

END OF PSALM 144

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: 144

A psalm of praise; to the infinite majesty of God.

1. I will extol thee, O God my king: and I will bless thy name forever, yea forever and ever.
2. Every day will I bless thee: and I will praise thy name forever, yea forever and ever.
3. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: and of his greatness there is no end.
4. Generation and generation shall praise thy works: and they shall declare thy power.
5. They shall speak of the magnificence of the glory of thy holiness; and shall tell thy wondrous works.
6. And they shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts, and shall declare thy greatness.
7. They shall publish the memory of the abundance of thy sweetness; and shall rejoice in thy justice.
8. The Lord is gracious and merciful; patient and plenteous in mercy.
9. The Lord is sweet to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.
10. Let all thy works, O Lord, praise thee: and let thy saints bless thee.
11. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom; and shall tell of thy power.
12. To make thy might known to the sons of men; and the glory of the magnificence of thy kingdom:
13. Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages: and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words: and holy in all his works.
14. The Lord lifteth up all that fall; and setteth up all that are cast down.
15. The eyes of all hope in thee, O Lord: and thou givest them meat in due season.
16. Thou openest thy hand, and fillest with blessing every living creature.
17. The Lord is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works.
18. The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him; to all that call upon him in truth.
19. He will do the will of them that fear him: and he will hear their prayer and save them.
20. The Lord keepeth all them that love him: but all the wicked he will destroy.
21. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless his holy name forever, yea forever and ever.

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: 144

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "I will extol thee, O God my King: and I will bless thy name forever, yea forever and ever." The two first verses contain a preface, in which the Prophet tells us what he proposes singing of in this Psalm, and he does so in a poetical manner by addressing himself directly to God. "I will extol thee;" I will celebrate thee in these my verses, in order that, supreme as you are, you may be looked upon and considered as the most supreme by men. He styles God "his King," either to show that, king as he was himself, he still had God as a King, who rules all, and is ruled by none over him, or because he was about to praise God for the works and attributes that pertained to him as King and Governor of mankind and of all created things. "And I will bless thy name," which is no more than a repetition of the previous sentence; and he adds, "forever, yea, forever and ever," to give us to understand that his praise would be everlasting, commencing with himself and continued by the succeeding generations, who were to chant his Psalms to the end of the world, and after that without end in the country above, as he says in Psalm 83, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, O Lord; they shall praise thee forever and ever." This is more clearly repeated and explained in verse 2, where he says, "every day will I bless thee;" I will praise thee forever, whether in prosperity or in adversity, while I am here below, and hereafter in heaven. "I will praise thy name forever and ever."

2. "Every day will I bless thee: and I will praise thy name forever, yea forever and ever." Greatness consists in breadth, length, height, and depth, which, to a certain extent, exist in God, according to the apostle, "that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth, and height, and depth," etc. The Prophet then commences by praising God by reason of his greatness, and if we apply it to his divine essence, he is great herein in breadth, because it is immense; in length, because it is everlasting; in height, because it is most sublime; and in depth, because it is incomprehensible. Or if you will have the Prophet call him great by reason of his sovereign power, he is great as to breadth or extent, inasmuch as all created things, from the highest angel to the crawling insect, are subject to him; as to length, because his kingdom is to last forever; as to height, because he rules everything with supreme and absolute power; and as to the depth, because he not only rules our bodies, but also our hearts, with its most intimate and secret thoughts and affections; and, finally, there is nothing so secret or so hidden, that the scepter of his kingdom does not reach. Therefore, "great is the Lord," and on that account, "greatly to be praised," – "and of his greatness there is no end." Whether as to length, breadth,

21. "My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless his holy name forever, yea forever and ever." He now concludes the Psalm by uniting the first and last verses, as if he said: in consequence of all I have stated regarding the greatness of God, of his works, of the perpetuity of his kingdom, of his royal qualities that are so numerous and so perfect in him, "my mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord" forever. And I not only mean to do so myself, but I earnestly desire that "all flesh," that every human being, everything that lives and breathes, should praise the name of the Lord forever.

height, or depth. God's greatness, then, is infinite, and therefore, quite incapable of being investigated by us, who are finite beings; which does not imply that we are thoroughly ignorant of God's greatness, for we know him to be great, and that there is no end of his greatness, though we cannot take it in or comprehend it. This infinite greatness of God admonishes us, that as well as his greatness has no end, so our praises should have no end. It also reminds us that we should not be satisfied with moving in the narrow limits in which we are placed here below, but that we should daily endeavor to increase in that real greatness that arises from virtue, as Psalm 83, has it. "In his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps in the vale of tears; they shall go from virtue to virtue," for they who seek to increase in riches and in power, that they may get above others, they, instead of being great, are only swollen; instead of being full of juice, they are only distended with wind, for pride and magnanimity are two very different things.

3. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised: and of his greatness there is no end."

4. "Generation and generation shall praise thy works: and they shall declare thy power." He passes now from the essence of the great king, which is inscrutable, to his wonderful works, that convey some idea of his power; and he does not say, I will praise thy works, but, "generation and generation shall praise thy works." I, of myself, am inadequate to praise your works, but generations unborn will praise them, for there never will be wanting souls to reflect on them, admire them, and praise them, "and they shall declare thy power." The unborn generations who shall study your works, will constantly proclaim the power that shines forth in them.

5. "They shall speak of the magnificence of the glory of thy holiness; and shall tell thy wondrous works." Having spoken, in general, of the wonderful works of God, he now distinguishes three sorts of his works, some of them glorious and beautiful, and therefore, wonderful, by reason of their surpassing beauty and splendor; some of them terrible, and therefore, very wonderful, by reason of the great terror inspired by them; and some of them most lovely, and from their being the channels of conveying God's kindness to us, no less wonderful than the others. In this verse, then, the works that are wonderful, by reason of their splendor and beauty, are praised, such as the heavens, than which nothing more beautiful can be imagined, and speaking of which he says in another Psalm, "the heavens show forth the glory of God," as also the sun, moon, and the other heavenly bodies, whose number, variety, splendor, and perpetual motion, without fatigue or labor, are truly wonderful. "They shall speak of the magnificence of the glory of thy holiness." All future generations shall speak in praise of the excellence of the glorious works of your magnificence, and in thus praising them, "shall tell thy wondrous works," that appear so numerous and so conspicuous therein.

6. “And they shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts; and shall declare thy greatness.” This is the second sort of God’s works, in which the fear of the divine majesty, in punishing the wicked, is shown, “and they shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts,” they shall be talking of the dreadful and severe scourges with which you chastised the wicked such as the deluge, the destruction of whole cities by fire from heaven, the plagues of Egypt and of Pharaoh, the opening of the earth to swallow Dathan and Abiron alive; and finally, the earthquakes, plagues, thunderbolts, inundations, and storms, which frequently express God’s anger to man.

7. “They shall punish the memory of the abundance of thy sweetness; and shall rejoice in thy justice.” Here is the third sort of God’s works, that appertain to mercy, which is expressed at greater length, and more redolent of gratitude, as all God’s faithful servants should be. “They shall publish the memory of the abundance of thy sweetness;” that is to say, all generations having been filled with the abundance of the sweetness and the kindness of thy mercy, for “the earth is full of God’s mercy,” such abundance will cause them to publish the memory of the sweetness that so abounds, or in other words, they would hand down to posterity the record of so many and so great favors conferred on them; and they will not confine themselves to so publishing the memory of these favors, but they will, themselves, “rejoice in thy justice,” by reason of your having so faithfully carried out what you promised. To this class of favors belong the innumerable gifts of providence bestowed so bountifully on man, such as the alternations of night and day, the rains of heaven, the fruitfulness of the earth, the countless multitude of cattle, birds, and fish, designed for the use of and be hoof of man, the verdant groves and beautiful gardens, the seas and the rivers, that serve for transport, and many other blessings beside. And all of those, nothing, positively nothing, as compared with the gifts of grace; for instance, the Incarnation of the divine Word, the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ, the sending of the Holy Ghost, the calling of the Gentiles, the preaching, the promise, and the publication of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone devoutly meditate on these points, and it will be truly wonderful if in his fullness he will not “publish the memory of the abundance of the sweetness” of God.

8. “The Lord is gracious and merciful: patient and plenteous in mercy.”

