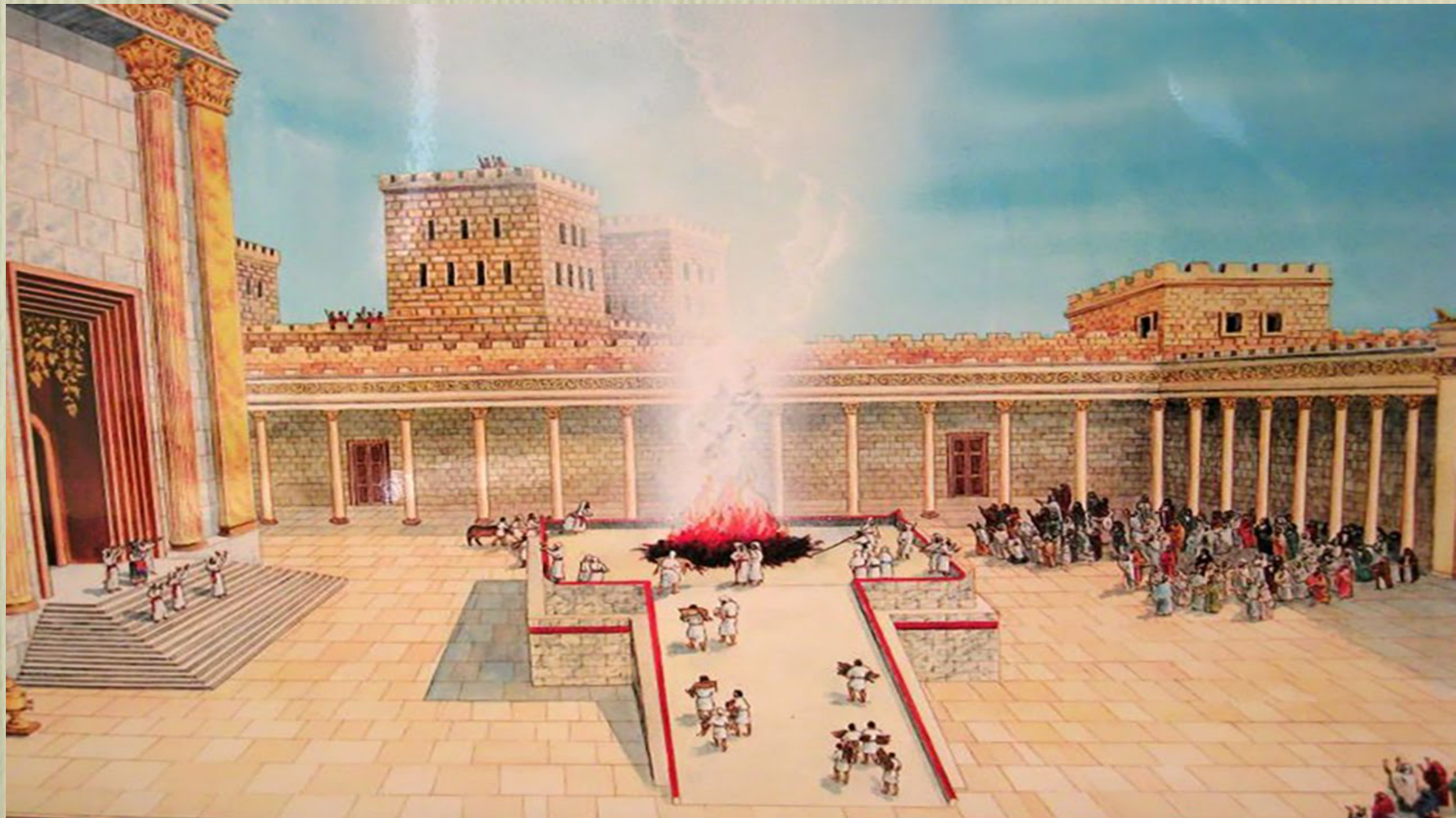


38. Psalms 116-118

Praying Psalm 116 with Jesus



¹I am filled with love for GOD who hears me when I call.

²I will continue to call on you, O GOD, as long as I live.

³Death's trap was set. The grave had me in its grip.

I was overcome with distress and anguish.

⁴I cried out to GOD: 'Rescue me, O GOD! Save me!'

⁵Gracious is GOD, and just, and tenderly compassionate.

