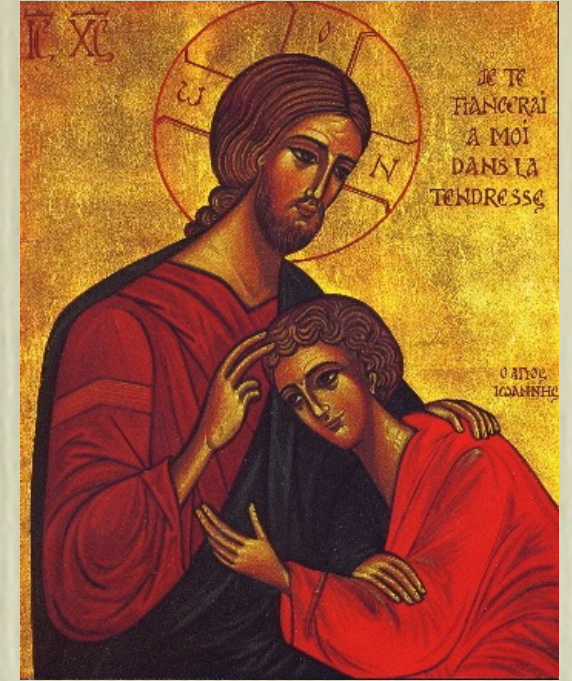
Psalm 7

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05. Praying Psalm 8 with Jesus

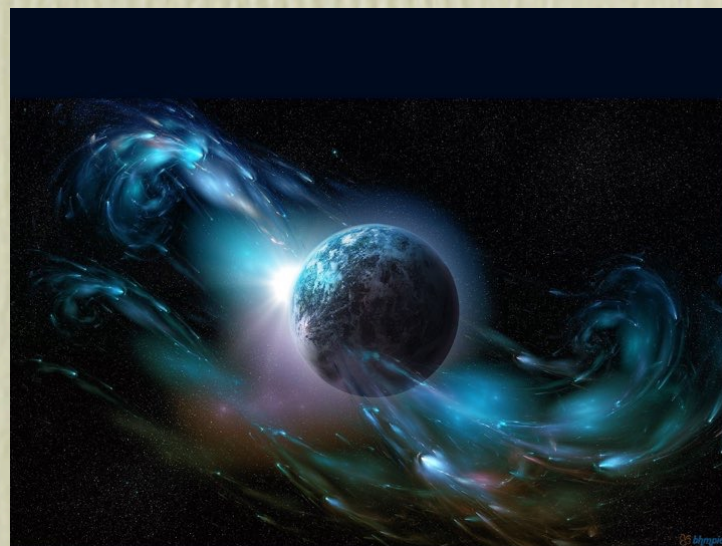


¹O GOD of the universe,
all your creation proclaims how wonderful you are.

²I want to worship you
with the worship of infants and babes at the breast.
They gaze with wonder at the star-studded heavens.
Their wonder reduces to silence the enemy and the rebel.

³When I look at your heavens, the work of your hands,
the moon and the stars that you have set in place,

⁴what are we, mortal human beings,
that you are mindful of us, that you care for us?



⁵You have made us a little lower than gods.
You have crowned us with glory and honour.
⁶To us you have entrusted the earth.
You have made us responsible
for all you have made:

⁷sheep and oxen, wild beasts of the plain,



⁸birds of the air,



and fish that make their way through the waters.



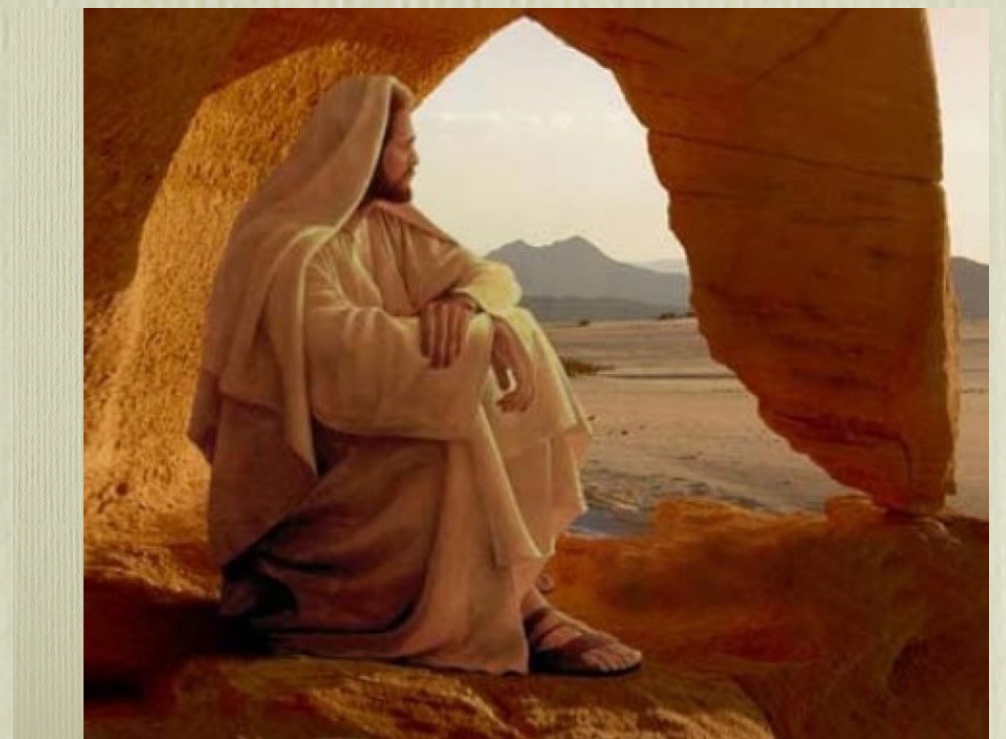
⁹O GOD of the universe,
all your creation proclaims how wonderful you are.

