

END OF PSALM 90

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: 90

The just are secure under the protection of God.

1. He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High, shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob.
2. He shall say to the Lord: Thou art my protector, and my refuge: my God, in him will I trust.
3. For he hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters: and from the sharp word.
4. He will overshadow thee with his shoulders: and under his wings thou shalt trust.
5. His truth shall compass thee with a shield: thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night;
6. Of the arrow that flieth in the day; of the business that walketh about in the dark; of invasion, or of the noon-day devil.
7. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand: but it shall not come nigh thee,
8. But thou shalt consider with thy eyes: and shalt see the reward of the wicked.
9. Because thou, O Lord, art my hope: thou hast made the Most High thy refuge.
10. There shall no evil come to thee: nor shall the scourge come near thy dwelling.
11. For he hath given his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways.
12. In their hands they shall bear thee up; lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.
13. Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk: and thou shalt trample underfoot the lion and the dragon.
14. Because he hoped in me, I will deliver him, I will protect him, because he hath known my name.
15. He shall cry to me, and I will hear him: I am with him in tribulation: I will deliver him, and I will glorify him.
16. I will fill him with length of days: and I will show him my salvation.

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: 90

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High, shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob." The first verse contains a remarkable promise, in which the Holy Ghost assures us that the divine assistance will never be wanting to those who really put their trust in God. To explain the words. "He," no matter who he may be, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, patrician or plebeian, young or old, for "God is no respecter of persons," but he is "rich to all that call upon him" – "that dwelleth," to give us to understand that this liberal promise does not apply to those who put only a certain amount of trust in God, but that this trust must be continuous, constant, and firm, so that man may be said to dwell in God, through faith and confidence, and to carry it about with him, like a house, like a turtle, "in the aid," for God's aid is not like one of the strongholds of this world, to which people fly for defense, but consists in an invisible and most secret tower that can be found, and entered by faith alone. However, the expression in the Greek as well as the Latin conveys, that we must place the most entire confidence in God, but still we are not to neglect the ordinary means that man can avail himself of. The husbandman puts his trust in him who gives the rain from heaven, and makes his sun to rise, but in the meantime he will be sure to plough, to sow, and to reap, knowing that God helps those who help themselves. "Of the Most High," God has been called by many names, but that of the "Most High" seems the most apposite in this passage, both because God is really most high, sits in the highest place, sees everything, and is aware of every danger around us. And again, not only is he Most High, and sees everything, but all things are subject to him, and therefore, he can deliver us from all manner of danger. "Shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob." The second part of the verse, in which a reward is promised to those who put their trust in God, and the meaning is: he that really trusts in the divine assistance will not be disappointed in his hope, but will be completely protected by the Lord. The several words in each member of the verse beautifully correspond with each other. The word "dwelleth" corresponds with "abide under;" the word, "in the aid," with "protection," and "the Most High," with "the God of heavens." To come down to the several words. The Hebrew for protection signifies shade or shadow, implying that God protects those that trust in him, as the hen that gathers her chickens under the shadow of her wings. Shadow may also signify the grace and favor of princes, a shade that easily, and from a great distance, affords protection, as we read of a stag that roamed about in the greatest security, by reason of its having a label on its neck, "touch me not, I belong to Caesar," thus, the true servants of God, are always safe, even among lions, bears,

backwards and forwards, watch, labor, sweat, exercise all ingenuity, draw upon their eloquence, apply all their talents; and still, where true, solid, and eternal happiness, real riches, the highest honors, unspeakable happiness that has been prepared for those that love God, are in question, they are so lazy that they will not even condescend to stir one finger for them. It is dreadful to reflect that man, endowed with reason and understanding, should so devote his whole life to the pursuit of things the most likely to shut him out from eternal happiness. We should pray to God, that as he has deigned to promise us such blessings, he may infuse his Holy Spirit into us, so as to enlighten our hearts, that we may know "what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," Ephesians 1.

many and grievous tribulations, but was even raised to great glory afterwards; so was the patriarch Joseph; so was King David; but, beyond yea or nay, the real and true glorification will be accomplished in the other world only, for “then shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,” Matthew 13; and he says to the apostles, “you also shall sit on twelve seats, judging the twelve tribes of Israel;” and, to express their glorious position, the Psalmist says, “their principality is exceedingly strengthened;” and the apostle, in speaking on the matter, says, “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us.”

