

END OF PSALM 87

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;*
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 87

*A prayer of one under grievous affliction:
it agrees to Christ in His passion, and alludes to His death and burial.*

1. O Lord the God of my salvation: I have cried in the day, and in the night before thee.
2. Let my prayer come in before thee: incline thy ear to my petition.
3. For my soul is filled with evils; and my life hath drawn nigh to hell.
4. I am counted among them that go down to the pit: I am become as a man without help.
5. Free among the dead. Like the slain sleeping in the sepulchers, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cast off from thy hand.
6. They have laid me in the lower pit; in the dark places, and in the shadow of death.
7. Thy wrath is strong over me: and all thy waves thou hast brought in upon me.
8. Thou hast put away my acquaintance far from me: they have set me an abomination to themselves. I was delivered up, and came not forth:
9. My eyes languished through poverty. All the day I cried to thee, O Lord: I stretched out my hands to thee.
10. Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Or shall physicians raise to life, and give praise to thee?
11. Shall any one in the sepulcher declare thy mercy, and thy truth in destruction?
12. Shall thy wonders be known in the dark; and thy justice in the land of forgetfulness?
13. But I, O Lord, have cried to thee; and in the morning my prayer shall prevent thee.
14. Lord, why casteth thou off my prayer: why turnest thou away thy face from me?
15. I am poor, and in labors from my youth: and being exalted have been humbled and troubled.
16. Thy wrath hath come upon me: and thy terrors have troubled me.
17. They have come round about me like water all the day: they have compassed me about together.
18. Friend and neighbor thou hast put far from me; and my acquaintance, because of misery.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 87

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "O Lord the God of my salvation: I have cried in the day, and in the night before thee." The Prophet, speaking in the person of Christ, repeats and expresses his various terms what our Lord expressed when hanging on the cross, "my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In order to show the greatness of his sufferings He then, begins with a prayer to God the Father, saying, "O Lord,, the God of my salvation," from whom, through a speedy resurrection I hope for salvation. "I have cried in the day and in the night before thee." He did so on the day of his passion, when he cried on the cross, "my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And on the night before, when he thrice cried out in the garden, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

2. "Let my prayer come in before thee: incline thy ear to my petition." Hear my prayer, I beseech you. Such is the meaning of this verse, full of metaphorical language. "Let my prayer come in before you;" as an orator would be admitted to plead a cause. "Incline thy ear to my petition." Gave a favorable audience to said orator when he shall have been admitted.

3. "For my soul is filled with evils; and my life hath drawn nigh to hell." This refers to the time when our Savior exclaimed, "my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" For, then, Christ's soul was evidently "full of evils," by reason of the great pains all over his body, by reason of his feeling for his mother, who stood by; and then, especially, "his life was drawn nigh to hell;" for he was just about to die, and to go down to the hell where all the souls of the faithful were shut up.

4. "I am counted among them that go down to the pit: I am become as a man without help." Having mentioned the grievous bodily pains that brought him nigh unto death, he now alludes to the contempt and ignominy he suffered in man's opinion on his death; for they looked upon him as an ordinary mortal, who died reluctantly, who could in no wise help himself, and had nobody else to help him; whereas, though among the dead, he was not subject to death, nor to the captivity of the devil, and could die when he chose, and rise when he chose. "I am counted among them that go down to the pit." People thought that I had gone down to where the souls are, as all mortals have gone down, forcibly and against my will, and, therefore, looked upon me as no more than any other mortal. "I am become," in the opinion of the world, "as a man without help;" for they insulted me, wagging their

15. "I am poor, and in labors from my youth: and being exalted have been humbled and troubled." For fear it may be supposed that the passion of Christ lasted only for three hours, or for one day, the Holy Ghost reveals here that his passion was constant during the whole period of his life. For, to say nothing of the chalice of his most bitter death, that was always before his eyes, he was at all times in troubles and difficulties; "I am poor and in labors from my youth;" though in the form of God I was rich and happy; for you, mankind, have I become poor and in difficulties from my childhood. And so he was; witness his birth in a stable, and his flight into Egypt; "and being exalted" on my cross, as on a throne, with my title written over my head, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," still "have been humbled," even unto death, "and troubled," at the blindness and the ruin of my people; or, "being exalted," by the people crying out and saying, "Blessed is the king, who cometh in the name of the Lord;" and, for that reason, "have been humbled," so as to be scourged, and suffered death on the cross; and "have been troubled," seeing in the blindness of my people.