⁶GOD shelters those who are weak.

When I was brought low, God saved me.

⁷Rest once more, my heart,

for GOD has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸GOD, YOU have delivered me from death,

wiping my tears, steadying my feet.

⁹I am walking with YOU in the land of the living.

¹⁰I believe, even as I say, 'I am sorely afflicted.'

¹¹I believe, even as I cry, 'No one can be trusted.'

¹²How can I repay GOD for all the goodness I am shown?

¹³I raise the cup of salvation and call on you, O GOD.

¹⁴I fulfil my vows to YOU in the presence of all your people.

¹⁵O GOD, you hate to see your faithful die.

¹⁶I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.

You freed me from death's grip.

¹⁷I offer a thanksgiving sacrifice, and call on you, O GOD.

¹⁸I fulfil my vows to YOU in the presence of all your people,

¹⁹in the courts of the house of GOD,

in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

The Psalmist is thanking God because he has escaped death (verses 1-4 and 16). He speaks of his being abandoned and powerless to help himself. He speaks also of his interior affliction. He is taking part in a liturgy in which he is fulfilling a vow taken when ill (verse 14). Verse 19 suggests a communal dimension: God has liberated his people from the slavery and death of exile, and restored them to life in bringing them back to the temple. It is a song of love (verse 1), of faith (verse 10), and of thanksgiving (verse 17).

Psalm 116 is listed among the Hallel Psalms, sung on the pilgrimage feasts (Tabernacles, Passover, Pentecost), and also at Hanukkah and each month at the new moon. Psalm 116 was the first psalm sung after the Passover meal (see Matthew 26:30).

⁵Gracious is GOD, and just, and tenderly compassionate.

This draws on the creedal formula of the Book of Exodus: ‘GOD passed before Moses, and proclaimed, ‘GOD, GOD, a God tenderly compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (Exodus 34:6).

⁶ GOD shelters those who are weak.

⁷Rest once more, my heart, for GOD has dealt bountifully with you.

Praying this with Jesus, we recall Jesus’ invitation: ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’ (Matthew 11:28-30).

We recall also the acclamation by the chorus in the scene where Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night: 'God so loved us that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (John 3:16).

We think also of Paul: 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies' (Romans 8:18-23).

¹⁰I believe, even as I say, ‘I am sorely afflicted.’

¹¹I believe, even as I cry, ‘No one can be trusted.’

Paul draws on this when he writes: ‘Just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with Scripture-- ‘I believed, and so I spoke’ – we also believe, and so we speak’ (2 Corinthians 4:13). Paul also draws on verse 11: ‘Although everyone is false, let God be proved true’ (Romans 3:4).

In the Biblical tradition, the word ‘believe’ and the word ‘faith’ translate words from the Hebrew root ’mn. The noun ’mnh is often translated ‘faithfulness’. It denotes the quality one has when one acts according to one’s nature or commitments. The related adjective is descriptive of a person who is faithful, reliable, and so trustworthy.

God has this quality in its fullness because God always acts according to who God is. To speak of God in this way is to say that God is the real God, not a false one, and that God always acts according to the truth. Because of this, we can find our security in God, we can rely upon God, we can place our trust in God: 'The word of GOD is upright, and all GOD's work is done in faithfulness' (Psalm 33:4).

When we say that God is 'faith-full', we are saying that God always acts according to who God is. But who is God? Among the many necessarily imperfect answers to this question found in the sacred Scriptures, there is one that stands out: God is the one who hears the cry of the poor. When God first appears to Moses, God declares: 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them' (Exodus 3:7-8).

‘I am GOD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am GOD, your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians’ (Exodus 6:6-7).

We are made in God's image. What does it mean for us to 'believe', to have 'faith', to be 'faith-full'? To believe in God is to accept the salvation which God offers and to experience a summons, like Moses, to be God's instrument in liberating the oppressed:

'God has taken his place in the council of the gods.

It is there God holds judgment:

"How long will you judge unjustly
and show partiality to the wicked?

Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
defend the lowly and the destitute.

Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the power of the wicked" (Psalm 82:1-4).

Jeremiah challenges King Zedekiah: 'Did not your father [King Josiah] eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? ... He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord' (Jeremiah 22:15-16). King Josiah, Zedekiah's father, acted justly and so can truly be said to have put his faith in the faithfulness of God.