16. “I will fill him with length of days: and I will show him my salvation.” These are the two last favors promised to those “who dwell in the aid of the Most High,” and may be looked upon as an explanation of the sixth favor. “I will glorify him,” for the glory of the saints consists in their having secured supreme happiness; now, supreme happiness must be everlasting, for happiness, without being everlasting, is nothing more than misery; and eternity, without happiness, is eternal misery. He, therefore, describes real eternity; first, by the expression, “I will fill him with length of days,” and then true happiness by the words, “and I will shed him my salvation.” By length the days is meant a space of time, so extended as fully to satisfy man’s desire, for that is what he promises when he says, “I will fill him with length of days;” and, as man’s desires cannot be satiated but by a continuance of what he desires, this length of days must be taken to mean eternity. The Scripture makes use of such expressions to designate eternity, because it speaks to those who can form no idea of eternity, but from the length or the number of days. In eternity there is no succession of days, but one day always going on, or rather one moment lasting without change, succession, or vicissitude. But it may be said, the vicissitudes of the seasons bring their pleasure with them, and we find men beguiling the length of day in summer, and of the night in winter; by various amusements. That arises from all the stages of this life being full of various inconveniences and troubles, which make us look forward with impatience to the future, but when the day, than which no better can be expected, shall have come, the wish, then, that it may always last, will be the wish of all. “And I will show him my salvation.” I will cause the just man to live no longer by faith, by belief in what he sees not, but that he may clearly see and feel, and know by experience the salvation I offer him. That salvation consists in the beatific vision promised to us, which renders man’s salvation both perfect and perpetual. The mind will then be cleared of all error and ignorance, when it shall have arrived at the summit of wisdom, which consists in viewing the supreme and sovereign author of all things. From such wisdom there will spring up in the will a most ardent and steadfast love of the supreme good, that will completely take the affections from anything gross or unworthy, and such salvation will have its own effect on the inferior part of man, that thus will become subject to the superior without resistance or rebellion; and on the body itself, which will rise again immortal, impassable, more beautiful, and brighter than the sun. Here we cannot but wonder at the blindness of mankind; for while all wish for eternal happiness, and cannot avoid wishing intensely for it, they will, however, for some temporal or trifling advantage, whether in grasping and hoarding riches, or obtaining and keeping honors and preferment’s, or in gratifying and indulging their carnal and sensual desires, leave no stone unturned, will run

serpents, fire, water, thunder, and tempests, for all creatures know and reverence the shadow of God. Even the Latin word “protection” is very significant. To protect means to cover from a distance, and one may be covered from a distance in two ways, by the person standing nigh, and warding off the weapons that are shot from a distance; or by standing afar off, and still warding off the weapons of close combat. God does both, for, abiding in us, he wards off the weapons that are shot from afar, for he sees the very first beginning of the danger, and, by his wonderful power, stifles it in the bud, if he thinks proper; he also, though seated in heaven, puts aside all dangers, however proximate to us, for he has farseeing eyes and long reaching hands, so that he can easily cut short all impending dangers, his eye is his intelligence, his hand is his power, and his power his will. “The God of heaven;” for nobody is all sufficient, needing nothing, and through and in himself omnipotent, but the true God, made the heavens, “for all the gods of the Gentiles are devils; but the Lord made the heavens;” and though the earth, and to sea, and the air are great and wonderful works of God, still, among things created there is nothing greater or more wonderful than the heavens, whether we regard its size, its beauty, its efficacy, its velocity, or its stability; and no wonder the Prophet should exclaim in another place, “the heavens show for the glory of God.” – “Shall abide.” This expression conveys that the person trusting in God will be protected by him, not now and then, or casually, but will be constantly protected by him, that the protection of God will not be like a hut on the roadsides but like one’s own or his father’s house. Here we cannot but wonder at the folly of mankind, who makes so little of such a promise. Those in power spend much money on their fortresses and bodyguards, and yet are often betrayed by them; by here it is not frail and deceitful man, but the Almighty and truthful God that says, “trust in me, and I will protect you,” and yet scarce can one be found to trust himself to God has he ought.