9. “The Lord is sweet to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.” Not content with having said that such was the abundance of God’s sweetness that all generations would publish the memory of it, he comes out the first to publish and to proclaim it, saying, “the Lord is gracious and merciful, patient, and plenteous in mercy.” He is the Lord because he removes all troubles, by forgiveness, by justification, by glorification; and he is not only “gracious,” but he is “merciful,” as merciful as a father, and, furthermore, he is “patient,” which means that his mercy is continuous; for no matter how often we may provoke him, he will not turn to anger at once, but rather waits to see would we do penance; and finally, such mercy is not small, confined, or illiberal, but on the contrary, “most plenteous.” That is most fully explained in the next verse, way he says, “the Lord is so sweet to all;” and so he is to those who can appreciate his sweetness; and he is not only sweet and kind to all, and merciful too, but “his tender mercies, are over all his works;” for there is no one of

19. “He will do the will of them that fear him: and he will hear their prayer, and save them.” Benignity, or kindness, is the sixth royal attribute, by virtue of which the king not only admits his subjects to an audience, but graciously grants all their petitions, provided it be right for him to grant them. “He would do the will of them that fear him;” on having heard their prayer, he will do what they want, but he qualifies it by adding, “of them that fear him,” for it is but fair that God should do the will of those only that do his will; and those who have a holy horror of offending God, and would lose the whole world rather than his grace, are the people that do his will. That, as usual, he repeats, when he says, “and he will hear their prayer.” He finally adds, “and save them,” to give us to understand how God always hears the prayers of those that fear him. God frequently appears not to hear the prayers of such people, as when he would not deliver St. Paul from “the sting of his flesh,” though he had prayed three times to be delivered from it; and still he really hears the principal desire of such people, which consists in a desire of eternal salvation. For, as the Lord ordered to “seek first the kingdom of God and his justice,” or in other words, his glory and his grace; thus all they who fear God to the holy fear becoming him, will first and principally, in every prayer of theirs, ask for inchoate salvation or grace; and then for perfect salvation which is glory. God, then, always hears those that fear him, for “he will save them;” that is to say, he hears them in the time and the mode most conducive to their salvation.

20. “The Lord keepeth all them that love him: but all the wicked he will destroy.” The last but most necessary virtue for a king is that of providence, by virtue of which he protects the just from oppression on the part of the wicked, and prevents the wicked, if not from injuring the just, at least from injuring them to the extent of their wishes. For though he sometimes allows the justice to suffer much from sinners, still he so protects them, that such suffering cannot harm them; nay more, that it turns to their advantage. God suffered the holy martyrs to be flogged and to be slain, but he “kept them,” by the gift of constancy, in their faith, and patience in their sufferings, with a view of securing glory to their souls, and a glorious and immortal body, and thereby realizing the truth of the promise “a hair from your head shall not be lost.” As to the sentence, “but all the wicked he will destroy;” the truth of that will appear either because the wicked will be converted, and will then not be there, as wicked, for destruction; or because they persevere in final wickedness, and will then be scattered by being consigned to hell, so that they can never again come near the just.

sense in which St. Paul uses the word blessing, when he writes that the Corinthians to have the alms collected, “to be ready, so was a blessing, not as covetousness;” that is, that their alms should be liberal. But if God fills every living thing so abundantly whence have we so many beggars, so many poor, hungry, thirsty? We have already observed that a good deal of it arises from the injustice of the rich, who either hoard up, or sinfully squander, what they should share with the poor; and we added, that such often arises from the just punishment of God, that is called for by the sins of the parties themselves; and finally, we may add, that the very poor in question are often themselves the cause of it, either because they depend more on their scheming than they do on God, or because they cannot content themselves with the food and raiment befitting their station in life, or because they will often spend in one day’s debauchery what they may have been earning for an entire week.

17. “The Lord is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” Justice is the fourth virtue befitting a sovereign, and one of absolute necessity, in order to ensure peace and tranquility among the people. “The Lord is just in all his ways.” The Lord displays extreme justice in his external acts, by which alone we can form an idea of his justice; for he renders to all what is due to them, and he repeats the same in the next sentence when he says, “and holy in all his works.”