The idea recurs again and again in the writings of the prophets: 'Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream' (Amos 5:24). 'Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land' (Hosea 4:1). 'I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings' (Hosea 6:6). 'They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (Isaiah 11:9).

The Mosaic Law requires of God's people to be faithful to the covenant by acting with justice for the poor. They are to remember that they were once oppressed and that it was GOD who redeemed them. The following text is typical and similar injunctions can be found throughout the books of the Law: 'You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry' (Exodus 22:21-23).

What, then, does it mean for us to have 'faith', to 'believe', to be 'faith-full'? To answer this question we must look at Jesus. In the New Testament Jesus is portrayed as having perfect faith. He always acts towards God as Son, in perfect trust and obedience. In doing so he reveals who God is for us and how we are to respond to grace. He is our 'leader in faith' (Hebrews 12:2).

We have faith when, in accordance with who we are as creatures totally dependent on God, we listen to Jesus' word and open our hearts to receive the sharing in his intimate life of love with the Father which he offers us. To do so we will need to trust him. We will also need to live faithfully the life he offers us, not independently, but as people who are 'born of God' (John 1:13), like branches which draw their life from the vine to which they remain attached (John 15:1ff).

Believing speaks of listening to God, heeding God's inspiration, and acting accordingly. It focuses on the dynamic movement of our actual relating with God. Far from being a speculative, cerebral thing, faith is essentially practical. It is fundamentally about action. As Jesus himself says: 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven' (Matthew 7:21).

The Vatican Council (Dei Verbum, n. 2) writes: ‘The invisible God from the fulness of Love addresses human beings as God’s friends and moves among them in order to invite and welcome them into God’s own company.’ Opening our minds and hearts to welcome God’s communication and loving invitation is what we mean by faith. It speaks of the decisions we make, and the lifestyle to which we are committed as a consequence of taking this revelation seriously.

When we speak of human beings believing, we are saying that they are trustworthy because what they do and say is in accordance with the truth. If we seek the truth, and deal honestly and carry out our obligations, then we share in the faithfulness of God, and others in turn can rely upon us. Abraham is described as having a faithful heart (Nehemiah 9:8), and Moses is spoken of as being trustworthy because of the intimacy of God's communication with him (Numbers 12:7). We hear of a faithful priest (1 Samuel 2:35) and a trustworthy prophet (1 Samuel 3:20).

To believe is, as the English word so aptly expresses, to 'be' - 'lieve', to 'be' in 'love'. It is to be in God's love, receiving with an open heart the love which God is, the love which the risen Jesus enjoys in the eternal mystery of God's being and which he offers to us by pouring his Spirit into our hearts.

To be faith-full is to let this divine communion transform us so that our lives, too, become radiant reflections of God's love reaching out to others and inviting them into the same shared communion. To believe is:

- to listen to God's word as revealed in Jesus.
- to heed what God says, trusting that God is faithful and so accepting his word as true with our hearts and minds, our soul and strength.
- to act in accordance with God's will as revealed by Jesus, especially by living a life of love.

To have faith is to respond to God by savouring what we have received, reflecting upon it, integrating it into our lives, and living accordingly.

We now come to the heart of Christian faith. It is not a matter of copying Jesus, of modelling ourselves on him, on his 'faith', on his 'believing', on his being 'faith-full.' It is welcoming Jesus' own faith, given us when he pours his Spirit into our hearts. We are given the 'faith of Jesus, the Messiah' (Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16). We have faith when, in accordance with who we are as creatures totally dependent on God, we listen to Jesus' word and open our hearts to receive the sharing in his intimate life of love with the Father which he offers us.

We are not isolated individuals. God reveals God's Self to us through others. Christian faith is handed on through tradition, through the Sacred Scriptures and through the community of Jesus' disciples. We might reflect on the following statements from the [Catholic Catechism](#):

‘To live, grow, and persevere in faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God. We must beg the Lord to increase our faith. It must be ‘working through love’ (Galatians 5:6), abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church’ (n. 162).