The intricacy and delicacy of the created world, especially the beauty of the night sky (verses 1-3) moves the psalmist to a profound sense of awe at the majesty and power of the Creator. We can picture Jesus praying this psalm during his sojourn in the wilderness after his baptism experience (see Mark 1:12), and regularly during his prayer:

‘While it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he was praying’ (Mark 1:35).

‘He would withdraw to deserted places and pray’ (Luke 5:15-16).

‘Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came he was there alone’ (Matthew 14:23).



²I want to worship you
with the worship of infants and babes at the breast.
They gaze with wonder at the star-studded heavens.
Their wonder reduces to silence the enemy and the rebel.

Jesus responded to God as to a 'Father', and he told us that to be part of the reign of God's love we must do the same. We have to become like little children. 'Jesus called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like this little child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:2-3).

When Jesus' disciples tried to stop little children 'troubling' Jesus, he said to them: 'Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs' (Matthew 19:14).

Matthew records the occasion when Jesus ‘entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying there’ (Matthew 21:12). He goes on to tell that ‘the blind and the lame came to Jesus in the temple, and he cured them’ (Matthew 21:14). It was the children who responded with delight, and in his response Jesus quotes from Psalm 8: ‘**Out of the mouths of infants you have prepared praise**’ (Matthew 21:16).

‘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’ (Luke 10:21).



⁴what are we, mortal human beings,
that you are mindful of us, that you care for us?

The psalmist does not attempt to answer this fundamental question by looking at us human beings and at what we do.

Rather he looks at what God has done and is doing for us.

We are all too aware of what we do and fail to do. The only way to find out who we really are is to look at our relationships, and primarily at our relationship with God.

How God treats us shows us who we are and why God keeps us in mind and cares for us.

1. Remember special experiences of God's care.

⁶To us you have entrusted the earth.
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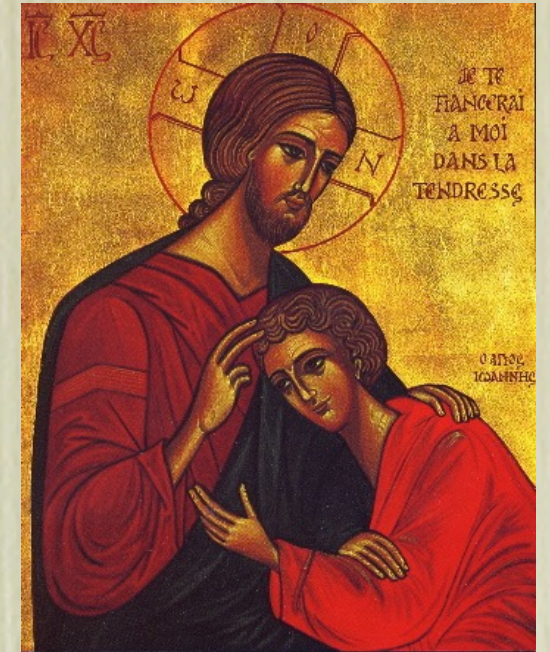
We have been given the whole of creation to continue the task of bringing order out of chaos and forming the world into a paradise where human beings can live with dignity and where all living things, indeed the whole of the created universe, can be intelligently governed (verses 6-8). This is not a right, but a privilege given to us for which we are responsible. We are to live, as Saint Paul invites us, ‘for the praise of God’s glory’ (Ephesians 1:14).

Psalm 8

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