

13. Psalms 33-36

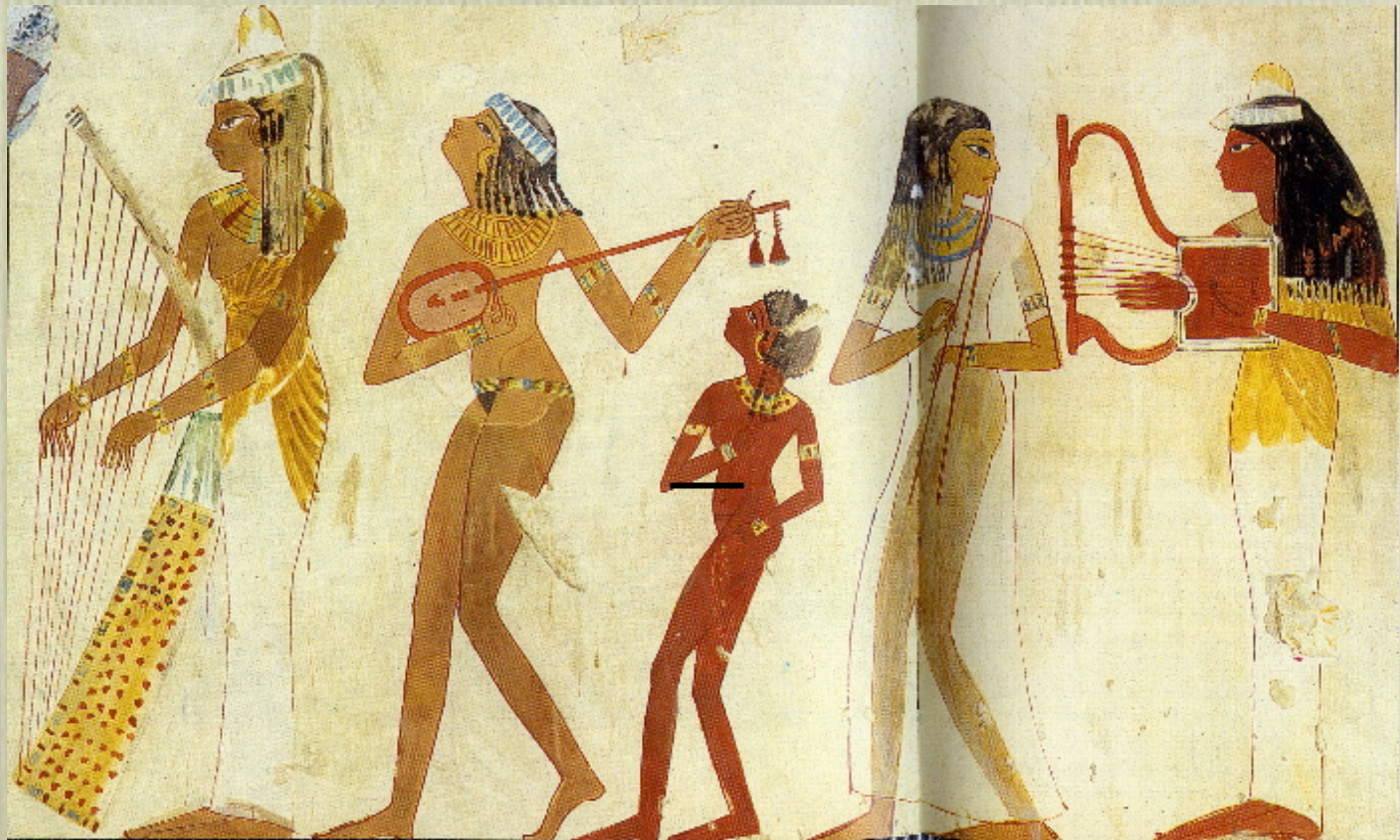
Praying Psalm 33 with Jesus

Harp

Lute

Oboe

Lyre



¹Ring out your joy to GOD, you lovers of justice.

How right it is to praise!

²Give thanks to GOD upon the lyre.

Make music with the ten-stringed harp.

³In a new song raise your voice to God.

Play skilfully on the strings.

⁴For the word of GOD is true.

What God says, God does.

⁵GOD, the lover of justice and truth,

fills the earth with covenant love.

⁶By God's word the heavens were made,
and by God's breath all their starry host.

⁷God collects and stores the waters of the sea.

⁸Let all the inhabitants of the earth pay homage [fear God].