2. “He shall say to the Lord: thou art my protector, and my refuge: my God, in him will I trust.” The Prophet now proves and explains his assertion by the testimony of a just man confiding in God, who gives his testimony from experience. “He shall say to the Lord;” that is, the just man, who dwells in the age of the Most High, will acknowledge the favor of the protection he had from God. He calls God absolutely Lord, because God alone is truly and strictly Lord, both because he has neither equal nor superior, is subject to no necessity, wants nothing; as also, because all things are at his beck, without him they can neither move nor exist; and finally, because he alone can change, destroy, or repair all things as he pleases. “Thou art my protector, my refuge, my God.” These words represent three of God’s favors, for which the just man returns thanks; one, a past favor: the second, a present; and the third, a future favor. The first favor is that unspeakable mercy of God, through which he supports man after fall into mortal sin, and rushing headlong to hell; of who is said to Psalm 117, “being pushed, I was overturned that I might fall; but the Lord supported me;” so St. Bernard explains the passage, and says, “a sign of such support is, when the person who fell rises up more humble, more resolute, and more cautious, as the David, and Peter, and Magdalene.” The just man, then, who confides in God,

mentions this favor first, not that arises from confidence, (for it precedes instead of coming from confidence), but because he says to himself, if God be so good as to protect the enemy who does not confide in him, and to inspire him with penance and confidence, how good and kind must he not be to the friend and child who does confide in him. The second favor is one of the present time, and is contained in the expression, "and my refuge." For, when God protects anyone through the grace of justification, he does not, at once, take him up to heaven, but he places him in the line of his soldiers, who are fighting here below, but if he trust in the Lord, he will prove "a refuge" to him in every temptation and difficulty, and a most safe and secure refuge, as the Hebrew word for refuge implies. The third favor is a future one, and the greatest of all, and is contained in the words, "my God," for God is the supreme good, and God is always God in himself, and, therefore, the Supreme Court; and he will be peculiarly so "when we shall see him as he is," for then we shall enjoy the supreme good. The just man, therefore, reflecting and allowing that God was one time his protector, then his refuge, and, after this life, will constitute his happiness, comes to the conclusion, "in him will I trust;" that is, I am firmly determined to put my trust in him, through every danger and temptation, as did holy Job, when he said, "although he should kill me, I will trust in him."

3. "For he hath delivered me from the snares of the hunters: and from the sharp word." Having said, in the previous verse, that he would put his trust in God, he now assigns a reason for doing so, "for he hath delivered me from the snares of the hunters, and from the sharp word," in which he alludes to two favors conferred on him, one temporal, the other spiritual. The temporal blessing consists in immunity from snares, stratagems, and frauds of the wicked, the source of much temporal injury: the frauds being designated by the "snares of the hunters," and the "sharp word" implies the injuries consequent on the frauds. And, as frauds and stratagems are generally effected through the tongue, Eccus. 51 says, "thou hast preserved me from the snare of an unjust tongue." God, then, in his singular providence, has caused, and always will cause, the frauds and schemes of the wicked to do no harm to the just, who confide in the aid of the Most High. Another favor, and a much greater one, is an exemption from the temptations of the evil spirits; for such is their craft, that men, however prudent they may be, we compared with them, may be looked upon as half fools. Those demons, then, are the hunters of whom the apostle says, "for they who would become rich, fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil;" and again, "and they recover themselves from the snares of the devil, by whom they are held captives, at his will." Those demons are so numerous as nearly to fill completely the dark prison in which they are confined, and, according to St. Jerome, they are so powerful and so ferocious as to be compared, in the Scriptures, "to lions and dragons;" and they have no other study but constantly "going about roaring, seeking whom he may devour;" and, if we would seriously and attentively keep this fact before us, we will watch with as much fear and trembling in our prayers as it is probable Daniel did in the lions den, or the three children in the fiery furnace. All created things are so many snares, which catch the heart of man either through the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, or the pride of life. The wise man says of them, "the creatures of God are made a snare to the feet of the unwise," Wisdom 14; and Eccus. 9 has, "for thou art going in the midst of