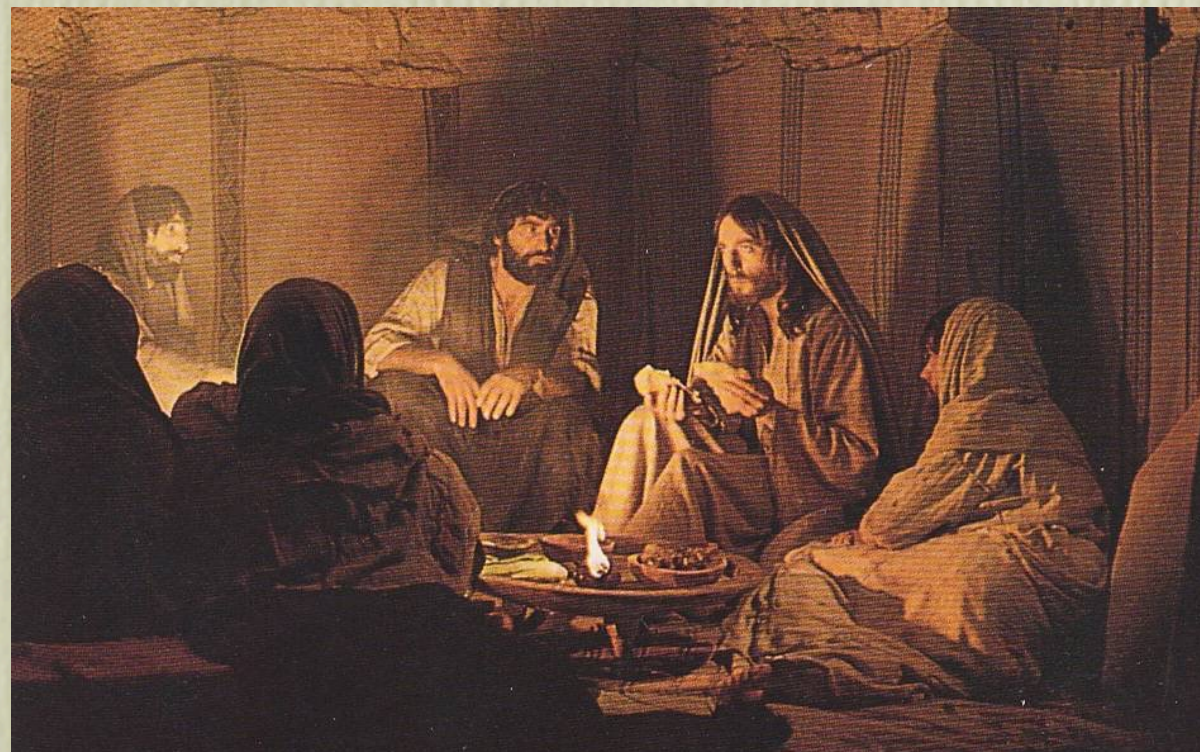
‘No one can believe alone ... I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I help support others in the faith’ (n. 166).

‘The Christian community is our teacher in the faith’ (n. 169).

¹⁵O GOD, you hate to see your faithful die.

GOD's 'faithful' are those who have welcomed God's covenant love [hesed] and are faithful in keeping the covenant: 'Love GOD, all you his faithful ones. GOD preserves those who believe in GOD' (Psalm 31:23).

The ‘cup of salvation’ (verse 13) and the ‘thanksgiving sacrifice’ (verse 17) draw us to think of the Last Supper, and the Eucharistic meal that is central to the life of Jesus’ disciples: ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’ (Luke 22:20). ‘The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?’ (1Corinthians 10:16). ‘Jesus took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’ (1 Corinthians 11:25).

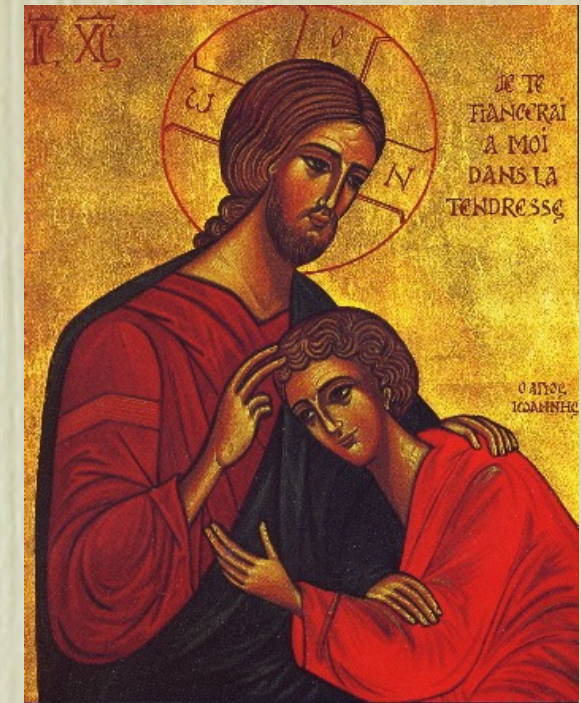


Psalm 116

- ¹I am filled with love for GOD who hears me when I call.
²I will continue to call on you, O GOD, as long as I live.
³Death's trap was set. The grave had me in its grip.
I was overcome with distress and anguish.
⁴I cried out to GOD: 'Rescue me, O GOD! Save me!'