16. "Thy wrath hath come upon me: and thy terrors have troubled me." He assigns a reason for having been humbled after having been so exalted, because God's anger, by reason of the many and multifarious sins of mankind, came upon him, on Christ himself; for, as Isaias 53, says, "for the wickedness of my people have I struck him;" and, as in 1 Peter 2, says, "who in his own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree." "Thy wrath hath come upon me," that was about the come on the wicked, "and thy terrors," intended for them, "have troubled me;" and hence it was that in the garden he began to fear, and to be sad, and to be heavy, terrified, as he was, by what he was about to undergo for the expiation of sin, and the satisfaction of divine justice.

17. "They have come round about me like water all the day: they have compassed me about together." He says that the anger of God, and the terror inspired by him, was like the absorbing and swallowing of a human being, as he briefly expressed before when he said, "my soul is filled with evils," which is more fully expressed here, when he says, they were like a sea all round about him, overwhelming and absorbing him.

18. "Friend and neighbor thou hast put far from me: and my acquaintance, because of misery." To this heap of misery is added the intolerable one of being alone obliged to drink the bitter chalice, with no one to share with him, to help him in this dreadful calamity. "Thou hast put far from me," in the height of my sufferings, the "friend and neighbor;" Judas, who went farthest from him, and, from a friend and neighbor, proved an enemy. "And my acquaintance because of mercy;" the apostles themselves, for, "leaving him, they all fled;" and, though St. John and some of the women came to him, instead of diminishing, they only augmented his sorrows. How justly, then, the Lord complains in Isaias 63, "I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the Gentiles there is not a man with me. I looked about, and there was none to help; I sought, and there was none to give aid."

heads, and saying, "he saved others, himself he cannot save."

5. "Free among the dead. Like the slain sleeping in the sepulchers, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cast off from thy hand." Death has dominion over all except myself, I alone am free, and nobody can put me to death against my will; as our Savior says, John 10, "and I have power to lay my life down, and I have power to take it up again." "Like the slain." He tells further what men thought about him. They looked upon him "like the slain sleeping in the sepulchers;" "like so many who died of their wounds, and lay in their graves in the sleep of death." "Whom thou rememberest no more;" whom you, O Lord, care for no longer, as being no longer under your charge as human beings, which he repeats and explains by saying, "and they are cast off from thy hand;" you have forgotten them, and think no more of them, for they are cast off from your providential hand, as having no further existence.

6. "They have laid me in the lower pit; in the dark places, and in the shadow of death." My enemies, who put me to death, caused my soul to descend to the lower pit, while my body lay in the sepulcher, and the lower pit may be described as "the dark places, and in the shadow of death." See Psalm 24, 4 hereon.

7. "Thy wrath is strong over me: and all thy waves thou hast brought in upon me." Speaking still in the person of Christ, he now makes use of two metaphors to explain the extent of his sufferings. "Thy wrath is strong over me;" your anger at the sins of mankind, or rather the justice that prompted you to inflict condign punishment on the sinner, was not only poured out upon me, but was made strong and was increased upon me, never to lose hold of me until satisfaction to the last farthing should have been exacted. This is the first metaphor by which we are given to understand that the sufferings of our Lord were as intense as was the anger of Almighty God, by reason of the sins of the whole world. A serious matter for all of us who have been redeemed to reflect on; "and all thy waves thou has brought in upon me." Another metaphor, in which the passion of our Lord is compared to all the billows of the sea tumbling in upon, overwhelming, and dashing on the rock, one unfortunate creature struggling in the sea. For as our Lord Jesus Christ had undertaken to wipe away the sins of the whole world, it was not one or two tides of sorrow he had to bear up against, but a universal inundation of the sins of mankind.

8. "Thou hast put away my acquaintance far from me: they have set me an abomination to themselves. I was delivered up, and came not forth." In addition to his sufferings came the aversion of his acquaintance, and by acquaintance we are to understand all who knew him through his conversation and his teaching, but did not believe him to be either God or the Messias, of whom it is said in John, "he came unto his own and his own received him not." "Thou has put away my acquaintance far from me," allowed those who knew me to shun and avoid me; they have set me an abomination to themselves," they not only held back from me as if they did not know me, but they even execrated me as a deceiver, as a Samaritan, as one possessed by a devil, as a friend of publicans

and sinners, all of which we read in the Gospels. This verse may also be applied to his disciples, who may be called his acquaintance; for St. Luke says, Chapter 23, "and all his acquaintances stood afar off;" and in Matthew 26, "and all the disciples leaving him, fled away." "They have set me an abomination to themselves," was accomplished and Peter, "who began to curse and swear that he knew not the man;" for, though St. Peter in reality had no such hatred of Christ in his heart, he professed it, however, when he swore so vehemently that he had no knowledge of him. Even his disciples, before they understood the mystery of his passion, and when they looked upon it as fraught with evil to him and to themselves, considered it an abomination; hence they said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews but just now sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" And when St. Peter heard of his intended passion, he too looked upon it as an abomination, saying, "Lord, be it far from thee; this shall not be unto thee." "I was delivered up, and came not forth." I was like one shut up in a prison, without the power of leaving it until I should have suffered what had been decreed by you.