in his greatest tribulation; the Saturday on which he rested in peace from all his troubles; and the Sunday on which, by rising from the dead, he had a most glorious triumph. All the just and the elect have three such days before them; for, with Christ, we must all go through our own tribulations on Friday, that is, in this life, which is the shortest, and is counted but as one day; we must rest in the sepulcher on the Saturday; and, finally, rise on Sunday, and be glorified with Christ. The Lord, therefore, says, "I am with him in tribulation;" for the person praying asked for the gift of patience above all things, "which is necessary for you, that you may receive the promise, Heb. 10. Now, the Lord who said, "I will hear him," promises him, in the first place, the gift of patience, when he says, "I am with him in tribulation," each word of which has a peculiar force of its own. "I am," in the present tense, whereas everything else was expressed in the future; "I will deliver, I will protect, I will hear, I will glorify, I will fill;" and this was so expressed, with a view to show us that the troubles of this world are momentary, as the apostle, 2 Cor. 4, says, "for our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory;" and, therefore, God's mercy causes our tribulations to fall upon us, as it were, drop by drop, whereas our future glory will flow upon us like the inundation of a river; as the Psalm expresses it, "thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure;" – "with him" conveys that God is present with everyone, in various ways, but that he is specially, through his interior consolations, and the influx of his unspeakable sweetness, with those who are in trouble; like a fond mother, whose entire care, even to the neglect of the others, is bestowed on the child in sickness; or as we ourselves, who nurse and care the ailing members of our body, and care not for the others. "In tribulation;" this gives us to understand that, however great the consolations, whether temporal or spiritual, bestowed by God upon his friends here below, that they are not without a certain admixture of tribulation. Some, especially among sinners, have their troubles without any consolation; but none, neither just nor wicked, have their consolations without some mixture of trouble; but there is this difference between the good and the bad; that the former, with few tribulations, more apparent than real, get true and solid consolations, for "the fruit of the Spirit is charity and joy," Gal. 5; but as to those who have not the Spirit, how can they expect its fruits? "I will deliver him;" this promise regards the future life, for it is at their death that the just are delivered from all present and future troubles, as St. John has it in the Apocalypse, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, from henceforth, now and forever; that they may rest from the labors;" and again, chapter 21, "and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be anymore." The wicked appear to be delivered from the troubles of this world by death, but it is by no means the fact; for they only pass from temporary to eternal tribulation; they are no more delivered than is the wretch who is brought out of jail to the place of execution. Sometimes, however, the just, even in this life, are delivered from their tribulation. Such was the case with Joseph, Job, David, Tobias, Daniel, their three children, Susanna, and others; but it was only a short and brief delivery. The fourth promise is, "and I will glorify him;" that, to a certain extent, sometimes happens also in this life, for holy Job was not only delivered from

be referred to the deliverance previously mentioned through the angels, or the shield, or in any other way, so that the meaning is: let not the just man imagine for a moment that he can be delivered by the angels, or by a shield, or by any means without me; they can do nothing without me, and it is I that will deliver him through them, and frequently without them, since it was in me principally, and not in them, that he trusted. Looking at the passage from a higher point of view, the deliverance here promised may be said to mean deliverance from the tyranny of sin, which may be said specially to be a mark of the perfect, and a most desirable one; our Savior himself, speaking thereon, says, "whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. If, therefore, the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." Now such liberty is not granted unto all, but to those that hope in God, "because he hoped in me I will deliver him." It is not, then every hope, but that confidence that is the fruit of a good conscience, and springs from filial love and affection, that frees man from the vices that tyrannize over him; for, as avarice ties him down, and holds him captive, and the more he advances in charity, the more is his avarice diminished; and when his charity and attachment to the supreme good shall be most perfect, then, too, will his liberty be most complete, that liberty that is styled by the apostles "the liberty of the glory of the children of God." The next promises is, "I will protect him, because he hath known my name." For he that is freed from the tyranny of vice in this world, still is not perfectly free, he needs God's help to advance in grace until he shall have come to glory. God, therefore, promises continual protection to those "who have known his name;" that is, to those who have come to the knowledge of his power, wisdom and goodness which raises up in them the most firm hope and confidence. They, too, are said "to know his name," who are on familiar terms with God and know him as a pastor, a friend, and the father, speaking of which our Savior says, "I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep, and my sheep know me;" and, on the other hand, speaking of the others, he says, "I know you not;" and in 2 Thess. 1, "in a flame of fire, giving vengeance to them who know not God." Wonderful altogether is God's kindness to man, when he speaks to him not only as a Lord but as a friend, and no wonder David should exclaim: "Lord, what is man that thou art made known to him?"