⁵Gracious is GOD, and just, and tenderly compassionate.
⁶ GOD shelters those who are weak.
When I was brought low, God saved me.

⁷Rest once more, my heart,
for GOD has dealt bountifully with you.
⁸GOD, YOU have delivered me from death,
wiping my tears, steadying my feet.
⁹I am walking with YOU in the land of the living.



¹⁰I believe, even as I say, 'I am sorely afflicted.'

¹¹I believe, even as I cry, 'No one can be trusted.'

¹²How can I repay GOD for all the goodness I am shown?

¹³I raise the cup of salvation and call on you, O GOD.

¹⁴I fulfil my vows to YOU in the presence of all your people.

¹⁵O GOD, you hate to see your faithful die.

¹⁶I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.

You freed me from death's grip.

¹⁷I offer a thanksgiving sacrifice, and call on you, O GOD.

¹⁸I fulfil my vows to YOU in the presence of all your people,

¹⁹in the courts of the house of GOD,

in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

Praying Psalm 117 with Jesus



¹Praise GOD, all you nations!

Extol our God, all you peoples!

²Great is GOD's covenant love for us.

GOD is forever faithful. Praise GOD! [Alleluia]

In his Letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul includes this psalm among the quotations he uses to indicate God's will to reach out to the Gentiles. He speaks of God's faithfulness to Israel in keeping his promises, and God's steadfast love in reaching out to save all nations.

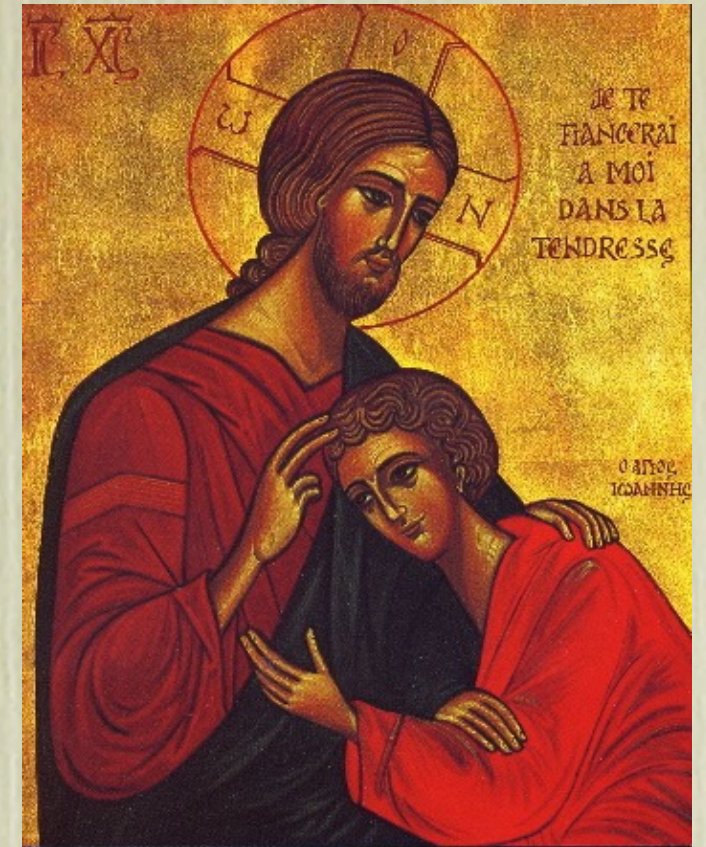
Romans 15:8-12

‘Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the faithfulness of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name’ (Psalm 18:50); and again he says, ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people’ (Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX); and again, ‘Praise GOD, all you nations! Extol our God, all you peoples’ (Psalm 117:1).’