Let them stand in awe of God.

⁹GOD speaks and the world comes into existence.

GOD commands and creatures spring into being.

¹⁰GOD brings the designs of the nations to nothing,
frustrating their plans.

¹¹It is GOD's designs that stand, the plans of God's heart from age to age.

¹²Blessed and happy is the nation whose God is GOD,
the people whom GOD has chosen.

¹³From heaven God sees all the inhabitants of the earth,

¹⁴From where God sits enthroned,

God sees all the inhabitants of the earth,

¹⁵and fashions the hearts of them all, and knowing all their deeds.

¹⁶Kings are not helped by their armies,
nor soldiers because of their strength.

¹⁷The warhorse is a vain hope for deliverance.

Despite its strength, it cannot save.

¹⁸GOD looks with love on those who believe,
on those who count on God's love
¹⁹to deliver them from death,
to keep them alive in famine.

²⁰With all our being we wait for GOD,
our strength and our shield.

²¹Our heart finds joy in GOD.
in whom we place our trust.

²²Let your love be upon us, O GOD,
for we place all our hope in you.

The psalmist is inviting us to praise God the creator of the universe, and for what God is doing in the world. Indeed, all that God does manifests God's 'faithfulness' (verse 4); 'the earth is full of the covenant love of GOD' (verse 5). He speaks of the power of God's word (verses 6 and 9).

In the Prologue to the Gospel of John we read: 'All things came into being through God's Word. Without God's Word not one thing came into being' (John 1:3).

'God spoke, and it was; commanded, and it came to be' (verse 9). God created the universe simply by a word (Genesis 1:3). The heart of human beings, however, he fashions day by day as he gazes with love upon us.

¹¹It is GOD's designs that stand,
the plans of God's heart from age to age.

Jesus is the central focus of 'the plans of God's heart',
We are praying this psalm with him who is God's
'Word-made-flesh' (John 1:14), 'the image of the invisible
God, the firstborn of all creation, for In him all things
in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and
invisible ... all things have been created through him
and for him' (Colossians 1:16).

The psalmist reflects on the power of the Creator. If God can command the sea to respect the land and not to encroach beyond the boundaries set by God, and can lock up the subterranean ocean, preventing the collapse of the pillars that support the earth, and allowing it only to well up to the surface in springs and rivers, then let everyone stand in awe at God's power (verse 8). As in the opening chapter of Genesis, God's will, God's word, is enough to create divine order. How foolish are those who think that they can oppose God with their paltry plans (verse 10).

¹⁸GOD looks with love on those who revere [fear] God,
on those who count on God's covenant love

In reflecting on Psalm 2:11 we looked at the expression 'Fear of GOD' and saw that it is not the same as being afraid of God. Rather, it speaks of a sense of awe and wonder in relation to God's mysterious Presence. If there is an element of fear in this it is fear of our capacity to turn away from God's Presence.

This understanding of 'Fear of GOD' is reinforced in this psalm. A regular feature of Hebrew poetry is making a statement in one line and following it by making the same point in a second line, using different words in order to depth the meaning. In verse 8 we read: 'Let all the earth fear GOD'. Then in the following line the meaning is explained: 'Let the inhabitants of the earth stand in awe'. Similarly in verse 18 above.

Psalm 33

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Play skilfully on the strings.

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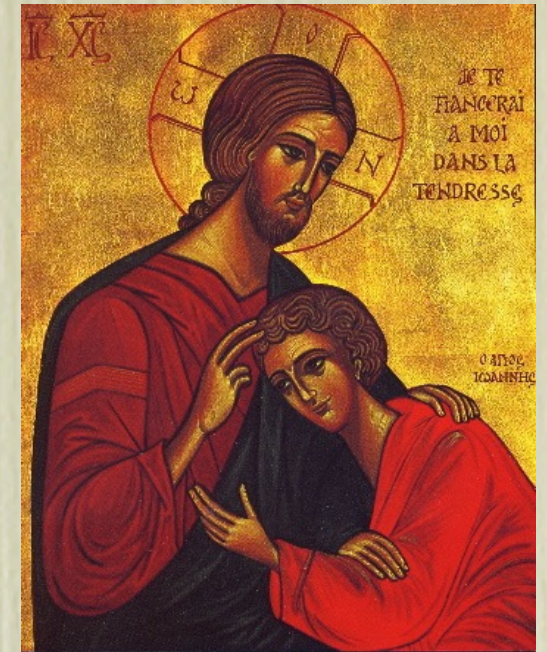
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our strength and our shield.