18. “The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him; to all that call upon him in truth.” The fifth virtue becoming a king consists in his being easy of access to all who come to him looking for assistance. This God does to a wonderful extent, for “he is nigh unto all them that call upon him;” no matter how high above the heavens he may be, he comes nigh at once to all that call upon him, never refusing an audience to anyone. Hence, Moses boasts in Deuteronomy, “neither is there any other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh them, as our God is present to all our petitions;” and he tells us how we are to understand the expression, “to all that call upon him,” when he repeats it with the addition of “in truth,” for that expression comprehends all the conditions that are necessary for prayer. He that prays without faith does not pray “in truth,” because, instead of calling on God, he calls on the idol of his own brain. He that prays without hope does not pray “in truth,” because, he cannot be serious in praying to anyone by whom he does not hope to be heard. And he who prays without charity, or, at least, without inchoate love, does not invoke God “in truth,” because nobody will seriously pray to one whom he hates, and who, he has reason to think, hates him. They, too, who pray without affection and desire, such as those who recite the Psalms or any other prayers, without any desire of obtaining what they ask, though they appear to do so, “do not invoke God in truth.” They also who pray without attention, without knowing what they are saying, pray merely with their lips, and they also “do not call upon him in truth, because instead of calling on him, they only show an empty appearance of calling on him.

his works however insignificant, to which he does not extend his mercy. The expression, “the Lord is sweet to all,” is absolutely true, because God “maketh his sun to rise upon the good and the bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust;” and in Psalm 85, we read, “for thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild, and plenteous in mercy, to all that call upon thee;” and again, is Psalm 102: “for according to the height of the heaven above the earth, he hath strengthened his mercy to them that fear him. As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him. But the mercy of the Lord is from eternity and unto eternity upon them that fear him;” which the Blessed Virgin also expressed,, when she said, “and his mercy is from generation to generation to them that fear him.”

10. “Let all thy works, O Lord, praise thee: and let thy saints bless thee.”

11. “They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom; and shall tell of thy power.”

12. “To make thy might know to the sons of men; and the glory of the magnificence of thy kingdom.”

13. “Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages: and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words: an holy in all his works.” Having hitherto sung of the glorious, terrible, and lovely works of God, he now comes to describe his kingdom, and then the virtues peculiar to the King himself. “Let all thy works, O Lord, praise thee.” Let all the works for which I have been hitherto praising you, now unite with me in praising you; for the production of an artist, when they are beautiful, redound to his praise and glory, and God’s works are such as to admit of no improvement, either by adding or taking from them. “And God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good;” and in Psalm 110, “great are the works of the Lord sought out according to all his wills.” These words may be considered as a conclusion to the first part of the chapter, as he now enters on a different subject with the words, “and let thy saints bless thee” that is to say, generations unborn will praise thee by reason of the works that are visible to all, but it is the Saints alone, through the revelation of the Holy Ghost, that are aware of the nature of your kingdom. I am now about to speak of; and, therefore, “let thy saints,” to whom it has been revealed by the Holy Ghost, “bless thee,” which means praise thee; and he tells for what, when he adds, “they shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and shall tell of thy power.” The glory of a kingdom is synonymous with its power. The power of a kingdom consists in the number of its subjects, and the sufficiency of its revenue, to maintain them. Now, the glory, or the power of God’s kingdom, may be inferred from the difference between it and that of man. There are four points of difference. First, the kings of this world have but few subjects, without much wealth; not more than the population and wealth of one kingdom, or one province, while God reigns over all Angels, all men, all demons, and all the wealth on land, in the sea, or in the air, belong to him. There is another difference, that while the kings of this world rule their subjects, they are still ruled by them, they are dependent on them, can do nothing without them; and,

however abundant their revenues may be, they are generally in want, nay even in debt, and, consequently, always calling for fresh tributes and taxes; but God, while he governs all, is subject to none, because he needs nobody's help or assistance; instead of being in want, and he abounds in everything, because he could, in one moment, bring from nothing much more than he now beholds or enjoys. The third difference is a consequence of the second, while the kings of this world seem so to enjoy their honors and dignities, they are, at the same time, suffering acutely from interior fears, doubts, and cares, which have sometimes been so burdensome, as to cause them to abdicate altogether. God never suffers such pressure, is subject to no fear, no misgivings, but reigns absolutely in perfect tranquility. The fourth difference, an essential one, is, that the kings of this world reign but for a time; but God reigneth forever. Now, the first difference is touched upon in this verse, "they shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and shall tell of thy power;" your Saints will proclaim the power and the glory of your kingdom, which consists in the number of your subjects, and the inexhaustible abundance of your wealth. The second and third are included in the words, "to make thy might known to the sons of men, and the glory of the magnificence of thy kingdom," which indicates an immense difference between the kingdom of God and any human kingdom, for he says, "to make known to the sons of men," to make them understand that their kingdoms are a mere nothing as compared with that of God, and not content with having said, "to make thy might known," he adds, "and thy glory;" and not content with that even, he adds, again, "of the magnificence of thy kingdom," or the glory of your most magnificent kingdom. The fourth difference is apparent in the verse, "thy kingdom," etc. "the Lord is faithful in all his words, and holy in all his works." He now enters on the virtues that belong to a king, that are so conspicuous in God, and in Christ, as man, and which all kings, and all in power, should constantly look to and seek to imitate. The first virtue that should distinguish a king is uprightness, with a strict adherence to truth, for the king's example is all-powerful, and of Christ, the King, we read, "who did no sin, neither was guilt found in his mouth," nearly word for word with what the Prophet says here, "the Lord is faithful in all his words;" that is to say, truthful, no liar, no deceiver, observing all his promises most faithfully; "an holy in all his works;" or in other words, "Innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners," and immaculate in all his actions.