9. "My eyes languished through poverty. All the day I cried to thee, O Lord: I stretched out my hands to thee." The abundance of tears shed by me weakened and impoverished my eyes. "All the day I cried to thee," and repetition of the first verse, which is explained more fully by St. Paul, when he says, Hebrew 5, "who in the days of his flesh, offering up prayers and supplications with a strong cry and tears to him that was able to save him from death, was heard for his reverence." He is said to have cried out "all the day," because it is explained in the first verse, he cried out both by day and by night; for as the natural day is composed of night and day, so both parts of it may be termed the whole day, though each part may not be entire. "I stretched out my hands to thee" in prayer; or, perhaps, on the cross, that by such an oblation I may obtain a speedy resurrection for myself, and freedom from death everlasting, for my Mystical Body, the Church.

10. "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Or shall physicians raise to life, and give praise to thee?"

11. "Shall anyone in the sepulcher declare thy mercy, and thy truth in destruction?"

12. "Shall thy wonders be known in the dark; and thy justice in the land of forgetfulness?" Speaking still in the person of Christ, it assigns a reason for having asked to be saved from death. These three verses are differently explained. They may be referred to that everlasting death which Christ wished to avert from his faithful; for a reason is assigned why he prays, and wishes for the aversion of such an evil, because God does not, nor ought he, show his wonders to the damned; neither ought they rise to life everlasting, nor will they relate with praise the mercy and truth of God; and, finally, they not only will not declare them, but they will not even know them. An objection to this explanation is the introduction of sepulchers and physicians: sepulchers seem connected with dead bodies, and not with damned souls; and physicians have more connection with the body than with the soul. Another explanation refers these verses to the death of the body, which Christ for himself and for his faithful disciples, while he prays for, and wishes a speedy

resurrection for himself and for them; and then the meaning would be: "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead?" I fear death, I desire to live, or that my life may be quickly restored to me and to my faithful; for, the dead, devoid of life or feeling, would in vain behold your wonderful works, that tend so much to your glory, and for which you should so deservedly be thanked, honored, and praised. "Or shall physicians arise to life, and give praise to thee?" The dead are not only devoid of life and feeling, but even all the art and skill of medicine will not raise them or give them life and feeling to render you the tribute of praise. "Shall anyone in the sepulcher declare thy mercy, and thy truth in destruction?" You do not show your wonders to the dead, because they are lying inanimate in their sepulchers, they cannot appreciate them, and therefore, you do not declare your mercy to them, or your wonders, the works of your mercy and your truth. "in destruction," signifies here, the losing one's life, and therefore, it is synonymous with lying in the sepulcher, where alone lie the dead. "Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy justice in the land of forgetfulness." The dead in their sepulchers will not declare your mercy or relate your wonderful things, because they know them not; nor can they know them for they live in the darkness of death, and in the land of forgetfulness, when there is no memory of the past, and consequently no sense of the present. This exclamation is confirmed by the words of King Ezechias, who certainly asked for life in this world, when he said, Isaias 38, "for hell shall not confess to thee, neither shall death praise thee, the living, the living shall give praise to thee, as I do this day." We have a similar passage in Psalm 113, "the dead shall not praise thee, O Lord, nor any of them that go down to hell, but we that live bless the Lord."

13. "But I, O Lord, have cried to thee; and in the morning my prayer shall prevent thee."

14. "Lord, why casteth thou off my prayer: why turnest thou away thy face from me?" He now shows that the passion of Christ was so decided on by a divine decree, that it could not be changed; and explains at greater length the brief exclamation of our Savior on the cross, "my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But I, Lord, have cried to thee," that the chalice of my passion may pass from me; "and in the morning my prayer shall prevent thee;" early enough, in the very morning of beginning of my passion, my prayer shall prevent or anticipate thee; for, though Christ's prayer in the garden was offered in the night, still, that night was the morning or the beginning of his passion. "Why casteth thou off my prayer?" Why don't you hear me? Why don't you cause this chalice to pass from me? "Why turnest thou away thy face from me?" Why do you turn away from me as if I were a stranger? Why do you abandon me? He makes use of all these expressions to give us some idea of the enormity of the sufferings, so repugnant to his human nature; for, absolutely speaking, the Lord wished for and chose such sufferings as a remedy for the sins of mankind; and the Father always heard him in what he wished and asked for.