

END OF PSALM 131

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: 131

A prayer for the fulfilling of the promise made to David.

1. O Lord, remember David, and all his meekness:
2. How he swore to the Lord: he vowed a vow to the God of Jacob.
3. If I shall enter into the tabernacle of my house; if I shall go up into the bed wherein I lie;
4. If I shall give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids,
5. Or rest to my temples; until I find out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.
6. Behold, we have heard of it in Ephrata: we have found it in the fields of the wood.
7. We will go into his tabernacle: we will adore in the place where his feet stood.
8. Arise, O Lord, into thy resting place; thou and the Ark, which thou hast sanctified.
9. Let thy priests be clothed with justice: and let thy saints rejoice.
10. For thy servant David's sake, turn not away the face of thy anointed.
11. The Lord hath sworn truth to David; and he will not make it void: of the fruit of thy womb I will set upon thy throne.
12. If thy children will keep my covenant, and these my testimonies which I shall teach them: their children also forevermore shall sit upon thy throne.
13. For the Lord hath chosen Sion: he hath chosen it for his dwelling.
14. This is my rest forever and ever: here will I dwell, for I have chosen it.
15. Blessing I will bless her widow; I will satisfy her poor with bread.
16. I will clothe her priests with salvation; and her saints shall rejoice with exceeding great joy.
17. There will I bring forth a horn to David: I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.
18. His enemies I will clothe with confusion: but upon him shall my sanctification flourish.

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: 131

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "O Lord, remember David, and all his meekness." Such is the language of Solomon, who is supposed to be the author of this Psalm, in which he prays to God through the merits of his father, David, "Lord, remember David," your friend, and all his good qualities, the principal of which was "his meekness." The word "remember" does not imply that God is subject to forgetfulness; it means that when he does not regard the just he seems to act as if he did not remember their merits. The meaning, then, of such expression is that he wishes we should pray for many things which, without our prayers, he would not have granted. An instance of this occurs in 3 Kings, where God, through the Prophet, speaks to Jeroboam, and says he is highly incensed at the sins of Solomon; still, that he would preserve the kingdom for him during his life, "on account of David, his servant, who observed his precepts and commandments;" from which it appears that this prayer of Solomon was heard. Solomon alludes to David's mildness, without taking any notice of his other virtues; because David was most remarkable for mildness, as was evident from his refusing to take Saul's life, though he might have done so, and he knew Saul was seeking to take his, and that without cause; as, also, because mildness is of great value in the sight of God, being the constant companion of humility and charity, and because it makes man like to God, who is "sweet, and mild, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon him." Thus, previous to David, Moses was God's greatest friend, "because Moses was a man exceedingly meek, above all men that dwell upon earth;" and Christ our Lord, who was full of grace and truth, held up no other virtue more for our imitation. "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart." Nor is it inconsistent with the meekness of David or Moses to have taken the lives of so many, nor with that of Christ to have turned the buyers and sellers out of the Temple, and to upset their tables; for meekness is not inconsistent with justice, it is rather sister to zeal for the honor of God; then they who readily put up with a personal offense, which is the office of meekness, are the more fit to punish one offered to God or to the neighbor, because it is evident to all that they are not influenced by any private pique or selfish motive, but by a pure love of justice; as, also, because they seem to forget themselves altogether and to be entirely absorbed in seeking and extending God's honor and glory.

2. "How he swore to the Lord: he vowed a vow to the God of Jacob."

3. "If I shall enter into the tabernacle of my house; if I shall go up into the bed:

wherein I lie.”

4. “If I shall give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids.”