The call is for all peoples to praise God (verse 1). The Gospels recall Jesus' ministry to people who were not Jews. We think of his healing of the servant of the centurion (Matthew 8:5-13) and the demoniacs in the country of the Gadarenes (Matthew 8:28-34). He healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). Matthew ends his Gospel with the commission Jesus gave to his disciples: 'Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"' (Matthew 28:18-20).

Psalm 117

¹Praise GOD, all you nations!
Extol our God, all you peoples!
²Great is GOD's covenant love for us.
GOD is forever faithful.
Praise GOD! [Alleluia]



Praying Psalm 118 with Jesus



The occasion is a festival procession into the temple, celebrating victory. The Master of Ceremonies is summoning the people, then the priests, and finally the whole assembly to thank God, and in turn to shout: ‘**GOD’s covenant love endured forever!**’ (verses 1-4).

Then the king recounts how GOD came to his aid (verses 5-14).

¹*Give thanks to GOD who is good.*
GOD's covenant love endures forever!

²Let the people proclaim:
'GOD's covenant love endures forever.'

³Let the priests proclaim:
'GOD's covenant love endures forever.'

⁴Let all who revere ['fear'] GOD proclaim:
'GOD's covenant love endures forever.'

⁵I called to GOD in my distress.
GOD answered and set me free.

⁶With GOD on my side,
I do not fear what people can do to me.

⁷GOD is with me to help me.
I will see my enemies defeated.

Verse 6 is quoted by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews: 'He has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "With GOD on my side, I do not fear what people can do to me".' (Hebrews 13:5-6).

⁸It is better to take refuge in GOD
than to rely on human help.

⁹It is better to take refuge in GOD
than to trust in princes.

¹⁰The nations surrounded me.

Calling on GOD, I drove them back!

¹¹They surrounded me on every side.

Calling on GOD, I drove them back!

¹²They swarmed like bees,

and blazed like a brushwood fire.

Calling on GOD, I drove them back!

¹³I was hard-pressed and falling.

GOD came to my help.

¹⁴GOD is my strength, my song, my saviour.

¹⁵Glad shouts of victory ring out in the tents of the righteous.

‘With triumphant arm raised high, ¹⁶GOD has conquered!’

Responding to the king, the chorus recalls the celebration in the camp of the victory that was achieved through the power of GOD.

¹⁷I will not die. I will live to recount GOD’s deeds.

[¹⁸GOD punished me severely] but did not leave me to die.

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter and give thanks.

Verses 17-19 are spoken by the king. Praying the psalm with Jesus we rejoice that ‘God did not leave Jesus to die’: ‘We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him’ (Romans 6:9). We trust that we will share in Jesus’ risen life. In the meantime: ‘We are treated as dying, and see - we are alive’ (2 Corinthians 6:9).

¹⁵Glad shouts of victory ring out
in the tents of the righteous.

‘With triumphant arm raised high,
¹⁶GOD has conquered!’

¹⁷I will not die.

I will live to recount GOD’s deeds.

[¹⁸GOD punished me severely,
but did not leave me to die.

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter and give thanks.

²⁰This is GOD’s gate.

Through it only the righteous can enter.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me.
You have become my saviour.

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter and give thanks.

²⁰This is GOD's gate. Through it only the righteous can enter.

In verse 19 the king turns to those responsible for opening the gate to the temple. They reply in verse 20.

Praying this with Jesus we recall his words: 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture' (John 10:9). And: 'I am the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6).

²¹I thank you that you have answered me.

You have become my saviour.

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone.

²³This is GOD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day GOD has made; let us rejoice in it and be glad.

²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O GOD! O GOD, grant us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in GOD's name.

We bless you from GOD's house. GOD is our light.

²⁷On this our festival go forward with branches even to the altar.

²⁸You are my God (אֱלֹהֵי). I give you thanks.

You are my God (אֱלֹהֵי). I extol you.

²⁹*Give thanks to GOD who is good.*

GOD's covenant love endures forever!

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone.

²³This is GOD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

Verses 22-23 are chanted by the chorus. Jesus quotes them in his parable about his being rejected and the consequences for those who rejected him: 'Have you not read this scripture: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone. This is GOD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes' (Mark 12:10).

Peter quotes this text in his trial before the Sanhedrin: 'This Jesus is "the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone." There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortal human beings by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:11-12).

²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone.