²¹Our heart finds joy in GOD.
in whom we place our trust.

²²Let your love be upon us, O GOD,
for we place all our hope in you.

Praying Psalm 34 with Jesus



¹I will bless GOD at all times,
praise continually on my lips.

²With thanksgiving I glory in GOD.
Let the lowly hear and be glad.

³Join with me in singing of GOD's greatness,
together let us praise our God.

⁴I sought and GOD replied,
setting me free from all my fears.

⁵Look to GOD, and be radiant.

⁶This poor person cried, and GOD heard me,
and saved me from every danger.

⁷The angel of GOD encamps
around those who revere [fear] GOD.

⁸O taste and see that GOD is good.
Blessed are you who take refuge in God.

⁹Live in awe [fear], you holy ones. You will want for nothing.

¹⁰The rich and powerful suffer want and go hungry.

Those who seek GOD lack nothing good.

¹¹Come children, listen to me;

I will teach you to cherish GOD.

¹²Do you desire life, and time to enjoy success?

¹³Well then, keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.

¹⁴Finish with evil. Learn to do good.
Seek peace, and pursue it.

¹⁵The eyes of GOD are on the just,
to attend to their cry for help.

¹⁷Cry out for help. GOD hears,
and rescues from every danger.

¹⁸GOD is near to those whose hearts are broken,
coming to the aid of those whose spirits are crushed.

¹⁹Many are the afflictions of the just,
but GOD rescues from them all.

²⁰GOD keeps guard over all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.

²¹Evil brings death to the wicked.
Those who hate the just will be condemned.

²²GOD redeems the lives of God's servants.
No one who takes refuge in GOD will be rejected.

Omitted

*¹⁶The face of GOD confronts evildoers,
to cut off all memory of them from the earth.*

Recalling how God responded to his cry of distress, the psalmist is encouraging others to follow his example by placing their trust in God who is ‘near to those whose hearts are broken, coming to the aid of those whose spirits are crushed’ (verse 18).

As we pray this psalm with Jesus, we listen to the words as coming to us from the lips of the risen Jesus. Enjoying now eternal communion with God, his whole being ‘glories in God’ (verse 2), praising God with a heart overflowing with gratitude, for he continually sought God, and God ‘answered him and delivered him from all his fears’ (verse 4).

It is his communion with God that matters most to Jesus and nothing gives him greater joy than to proclaim this to us, and invite us to ‘sing of God’s greatness, and together praise our God’ (verse 3). As we join Jesus in praising God, we do so especially for God’s gift to us of Jesus.

As Paul says: ‘We glory in God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Romans 5:11).

⁵Look to GOD, and be radiant.

We think of Jesus as he looked to God at his transfiguration where his ‘face shone like the sun’ (Matthew 17:2). We are reminded of the depiction of the exalted Jesus whose ‘eyes were like a flame of fire ... his face like the sun shining with full force’ (Revelation 1:14,16).

Paul writes: ‘All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:16). ‘It is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

⁸O taste and see that GOD is good.

In a cult setting the reference is to taking part in the communion sacrifice. 'Taste and see' can also refer to contemplation in which we savour the goodness of God.

We find this verse echoed in the New Testament: 'Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good' (1 Peter 2:2-3).

The psalmist addresses the ‘**holy ones**’ (verse 9). Holiness in the Bible is an attribute reserved for God. Only God alone is holy. The assembled people are called ‘holy’ here, not because of any attribute they possess, but only because God, the Holy One has chosen to be present in their midst.

¹⁰Those who seek GOD lack nothing good.

Jesus tells us: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and everything else will be given you as well’ (Matthew 6:33).

¹¹Come children, listen to me; I will teach you to cherish GOD.

¹²Do you desire life, and time to enjoy success?

¹³Well then, keep your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking deceit.

¹⁴Finish with evil. Learn to do good. Seek peace, and pursue it.

Peter includes these verses in his advice: ‘Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. For “Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer” (1 Peter 3:9-12).

²⁰GOD keeps guard over all their bones;
not one of them will be broken.