5. “Or rest to my temples; until I find out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.” Solomon now tells the consequence of the meekness and the humility of his father David. Being meek and humble in heart, he looked upon it as a reproach, then he should have a house wherein to dwell, and a bed whereon to lie, while the Ark of the Testament had no fixed place of residence, no Temple where it may be worshiped with the reverence due to it; but was constantly shifted from one place to another; and, therefore, he swore that he would not enter his house, nor lie on his bed; nay, more, that he would not close his eyes anywhere, or take any manner of rest, so long as the Ark had no resting place. We have no exact account of David’s having made such a vow, unless we can infer it from 2 Kings 8, where David tells Nathan the prophet that he had determined to build a temple to the Lord, because he was ashamed of living in “a house of cedar,” while the Ark of God was under a tent. On that very night God ordered Nathan to tell David that it was not his wish that he should build the Temple, but that he should leave it to his son to build it; and he repeated the same to David, in 1 Par. 22, and 28. If David, then, bound himself by oath to build the temple, why did not he build it? Why did not he even make the attempt? He was forbidden by God; and besides, the words of the oath contain an exaggeration not unusual in the Scriptures; and they mean no more here than the expression of David’s great anxiety to build the temple. Thus, in Psalm 1, the words, “and on his law he shall meditate day and night,” contain a similar exaggeration; and again, “I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall be ever in my mouth;” and a more striking one in Isaias, “upon thy walls I have appointed watchmen, all the day and all the night they shall never hold their peace;” and Solomon prescribes the same anxiety to perform a promise that he here attributes to his father, when he says, “run about, make haste, stir up thy friend, give not sleep to thy eyes, neither let thy eyelids slumber.” Similar expressions occur in the New Testament, “we ought always to pray, and not to faint;” and further on, “watch ye, therefore, praying at all times.” Such expressions do not imply that we must be praying at every given moment, but that we must pray often, and in matters of importance, and that we must not suffer the cares of the world, however urgent, to interfere with our ordinary prayers. The oath, then, may be thus explained, “if I shall enter into the tabernacle of my house,” so as to forget the obligation of building God’s house, which I swear never to forget – “if I shall go up into the bed where I lie,” I swear I will never go into it without thinking on the bed, the site of the temple, where the Ark of the Lord may rest in dignity.” “If I shall give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids;” I swear that I will not sleep or rest, without waking to consider on the necessity of building up a temple to the Lord, which oath and vow he most faithfully fulfilled, as can be seen in 1 Par. 29, “and I, with all my ability, have prepared the expenses for the house of my God. Gold for vessels of gold, and silver for vessels of silver, brass for things of brass, iron for things of iron, wood for things of wood: and onyx stones, and stones like alabaster, and of diverse colors, and all manner of

precious stones, and marbles of Paros in great abundance. Now, over and above the things which I have offered into the house of my God, I give of my own proper goods, gold and silver for the temple of my God, besides what things I have prepared for the holy house. Three thousand talents of gold of the gold of Ophir: and seven thousand talents of refined silver to overlay the walls of the Temple." Besides this large amount of property, he drew up a most elaborate specification of all parts of the Temple, of its halls, porches, supper rooms, chapter rooms, and the like, as well as of all the ornamentation of it. Now, these were all types and figures of Christ, the true David, who, in his desire of raising a living temple, and an everlasting tabernacle to God, spent whole nights in prayer, and, truly, neither entered his house, nor went up into his bed, nor gave slumber to his eyelids nor rest to his temples, and presented to himself "a glorious Church, not having spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing," nor built "with corruptible gold or silver," but with his own precious sweat and more precious blood; it was with them he built that city in heaven that was seen by St. John in the Apocalypse, and "was ornamented with all manner of precious stones." Hence, we can all understand the amount of care, cost, and labor we need to erect a becoming temple in our hearts to God.

6. "Behold, we have heard of it in Ephrata: we have found it in the fields of the wood." He tells the reason why David was so anxious to build a temple, and it was because the Ark of the Lord had no fixed or certain residence. "Behold, we have heard of it in Ephrata," of the Ark being in Ephrata, in the land of Ephraim, that was when it was in Silo, is Samuels time; then "we found it in the fields of the woods," when it was sent off by the Philistines, and found in the field of Joshua the Bethsamite, which must have been a woody place, as it was taken from thence to the neighboring town Cariathiarim, which means the city of woods.

7. "We will go into his tabernacle: we will adore in the place where his feet stood." Having expressed the wishes and desires of his father David, Solomon being now about to bring the Ark into the temple he had built, says, "we will go into this tabernacle;" in other words, hitherto, the Lord has been a stranger in various places, but now he shall have a fixed residence, and, therefore, "we will go into his tabernacle," now erected, and built on Sion, and "we will adore in the place where his feet stood," we will turn towards the holy Ark which is his footstool, where his feet stood, and are wont to stand, and adored there. The sanctuary in the interior of the tabernacle was so constructed that the Ark was the footstool, and the propitiatory was the seat of the Lord, and was supported by two Cherubim.