14. "The Lord lifteth up all that fall; and setteth up all that are cast down." Here is the second virtue that should adorn a king and a pastor, for both should rule in such a manner that their subjects may not fall; and if they chanced to fall, that they should be prompt in raising them. That virtue is called mercy, and one essential to all in power. The expression "lifteth up," in the Hebrew, conveys the idea not only of lifting up, but enabling the person so lifted to keep up, as we read in another Psalm, "being pushed I was overturned, that I might fall, but the Lord supported me." But it is true that God lifts up all that fall, when we daily see many falling without being lifted, either as regards soul or body? God is said to lift up all that fall, inasmuch as those who fall not when tempted, keep up, through God's grace, and they who rise after falling, are set up by God's grace; while they would fall, or do not rise after falling, must blame themselves for it, and not God, which Osee expresses in different language, when he says, "destruction is thy own, O Israel, thy help is only in me."

That David did not mean to say absolutely that all, without any exception, that may chance to fall would be raised, is clear from the following expression, where he says, "and setteth up all that are cast down." For if God were to support all that were about to fall, he would have no occasion to set up anyone, or nobody would fall; how, then, is it true that he "setteth up all that are cast down." These words are to be taken in a spiritual sense. As to the actual falling of anyone, it remains to be said that God is naturally inclined to raise and to set up all; and if he does not do so by all, nay, more, if he sometimes precipitates and brings them down, he does so either with a view to prove them and to crown them, as he does to the just, in which case it proves a raising up rather than a taking down, or he does so in order to punish and chastise, and that when the sins of the parties themselves call for it, and thus the very first root of the evil springs from ourselves, and thus what Osee said, "destruction is thy own, O Israel, thy help is only in me," will always be true.

15. "The eyes of all hope in thee, O Lord: and now givest them meat in due season."

16. "Thou openest thy hand, and fillest with blessing every living creature." Liberality is the third virtue that should adorn a king. Kings should not fleece their subjects, and seek to squeeze money out of them under various pretenses, and thus, perhaps, reduce them to poverty; on the contrary, they should deal liberally with them, supporting them, as if they were their own children; but, yet, taking care not to allow them to eat to excess, or spend whole days in feasting. "The eyes of all hope in thee, O Lord." The eyes of all living things look to thee, expecting food from thee, that they may be supported by it, and keep up their life, "and thou givest them meat;" and you, through the agency of the creatures subject to you, the earth, the sun, and the rain, produce fruits in abundance, as meat for all living creatures, and that "in due season," when they have need of it, for they should not be always eating; and thus, they who eat to excess, have not their meat from God, but from their own gluttony. "In due season" also implies when hunger calls for it, when it is useful or necessary; and therefore, they who accumulate and hoard up their superfluities, steal so much from the community; and it cannot be a matter of surprise to find so many in dire necessity. He also gives it "in due season," when it is right to give it, because sometimes it is better to withhold it, because man's sins deserve it, as the physician will sometimes prescribe total abstinence from food and strong drink; and hence God, not infrequently, visits sinners with dearth and famine in punishment of their sins. "In due season" also expresses the variety of food that God provides for us in the various seasons. That we may carry with us the fact of God's liberality, being the primary source of all our blessings, he next adds, "thou opened thy hand, and fillest with blessing every living creature," every word of which is expressive of profuse liberality. "Thou openest thy hand." It is not with a closed but an open hand that you give to your creatures; it is with extreme liberality; "and fillest," satisfy to the fullest extent of their desires, "every living creature," not only man, but all living things; "with blessing," in the most abundant manner; such is the