Peter quotes it again in his First Letter: ‘It stands in scripture, “See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame” (Isaiah 28:16). To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner’ (1 Peter 2:6-7).

Paul alludes to it in his Letter to the Gentile communities: ‘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 GOD; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God’ (Ephesians 2:19-22).

²⁴This is the day GOD has made; let us rejoice in it and be glad.

²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O GOD! O GOD, grant us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in GOD's name.

We bless you from GOD's house. GOD is our light.

The chorus chants verses 24 to 26. 'Save us' translates the Hebrew 'Hosanna.' These verses are echoed in the New Testament. In the account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem we read: 'Those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' (Mark 11:9-10).

'They took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!" (John 12:13).

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in GOD's name.

In his recounting of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, Matthew includes the following lament: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate' (Matthew 23:37-38). The conclusion picks up Psalm 118: 'You will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord".' (Matthew 23:39).

²⁷On this our festival go forward with branches even to the altar.

The Master of Ceremonies instructs the assembly: ‘On this our festival go forward with branches even to the altar’ (verse 27).

The king responds:

²⁸You are my God. I give you thanks. You are my God. I extol you.

The assembly repeats the cry (see verse 1):

²⁹*Give thanks to GOD who is good.*

GOD's covenant love endures forever!

Psalm 118

¹*Give thanks to GOD who is good.*

GOD's covenant love endures forever!

²Let the people proclaim:

‘GOD's covenant love endures forever.’

³Let the priests proclaim:

‘GOD's covenant love endures forever.’

⁴Let all who revere GOD proclaim:

‘GOD's covenant love endures forever.’

⁵I called to GOD in my distress.

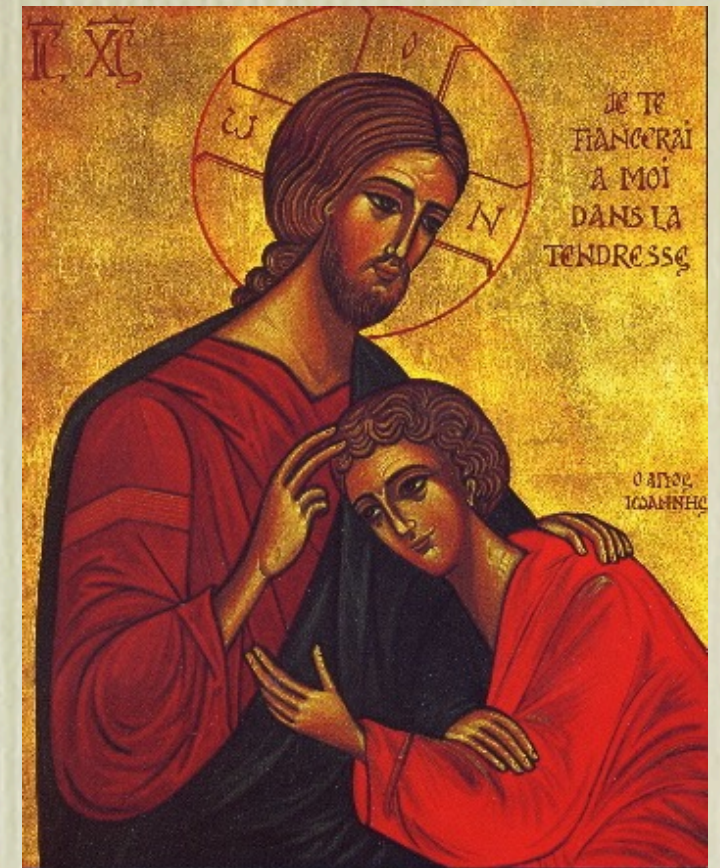
GOD answered and set me free.

⁶With GOD on my side,

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¹³I was hard-pressed and falling.

GOD came to my help.

¹⁴GOD is my strength, my song, my saviour.

¹⁵Glad shouts of victory ring out
in the tents of the righteous.

‘With triumphant arm raised high,
¹⁶GOD has conquered!’

¹⁷I will not die.

I will live to recount GOD’s deeds.

[¹⁸GOD punished me severely,
but did not leave me to die.

¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter and give thanks.

²⁰This is GOD’s gate.

Through it only the righteous can enter.

²¹I thank you that you have answered me.
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²¹I thank you that you have answered me.

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GOD's covenant love endures forever!