8. "Arise, O Lord, into thy resting place; thou and the Ark, which thou hast sanctified." Solomon, now about to introduce the Ark to a temple built in a most magnificent style, most poetically addresses it, inviting it to come in and take its habitation there. "Arise, O Lord," from the place in which you have been hitherto but as a guest, and enter your own house, to stay there, and no longer to wander about from place to place, as you have done hitherto. And he lets us see that, when he speaks thus to the Lord, he does not address him, as he essentially exists, for, as such, "the heaven of heavens do not contain him," but as he is peculiarly in the Ark of the Testament, because it was from it he gave his answers, and he, therefore, adds,

by its kings. "I have prepared a lamp for my anointed." St. Augustine says the lamp alludes to St. John the Baptist; for, as the Messiah was to come without any show, pomp, or retinue, it was likely that the carnal Jews, who expected quite a different Messiah, would hardly receive him had not John preceded him, who, by his singular sanctity and austerities, "like a light shining in a dark place," brought the eyes of all upon him. "There will I bring forth a horn to David;" this means, I have established the eternal kingdom of the Messiah; "I have prepared a lamp," the precursor, who will be as a lamp, "for my anointed," for the Messiah; and Christ himself seems to allude to this verse when he said of St. John, "he was a burning and a shining lamp."

18. "His enemies I will clothe with confusion: but upon him shall my sanctification flourish." The prophecies that Christ will have many enemies, as, in truth, he had amongst the Jews, who said, "we will not have this man to reign over us;" and when they said to Pilate, "we have no king but Caesar;" but he also prophecies the punishment in store for them. "His enemies I will clothe with confusion." I will brand them with infamy, as we see all over the world. Soon after the death of Christ, the Romans sacked and destroyed the city, slew immense numbers of them, sold many of them as slaves, and exposed a great many of them to wild beasts in the public games; and from thence to the present day, the Jewish race is everywhere in a state of slavery, and is everywhere despised; but on the last day, then not only will Jews, but all pagans, heretics, and all false brethren, who, through his brethren, have been enemies to Christ, will be "clothed with confusion. Those who while they shall be "clothed with confusion," Christ will be clothed with glory, because the seed that had been buried in the earth will then flower forth into glory, by budding forth the flowers of sanctification; and not only will Christ be clothed with glory, but so will all his members too, because such sanctification would then produce flowers of incredible beauty, when grace shall be turned into glory.

that is, the Church, “as his dwelling forever,” and said in regard of it, “this is my rest forever and ever;” that is to say, I will never desert this Church, but I will rest forever in her, because I will remove her to a perfect certainty in heaven; and there “I will dwell” in her forever, “because I have chosen it,” by a firm and everlasting decree.

15. “Blessing I will bless her widow; I will satisfy her poor with bread.” This and the following verses promise many blessings to Sion, the city of David, which are, to a certain extent, applicable to that city, inasmuch as she was a type of the Church, but they are much more applicable to the Church itself. He, first, promises such an abundance of the good things of this world that even the widows, who was generally destitute, and all the poor in general, will enjoy an abundance. Now, this abundance, as applied to the Church, means an abundance of the spiritual food, of the food of the word of God and of the sacraments, an abundance of which is enjoyed by the children of the Church, especially by those who are poor in spirit.

16. “I will clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall rejoice with exceeding great joy.” The second blessing conferred on the holy city will consist in its priests being conspicuous for their justice and their holiness, because, as iniquity is the disease of the soul, so is justice its salvation; and, as Solomon previously prayed that “her priests be clothed with justice,” God now says, that “he will clothe those priests with salvation,” which is the same as justice when there is question of our spiritual salvation.

17. “There will I bring forth a horn to David: I have prepared a land for my anointed.” The third and the greatest blessing to be conferred on holy Sion will be, that there will the kingdom of David have its rise. The horn metaphorically means the power and the dignity of the king, and that by reason of its preeminence and durability. But, in a literal sense, the horn of David means the kingdom of the Messiah, that was to have its rise in Sion, and to be propagated from thence throughout the entire world. Zacharias announced it when he said, Luke 1, “and he hath raised up a horn of salvation to us in the house of David, his servant.” The Prophet, too, foretold it; for Isaiah says, chapter 9, “he shall sit upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to establish it and strengthen it forever.” Jeremiah has the following: “behold, the days come, saith the Lord, and I will raise up to David a just branch, and a king shall reign and shall be wise, and shall execute judgment and justice.” Ezekiel not only foretells the kingdom of Christ, but even describes his triumphal chariot, drawn by four animals, a man, a lion, a calf, and an eagle, meaning the four evangelists. In Daniel 2, we have, “but in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed;” and Zechariah 9, “rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion, shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem, behold thy king will come to thee, the just and Savior; he is poor and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.” From all of which prophecies it is clear that this verse cannot possibly apply to Solomon or to his kingdom, for he was then alive and on his throne, whereas some future king is evidently intended. The expression, “will I bring forth,” means, I will make David’s horn or power, spring up, as it were, and germinate, wherein he evidently foretells the destruction of Jerusalem, and the establishment of the everlasting kingdom of the Messiah in place of the temporal power enjoyed hitherto

