

END OF PSALM 78

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: 78

*The church in time of persecution prayeth for relief.
It seems to belong to the time of the Machabees.*

1. O god, the heathens are come into they inheritance, they have defiled thy holy temple: they have made Jerusalem as a place to keep fruit.
2. They have given the dead bodies of thy servants to be meat for the fowls of the air: the flesh of thy saints for the beasts of the earth.
3. They have poured out their blood as water, round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them.
4. We are become a reproach to our neighbors; a scorn and derision to them that are round about us.
5. How long, O Lord, wilt thou be angry; shall thy zeal be kindled like a fire?
6. Pour out thy wrath upon the nations that have not known thee; and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name.
7. Because they have devoured Jacob; and have laid waste his place.
8. Remember not our former iniquities: let thy mercies speedily prevent us, for we are become exceeding poor.
9. Help us, O god our Savior: and for the glory of thy name, O Lord, deliver us: and forgive us our sins for thy name's sake:
10. Lest they should say among the Gentiles: Where is their God? And let him be made known among the nations before our eyes, by the revenging the blood of thy servants, which hat been shed:

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11. Let the sighing of the prisoners come in before thee. According to the greatness of thy arm, take possession of the children of them that have been put to death.
12. And render to our neighbors sevenfold in their bosom: the reproach wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord.
13. But we thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture, will give thanks to thee. We will show forth thy praise, unto generation and generation.

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: 78

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "O God, the heathens are come into thy inheritance, they have defiled thy holy temple: they have made Jerusalem as a place to keep fruit." The Prophet, putting himself in the position of the people in the time of the Maccabees, addresses God, complaining of the destruction of the Temple and of the city. "Oh God, the heathens are come;" the pagan idolaters, "into thy inheritance;" to that city and province which you have selected from the entire world to be your own. Inheritance in possession are synonymous in the Scriptures. He tells, then, for what purpose the heathens came into his inheritance. "They have defiled thy holy temple," which they did in the time of Antiochus, when they set up an idol in the temple, and profaned the alters by offering sacrifices to idols on them. "They have made Jerusalem as a place to keep fruit;" they left the royal city so desolate that it had no longer the look of the city, but looked rather like a hut set up to watch the fruit in a garden or vineyard; such was the case is stated 1 Maccabees 3, where we read, "and Jerusalem was not inhabited, but was like a desert."
2. "They have given the dead bodies of thy servants to be meat for the fowls of the air: the flesh of thy saints for the beasts of the earth."
3. "They have poured out their blood as water, round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them." Having deplored the devastation of the temple and the city, he now deplores the slaughter of the people, and the cruelty and the barbarity of the enemy who would not suffer the corpses of the slain to be buried. "They have given the dead bodies" of the Jews that were killed, not for interment, but exposed them to be by the crows and the dogs. "They have poured out their blood as water;" in great abundance, without regard to time or person;" and there was none to bury them;"

and their bodies, therefore, were left to the birds of the air and the beast of the fields. This was accomplished several times, and especially in the slaughter of three scores of the leading men of the Jews, who were put to death in one day by Alcimus, as we read in 1 Maccabees 7, with this very verse is quoted, when speaking of the slaughter.

4. “We are become a reproach to our neighbors; a scorn and derision to them that are round about us.” He now deplores the infamy attached to them by such persecution. “We are become a reproach to our neighbors,” to the neighboring kingdoms of the Moabites, Ammonites, and others, will despise a mock us as weak and contemptible fellows.

5. “How long, O Lord, wilt thou be angry; shall thy zeal be kindled like a fire?” The Prophet, seeing God’s anger so terribly excited against his people, that he feared for their total destruction, in deprecation of which he earnestly asks, “how long wilt thou be angry?” And he repeats it, saying, “shall thy zeal be kindled like a fire?” When he compares God’s anger to fire, which if not extinguished at once, rapidly spreads and consumes everything before it.

6. “Pour out thy wrath upon the nations that have not known thee; and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name.” He prays here that God’s anger may be turned on the enemies of his people. We thy children, bad as we may be, are still thy children; we know you to be the true God; we worship you, we invoke you; rather, then, “pour forth thy wrath upon the nations that have not known thee;” who have not thee for their God, who do not provoke your name, who do not believe you to be omnipotent. This was seen to contradict the saying of our Savior, Luke 12, “and that servant who knew the will of his Lord, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.” St. Augustine replies, that the gospel speaks of servants belonging to the same family, with whom the fault, and, consequently, the punishment is greater in proportion to their cognizance of the extent of it; but much more grievously do they sin, and much most severe will be the punishment of those who do not belong to the family; nay more, but are sworn enemies, “serving the creature rather than the Creator,” and grievously persecute the entire family; and it is of such persons the following verse speaks.

7. “Because they have devoured Jacob; and have laid waste his place.” Not only have they paid no regard to the invocation of the Almighty, but they eat up his people as they would so much bread, robbing them, banishing them, putting them to death, seeking to drive them to apostasy, by threats and torments; “and have laid waste his place,” the city of Jerusalem which they left waste and desolate.