15. "He shall cry to me, and I will hear him: I am with him in tribulation: I will deliver him, and I will glorify him." There are four promises in this verse; the first is a general promise of being heard, a promise which God alone can make; and that there is no restriction whatever to the promise of hearing the prayer of all who confide in God, is clear from the words, "and I will hear him;" other passages of Scripture confirm it. Deut. 4, "neither is there any other nation so great, that hath God so nigh to them, as our God is present to all our petitions." John 15, "you shall ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you;" and in Mark 11, "all things whatsoever you ask, when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you;" and finally, in 1 John 3, "we have confidence towards God, and whatsoever we shall ask we shall receive of him;" and though certain conditions are necessary to have our prayer heard, the principal one is that which is expressed here, when he says, "he shall cry to me;" which implies a vehement desire, springing from confidence and love. The three other promises come next. "I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him, and I will glorify him." Three promises correspond most exactly to the three most remarkable days in the year the Friday on which the Lord, hanging on his cross, was

snared," "the shop word" is that spiritual death incurred by the person caught in such snares, or, if you will, it may mean that sentence that will be pronounced on the wicked, "go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire;" for what can be rougher or more severe than such a sentence when he conveys a loss of all that is bright and good, and an accumulation of all that is evil, not for a time, but for eternity. Such sentence of a most just judge will be justly pronounced on those who voluntarily suffer themselves to be tangled in the snares of the hunters, the demons.

4. "He will overshadow thee with his shoulders: and under his wings thou shalt trust." The Prophet now speaks in his own person, and addresses the just man, who spoke hitherto, saying, you were right in saying I will trust in him, for "he hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters;" for he really did deliver you, and will always deliver you from every danger for while you will be but a little one, and no match for your enemies, he will foster you under his wings, like a hen on an eagle. God has been compared to two birds in the holy Scriptures, the eagle and the hen; to the former in Deut. 32, "as the eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them;" to the latter in Matt. 23, "how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." God was a eagle before, a hen after the incarnation; or, if it be referred to Christ alone, as God he is an eagle, as man a hen; or he was a hen previous to in eagle after his Resurrection. He, therefore, says, "he will overshadow thee with his shoulders." God, like an eagle or a hen, will gather you under his wings, and will so "overshadow" and protect you, that you will have nothing to fear from the heat of the sun, nor the severity of the rain or the storm, or from birds of prey; lodged, therefore, in the greatest safety "under his wings," under his care and protection, "thou shalt trust" for deliverance and safety.

5. "His truth shall compass thee with a shield: thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night."

6. "Of the arrow that flieth in the day; of the business that walketh about in the dark; of invasion, all of the noonday devil." The Prophet now explains another figure in regard of the more advanced in years, who can defend themselves; for God arms them with an extraordinary shield. The poets record the shields of Aeneas and Achilles, which were said to have been gifts from heaven, and through which they became invulnerable, but that was all a fable; but the shield of which David speaks is really celestial, and truly renders those invulnerable who know how to make proper use of it; and the Prophet says, "he shall compass thee with a shield;" not with a helmet which protects the head only, nor with a coat of mail that protects the breast and shoulders only, but with a shield that may be used for the protection of the entire body, fight it may be raised or lowered, turned to all sides, and opposed to every blow. "In all things taking the shield of faith, where with you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one," says St. Paul, Eph. 6. That shield is truth, so the passage says, "his truth shall compass thee with a shield;" as if he said: the truth of the Lord shall encompass thee like a shield. The truth of the Lord has two acceptations in the Scripture. In one sense it means God strict observance