“thou and the Ark which thou hast sanctified;” that is, you and your throne, and the footstool of your feet, which footstool is “the Ark which thou hast sanctified,” and through which you will be sanctified and honored by all who know it. In the Hebrew it is the “Ark of thy strength,” because it was through it God displayed his strength. When the priests brought it to the Jordan, the river at once turned back; when it was carried seven times round the city of Jericho, down came the walls; when it was taken by the Philistines, and lodged in the Temple of Dragon, the idol was found in the morning stretched on the ground before the Ark; and wherever it was carried about by them, innumerable were killed, so that the Philistines were at length forced to say, “the Ark of God of Israel shall not stay with us; for his hand is heavy upon us, and upon Dragon our God.” When the Bethsamite’s inspected the Ark with too much curiosity, over forty thousand of them were slain; and Oza, for merely touching it, was at once slain by God.

9. “Let thy priests be clothed with justice: and let thy saints rejoice.” The Ark having been brought into the temple, Solomon puts up a prayer, first for the priests, then for the king, that is, for himself; for on them depends the whole safety of the people, the priests being the rulers in spiritual matters, as are the kings in temporal. He asks for the priests, that they may be just and holy, as they ought to be, in order to discharge their duty properly, and that they should be alive in praising God, that being their peculiar province because they are bound to give God the tribute of praise and thanksgiving, both on their own part, and on that of the people, for the favors we are constantly receiving from him; and so to praise and thank our benefactor is to stir up his kindness to continue and increase his blessings. He, therefore, says, I beg of you, O Lord, that “thy priests be clothed with justice,” interior and exterior, within and without; that justice may appear in their lives, words, and actions, and that nothing disgraceful should turn up in those who are to minister to you and to teach your people. The metaphor of a robe is used here to give us to understand, that as such an article not only covers the deformities, but also adds to the appearance of those who wear it, and distinguishes them too; so should priests, through their virtues, and their extreme sanctity, not only rise above the imputation of anything mean or disgraceful, but should hold themselves up as a bright model and example to the flocks they have in charge, so that it may not be said of them, that “the people are as bad as the priest.” “And let thy saints rejoice.” Let the same priests, who, strictly speaking, are your saints, at least they ought to be, as being consecrated and segregated to you, let them exult and rejoice in praising you, and thus properly discharge their duty. If such was the justice, holiness, and promptness required of the priests who sacrificed but sheep and oxen, what amount of those virtues will be required of the priests who sacrifice the Lamb? Woe to us wretched, who have been called to so sublime a ministry, and are so far short of the fervor that Solomon required in the priests who were but foreshadows of the priests of the new law!

10. "For thy servant David's sake, turn not away the face of thy anointed." He now prays for the king, that is, for himself; and in order to get what he wants more easily, he draws upon the merits of his father David, and his prayer consists in asking that he may be heard whenever he may pray. "For thy servant David's sake." In consideration of the faithful services of David my father, "turn not away the face of thy anointed." Do not cause me who have been anointed king in his place, to retire in confusion from you at the rejection of my prayer, and thus cause me to turn my face away from you. To turn away the face of the supplicant means, to refuse his prayer, to dismiss him in confusion, as when Solomon's mother said to him, "I desire one small thing of thee, do not put me to confusion. And the king said to her: my mother, ask, for I must not turn away thy face." However true all this may be, there is still a more spiritual meaning in this verse. Every good act of ours has a reference to God and to ourselves; to God, in order that he may look upon us with the love of the father, and that we should look upon him with the affection of a child; for such reciprocal love is the source and origin of all our good, but God's love or regard precedes, and causes our regard for him. As St. John says, "in this is charity, not as if we have loved God, but because he first loved us." Thus, when God loves us, he causes us to love him, and when he regards us as children he makes us regard him as a father; and though we, of our own free will, turn our face away from God by the commission of sin, still, should God deign to look upon us, and to look upon us in his mercy, he will mercifully cause us to take no further pleasure in sin, and not to turn away our face from him, or should we chance to do so, that we will at once turn to him again, just as when the Lord looked on Peter, who had turned his face from him, and thereby converted him so effectually, that, "he went out at once and wept bitterly." David put up the same prayer, when he said, "look thou upon me, and have mercy on me;" and thus, Solomon prays here, "turn not away the face of thy anointed;" let not my face be turned away from you, which will be caused by your not turning your face away from me.