8. "Remember not our former iniquities: let thy mercies speedily prevent us, for we have become exceeding poor." For fear God's people, in accusing their enemies, and deeming them worthy of punishment, would appear to be justifying themselves, as if their own punishment were not deserved, and that they were afflicted more through the power of their enemies than through the justice of God, in this verse they confess their own sins, and the sins of their fathers, and appeal to the mercy of a Father instead of the justice of a judge. "Remember not our former iniquities." Punish us not for our old sins, nor for those of our fathers. God sometimes revenges the sins of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation, as read in Exodus 20. Even the Lord himself says, Matthew 23, "fill ye up then the measure of your fathers;" and, in few verses after, "that upon you may come all the just blood that hath been shed upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the just, even unto the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachias." Nor does this contradict Ezekiel, who says, "the son shall not bear the iniquity of his father;" for the son, strictly speaking, is punished for his own sins, but he is said sometimes to be punished for the sins of his parents, for God would not have punished him, though he might have done so in justice, but for the sins of his parents. "Let thy mercies speedily prevent us;" we are rushing to destruction if your mercy will not speedily interfere; and he tells why, when he says, "for we are become exceeding poor;" afflicted, humbled, attenuated, wanting; not only the riches of this world, but also help and assistance.

9. "Help us, O God our Savior: and for the glory of thy name, O Lord, deliver us: and forgive us our sins for thy name's sake." The Prophet now explains how "God's mercies prevent us," which he does in the shape of a prayer rather than an instruction. "Help us, O God, our Savior;" may your mercies prevent us, by helping us in doing what is right, so as to avoid sins of the future, and in doing penance to atone for sins of the past. He says, "help us," to show that free will, instead of being suspended by grace, is only helped by it; for no one can be said to be helped but he who does something through the cooperation of grace. He then explains both by saying, "and for the glory of thy name, O Lord, deliver us." Deliver us from the death of future sin, by helping us in doing what is right; not on account of our merits, but for your own glory. "And forgive us our sins, for thy name's sake;" and for the sake of the same glory, and not from our sake, forgive us our past sins, by helping us to do penance.

10. "Lest they should say among the Gentiles: where is their God? And let him be made known among the nations before our eyes, by the revenging the blood of thy servants, which hath been shed." Here is the reason why, in the preceding verse, he appealed to God by the glory of his name, "lest they should say among the Gentiles: which is their God?" Where is, that God that was wont to protect the Jews? He must have deserted them like an imbecile or a coward, or he is quite ignorant of what they have come to. "And let him be made known among the nations before our eyes;" such blasphemies will be uttered not only here, but they will spread among the surrounding nations; and when we hear and see them, we must needs be the more grievously afflicted. "By the revenging the blood of thy servant which hath been shed." That your name, then be not blasphemed, revenge the blood of your servants so cruelly spilled.

11. "Let the sighing of the prisoners come in before thee. According to the greatness of thy arm, take possession of the children of them that have been put to death." Let the groans of thy servants in captivity, and even in chains, come before thee. "According to the greatness of thy arm, take possession of the children of them that have been put to death." The Prophet, speaking in the person of God's people, had previously asked two things, namely, that vengeance may be inflicted for the slain, and that the captives doomed to death may be freed; he now repeats the prayer, but inverts it, first asking for protection for the living, then vengeance for the dead. "According to the greatness of thy arm, take possession of the children of them that have been put to death." As your arm is most powerful, bravely resist our persecutors, and take possession (it being your peculiar inheritance) of the remnants of your people, to wit, the children of those who have been slain by the enemy. "And render to our neighbors sevenfold in their bosom," punish our neighbors sevenfold, and hide it in their bosom, so that it will not be easy for them to get quit of it: "the reproach wherewith they have reproach thee, O Lord;" as they reproached you with Imbecility and folly, as if you were not the true God, show them that they were the real imbeciles and fools, and, instead of being men, were rather the vermin of the earth, or dust and ashes.

12. "And render to our neighbors sevenfold in their bosom: the reproach wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord."

13. "But we thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture, will give thanks to thee. We will show forth thy praise, onto generation and generation." St. Augustine, writing on the words, "render to our neighbor," says, with much truth, that such a similar expressions are to be read rather as predictions than imprecations; for the Psalm is concluded by this certain prediction that God's praise would have no end. They, says he, (and they deserve it) will get sevenfold punishment in their bosom; but we will give thanks to thee;" we will praise thee, and preach up thy glory to all ages. That was foreshadowed to the Jews, with whom the Maccabees held sway for many years after the persecution of Antiochus; but will be more completely accomplished in the Church of Christ, which, after many and varied persecutions, will, on the day of judgment, see all her persecutors receive in their bosom the reward of their iniquity, while she, with Christ her King, will, in the heavenly Jerusalem, praise her God through ages of ages.