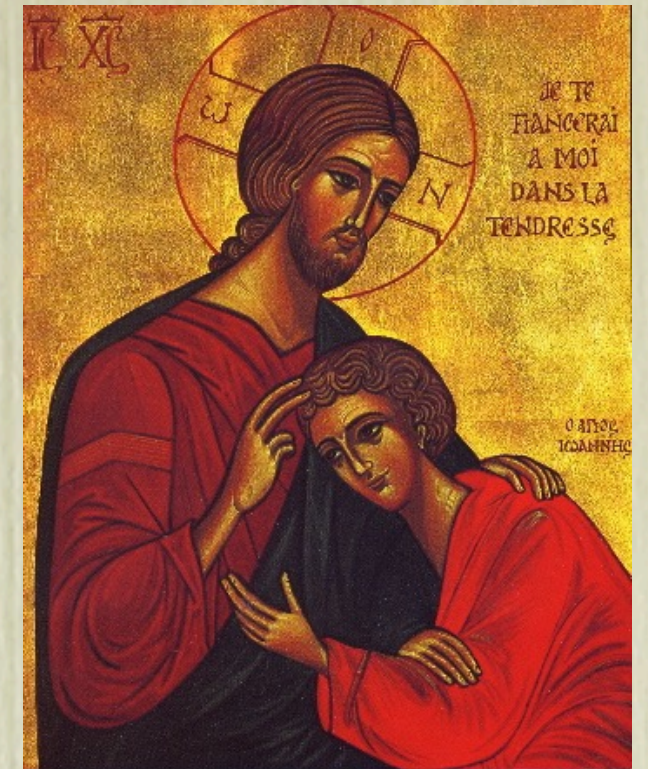
They will experience suffering, but their ‘bones’ will not be broken. Just as bones survive death, so the nation will continue on.

This truth was symbolically represented in the Passover ceremony in which no bone of the lamb was broken: ‘You shall not break any of its bones’ (Exodus 12:46).

John draws attention to this as he depicts Jesus on the cross: ‘These things occurred so that scripture might be fulfilled: None of his bones shall be broken’ (John 19:36). Physical death cannot destroy Jesus’ life, and it cannot destroy ours.

Psalm 34

- ¹I will bless GOD at all times,
praise continually on my lips.
- ²With thanksgiving I glory in GOD.
Let the lowly hear and be glad.
- ³Join with me in singing of GOD's greatness,
together let us praise our God.
- ⁴I sought and GOD replied,
setting me free from all my fears.
- ⁵Look to GOD, and be radiant.
- ⁶This poor person cried, and GOD heard me,
and saved me from every danger.
- ⁷The angel of GOD encamps
around those who revere [fear] GOD.
- ⁸O taste and see that GOD is good.
Blessed are you who take refuge in God.



⁹Live in awe [fear], you holy ones. You will want for nothing.

¹⁰The rich and powerful suffer want and go hungry.

Those who seek GOD lack nothing good.

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²¹Evil brings death to the wicked.
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Praying excerpts from Psalm 35 with Jesus



Psalm 35 A Psalm of David

This psalm is not found in the Church's lectionary. In the Prayer of the Church it occurs only in the Office of Readings for Friday Week 1, and even there verses 4-8, 20-21 and 25-26 are omitted.

⁹I will rejoice in you, O GOD,

celebrating what you have done for me.

¹⁰With all my heart I cry: ‘O GOD, who is like you?

You deliver the poor from those who are too strong,
from those who take away what little they have.’

¹¹Malicious witnesses rise up,

accusing me of things about which I know nothing.

¹²They repay me evil for good, leaving me forlorn.

¹³I prayed for them with my head bowed on my bosom

¹⁴as though I grieved for a friend or a brother.

I went about as one who laments for a mother,
bowed down in mourning.

¹⁵But they gathered against me.

The mob took me by surprise, and together they assaulted me.

¹⁶Lacking piety, they mocked again and again, gnashing their teeth.

¹⁷Rescue me from their ravages.

¹⁸Then I will thank you. In the congregation I will praise you.

¹⁹Do not let my treacherous enemies rejoice over me,
or those who hate me without cause enjoy themselves at my expense.

²²O GOD, you see it all! Do not be silent!

God* (יְיָ), do not be distant from me! (first use in the psalms)

²³Wake up! Bestir yourself for my defence,
for my cause, O my God!

²⁴Vindicate me, O GOD, according to your justice,
and do not let them rejoice over me.

²⁷Let those who desire justice for me shout for joy and be glad,
and say evermore, 'Great is GOD,
who delights in the welfare of God's servant.'

²⁸Then I will tell of your justice, and praise you allay long.

Omitted

¹God, contend with those who contend with me;

fight against those who fight against me!