11. "The Lord hath sworn truth to David; and he will not make it void: of the fruit of thy womb I will set upon thy throne." He now begins to refer to the promise that was made by God to David his father, in the hope of more easily obtaining what he asks for through such reference, as he seems to demand it as a debt fairly due. "The Lord hath sworn truth to David;" as much as the say, David, having sworn to the Lord, that he would build a temple to his glory, and the Lord swore, in return, that he would establish the sovereign power in David's family for all eternity; for God will not be outdone in liberality, and rewards not only our actions, but even our words and our thoughts, with the most unheard of generosity. The oath here implies the fixed determination on the subject, intimating that God, not satisfied with a promise he was sure not to break, went further, and confirmed it by an oath. He then reconfirms the matter, by adding, "and he will not make it void;" his oath will not be left unaccomplished, as he expresses it in another Psalm, "the Lord hath sworn, and he will not repent." The next proceeds to tell us what the truth was that he promised and confirmed by an oath, and says, "of the fruit of thy womb I will set upon thy throne;" in other words, I will make your son your successor on the throne; words that should be literally applied to Christ, and not to Solomon, unless we look upon him as the type of Christ, for in Psalm 88, that refers to the same oath, we read,

"once have I sworn by my holiness: I will not lie unto David: his seed shall endure forever; and his throne as the sun before me: and as the moon perfect forever, and a faithful witness in heaven." The phrase, then, "I will set," does not mean I will put there, but I will establish, and put their forever, which does not apply to Solomon. Furthermore, St. Peter, speaking of David, says, Acts 2, "whereas, therefore, he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath, that of the fruit of his loins one should sit upon his throne; foreseeing he spoke of the Resurrection of Christ; for neither was he left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption;" in which passage, St. Peter explains an expression in Psalm 30, by another in Psalm 131, now before us, and this is also alluded to by the Angel in saluting the Virgin, when he said, "and the Lord shall give unto him the throne of David his father, and he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever."

12. "If thy children will keep my covenant, and these my testimonies which I shall teach them: their children also forevermore shall sit upon thy throne." The oath and the promise in reference to his only son Christ, of whose kingdom there will be no end, was given and made unconditionally; but not so to others – it was on condition, "if they will keep my covenant;" the treaty I entered into with them of having no strange gods and of their observing "my testimonies," my commandments, in which case "they shall sit upon thy throne," and if not, they will be cast out. David expressed this idea much more clearly to Solomon, when he said, "if thou seek him thou shalt find him; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever;" and God himself, speaking of Solomon, a short before, says, "and I will establish his kingdom forever, if he continue to keep my commandments, and my judgments, as at this day;" and in Psalm 88, where we read, "and if his children forsake my law, I will visit their iniquities with a rod;" and he does not add, but my mercy I will not take away from them; "but from him," that is, from David, whose throne was everlasting, by reason of his being the type of Christ, even though the temporal sovereignty of Solomon, Roboam, and their successors may have an end.

13. "For the Lord hath chosen Sion: he hath chosen it for his dwelling."

14. "This is my rest forever and ever: here will I dwell, for I have chosen it." These verses apply, to a certain extent, to the city of Jerusalem, inasmuch as it was a type of the church militant, and afterwards triumphant; because God chose that city for a time as the seat of royalty and of the priesthood, and in it were to be found the throne and the temple. But as that city was soon to be laid in ruins, and the kingdom upset, and the temple itself to be burned, we are constrained to say that these verses apply to the Church, the kingdom of Christ, and that the Sion, or Jerusalem, alluded to here is that of which he speaks in the second Psalm, when he says, "but I am appointed king by him over Sion, his holy mountain," a continuation of which we have in verse 11 of this Psalm. "The Lord hath sworn truth to David, and he will not make it void, of the fruit of thy womb I will set upon thy throne;" that is to say, he swore to David that he would place and establish his Son, Christ, on his throne, which is Sion, and which is, consequently, called the city of David, because "the Lord hath chosen Sion,"