²Take hold of shield and buckler. Rise up in my defence!

³Take up the spear and block the way against my pursuers;

say to me, 'I am your deliverance.'

The image of God as a warrior king is not the way Jesus conceived of God.

Verses 4-8 are not in the Church's liturgy

⁴Let those who seek after my life be put to shame and dishonour.

Let those who devise evil against me be turned back and confounded.

⁵Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the Angel of GOD scattering them.

⁶Let their way be dark and slippery, with the Angel of GOD pursuing them.

⁷For without cause they hid their net to catch me; for nothing they dug a pit to take my life.

⁸Let ruin come on them unawares.

And let the net that they hid ensnare them; let them fall into the pit, to their own ruin.

The 'Angel of GOD' is not an angel in the sense of a spiritual being carrying out God's will. Rather, it is a way of speaking of God acting, while preserving God's transcendence. Matthew speaks of the 'Angel of the Lord' in his prologue (Matthew 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19), and at the resurrection (Matthew 28:2). He is speaking of a revelation from God, as is Luke in his account of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:9), and in Acts 5:19, 8:26, 12:7, 23.

Verses 20-21 are not in the Church's Liturgy

²⁰For they do not speak peace.

They conceive deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land.

*²¹They open wide their mouths against me;
they say, 'Aha, Aha, we saw you do it.'*

Verses 25-26 are not in the Church's liturgy

²⁵Do not let them say in their hearts,

'Aha, we have what we have always been wanting.'

Do not let them say, 'We have devoured you.'

²⁶Let all those who rejoice at my calamity be put to shame and confusion;

let those who exalt themselves against me

be clothed with shame and dishonour.

⁹I will rejoice in you, O GOD,
celebrating what you have done for me.
¹⁰With all my heart I cry: ‘O GOD, who is like you?
You deliver the poor from those who are too strong,
from those who take away what little they have.’

Jesus invites us to share his joy that God cares for the poor. He speaks to us the words he spoke to his disciples at the Last Supper: ‘I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete’ (John 15:11). ‘I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you’ (John 16:22).

¹¹Malicious witnesses rise up,

accusing me of things about which I know nothing.

¹²They repay me evil for good, leaving me forlorn.

¹⁵They gathered against me.

The mob took me by surprise, and together they assaulted me.

¹⁶Lacking piety, they mocked again and again, gnashing their teeth.

As we pray this psalm with Jesus we recall the terrible opposition he encountered, reaching its climax in his crucifixion (See the reflection on Psalm 3). The cry: ‘**My God, do not be distant from me**’ (verse 22) echoes Jesus’ cry from the cross: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mark 15:34).

Through his own suffering Jesus experienced compassion for the oppressed: 'When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Matthew 9:36); 'When Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick' (Matthew 14:14). See the reflection on Psalm 6.

¹³I prayed for them with my head bowed on my bosom
¹⁴as though I grieved for a friend or a brother.
I went about as one who laments for a mother,
bowed down in mourning.

Especially painful is the fact that the psalmist's enemies are people whom he has supported when they were in trouble. How must Jesus have felt when the crowd shouted: 'Crucify him! Crucify him! (John 19:6). Jesus did not call on God for vengeance.

He offered his life to God 'in order to bring them to God' (1 Peter 3:18). From the cross we hear him pray: 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

Psalm 35

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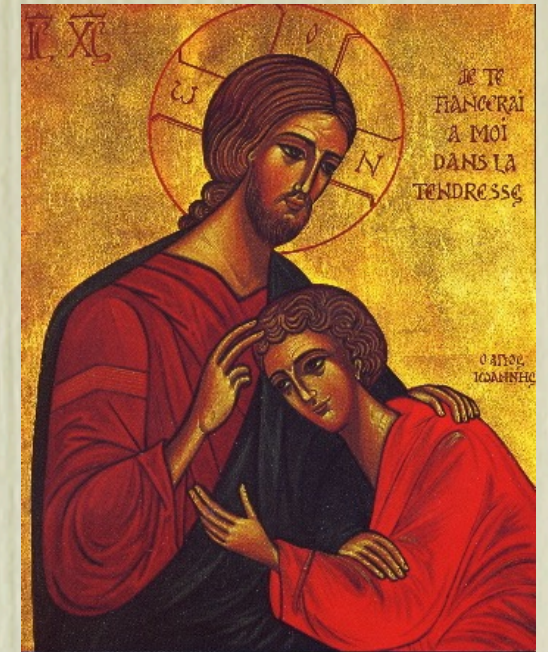
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²⁷Let those who desire justice for me shout for joy and be glad,
and say evermore, 'Great is GOD,
who delights in the welfare of God's servant.'

²⁸Then I will tell of your justice, and praise you all day long.

Praying Psalm 36 with Jesus



¹Sin speaks to sinners in the depths of their hearts.

God is watching them,
but still they experience no fear.

²They so flatter themselves in their mind,
that they know not their guilt.

³In their hearts are mischief and deceit.
All wisdom is gone.

⁴They plot the defeat of goodness as they lie on their beds.
Committed to evil, they have no regrets.

⁵O GOD, your covenant love extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.

⁶Your justice is like the high mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep.
You give life to all living beings.

⁷How precious is your covenant love, O God!

People take refuge in the shade of your wings.

⁸They feast on the abundance of your house.

You slake their thirst from the river of your delights.

⁹For with you is the fount of life.

In your light we see light.

¹⁰Keep on loving those who know you,
doing justice to upright hearts.

¹¹Do not let the arrogant trample over me,
or wicked hands assault me.

¹²See how those who do evil lie prostrate.
Flung down, they are unable to rise.

The psalmist gives us a graphic description of those who have no place in their lives for God (verses 1-4). They have allowed evil to enter and corrupt their hearts. As we ponder this psalm with Jesus we hear him warn us: 'It is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come' (Mark 7:21). We pray to welcome God's love, which alone can purify our hearts, and we pray for the courage to allow this purification.

They should be terrified at what they are doing and at the path of destruction that they have chosen to follow - but they are not (verses 1-2). They have no sense of the sacred, and their way of life separates them from the deepest desires of their hearts.

⁵O GOD, your love extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.

⁶Your justice is like the high mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep.

You give life to all living beings.

⁷How precious is your love, O God!

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⁹For with you is the fount of life. In your light we see light.

¹⁰Keep on loving those who know you,
doing justice to upright hearts.

The psalmist praises God's kindness to those who take refuge in him. He prays that this kindness will continue. Jesus assures us that it will.

⁷How precious is your love, O God!
People take refuge in the shade of your wings.

In the inner sanctuary of the temple was the mercy-seat, God's gold throne. It covered the ark of the covenant and was guarded by the cherubim whose wings extended over it. The people sought refuge in God's presence, shaded by these outstretched wings.

⁸They feast on the abundance of your house.

You slake their thirst from the river of your delights.

⁹For with you is the fount of life.

As we pray this psalm with Jesus we hear him invite us: ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water’ (John 7:37-38). The heart of Jesus is the source of this life-giving water.

As he said to the Samaritan woman: ‘If you knew the gift of God, you would ask me and I would give you living water ... The water that I will give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life’ (John 4:10, 14).

The Book of Revelation speaks of ‘the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city’ (Revelation 22:1).

⁹In your light we see light.

In the Prologue to his gospel John writes: ‘In God’s Word was life, and the life was the light of all people’ (John 1:4).

We hear Jesus say: ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life’ (John 8:12).

‘I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness’ (John 12:46).

Let us ask Jesus to light the lamp of his love in our hearts.

¹⁰Keep on loving those who know you

God's love reaches out to everyone. It is received by those who 'know' God. The psalmist is not speaking here of those whose knowledge of God is correct – though erroneous ideas about God are an obstacle. Nor is he speaking about those who know about God. Throughout the Bible, knowing refers to the knowing of intimate communion, knowing in love.

¹⁰Keep on loving those who know you

We can be in intimate communion without realising that it is God with whom we are in communion. It is possible to know about God or have correct ideas about God (in so far as this is possible), but not be in communion with God. God is offering love unconditionally, but we are free to welcome or reject this love. If we do not welcome it, and are unwilling to be drawn into intimate communion with God, we are unable to receive the ‘**covenant love**’ (verses 7 and 10), so faithfully and so persistently offered to us.

Psalms 36

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God is watching them,
but still they experience no fear.

²They so flatter themselves in their mind,
that they know not their guilt.

³In their hearts are mischief and deceit.
All wisdom is gone.

⁴They plot the defeat of goodness as they lie on their beds.
Committed to evil, they have no regrets.

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your faithfulness to the skies.

⁶Your justice is like the high mountains,
your judgments are like the great deep.
You give life to all living beings.



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Flung down, they are unable to rise.