of his promises, as in Psalm 88, “my truth and my mercy shall be with him;” and in another part of the Psalm, “but my mercy I will not take from him; nor will I suffer my truth to fail.” In another sense it means the truths revealed to the prophets and apostles, of which we have in John 17, “the word is true;” and in Proverbs 30, “every word of God is fire tried; he is a buckler to them that hope in him;” and Eph. 6, “in all things taking the shield of faith;” that is, of truth, which is had through faith alone, that being a supernatural truth. Both sorts of truth from the best possible shield to repel all the weapons of the enemy, whether in adversity of prosperity, for God’s promises are so fixed and unalterable, that of them may be said, “heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away;” for the truth of God is like holding ground in which the anchor of hope is firmly fixed. While the anchor is passing through the water it does not hold the ship, for water is a liquid and unsteady element, but once the anchor takes hold in the ground, it keeps the ship in her place. Thus our hope, when it is built on the promise of man, cannot but totter and waver; but one fixed in God’s truth, it remains firm and steady; “for God is true, and every man a liar.” Romans 3. And who can injure him who has been promised the protection of that God who cannot deceive him? The truth of faith protects us like a shield also when it gives us a certainty that eternal happiness is prepared for the just, and torments everlasting for the sinner after this life; and that judgment will be held on the last day, when all men shall have to render the most exact account of all their deeds, words, thoughts, desires, omissions, in short, of every idle word, however brief, they may have uttered. Such and similar reflections, disclosed to us by the truth of faith, would easily protect us from all temptations, both in adversity and prosperity, if we would daily use them as a shield; that is, if we daily and faithfully meditate on these truths of our religion. Who is he that would not bravely bear up against any terror whatever, by reflecting seriously on those words of our Lord? And fear not those they kill the body, and cannot kill the soul; but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell.” And who is there that will not despise the empty pleasures of this world, and the occasions of wronging their neighbor, when they seriously reflect on the following words of our Divine Master? “For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” – “Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night; of the arrow that flieth in the day.” He now tells us what the dangers are against which we need the shield of truth. The passage is a very obscure one, and variously explained, but of the various ones offered, we consider one to be the most simple and literal, as follows: you will have no dangers the fear, either by day or by night. “Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night,” you need not fear anything that may frighten you by night; fear, here, being used for the thing that causes it; as it is also in 1 Peter 3, “and be not afraid of their terror;” just as hope is used for the thing hoped for, and desire for the thing desired, as in Titus 2, “waiting for the blessed hope;” and in Psalm 77, “and he gave them their desire;” that is, they think they desired. The words, “of the arrow that flieth in the day,” means, you will have to fear no dangers in the daytime; “of the business that walketh about in the dark,” is only a repetition and explanation of “the terror of the night;” “of invasion or of the noonday devil,” is a mere repetition of “the arrow that flieth in the day.” In fine, in these words we have a general promise of security, both by day and by night, to those who trust in God, and are armed with the shield of truth; “For if God be for us, who is

persecutions, and the like. The feet mean our affections, that very often knock against the stones; and, as St. Augustine, treating of this passage, says: our feet are two affections, fear and love; and, whenever man proceeds in his actions, words, or desires, he is carried by one or the other, by the desire of acquiring one thing or losing something else, or by a desire of avoiding evil, or the fear of falling into it; we then knock our foot against the stone, when we fall into sin, on an occasion offering of acquiring some temporal good, or of avoiding some temporal evil, whence we lose eternal happiness, and incur eternal punishment; but they “who dwell in the aid of the Most High” are so assisted by the angel guardian, that the occasion is altogether removed; that is, the stone is taken out of the way, or the mind is so enlightened as to distinguish good from evil; that the feet, that is, the affections are so raised from the earth that the temporal advantage, that could not be had without sin, is easily despised; and the temporal evil, that could not be avoided without sin, is most patiently endured.

13. “Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk: and thou shalt trample under foot the lion and the dragon.” Having made mention of the good angels who have charge of the just man that trusts in God, he now alludes to the bad angels, and says, so far from their harming the just man, that he, on the contrary, will trample on and crush them, as the apostle says, “and may the God of peace crush Satan speedily under your feet.” He calls Satan a serpent, by reason of his cunning, and a lion, by reason of his ferocity; and, as there are various sorts of serpents, he calls him an asp, a basilisk, and the dragon, for to the cunning that is common to all serpents, the asp unites obstinacy, the basilisk cruelty, and the dragon great strength and power, for all of which Satan is remarkable. This is not the only passage in which the devil is called a serpent and the lion. In Job 26, and Isaias 27, he is called “the winding snake” and “the crooked serpent.” The Apocalypse calls him “the dragon” and “the old serpent;” and St. Peter calls him “the roaring lion.”

14. “Because he hoped in me, I will deliver him: I will protect him, because he hath known my name.” As we read in Deuteronomy, that “in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall stand,” the holy Prophet would have three witnesses to prove what he promised in the beginning of the Psalm, viz., that all who truly trust in God would be protected by him. The first witness was the just man, who, from his own experience gave testimony to the truth of it, when he said, “for he hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters.” The second witness was the Prophet himself, who, as the organ or voice of the Holy Ghost declared, “he will overshadow thee with his shoulders.” The third witness is God himself, who, in the last three verses, confirms all that had been said, and adds a great deal more, for these three verses contain eight promises of God, which most appropriately commence with deliverance from evil, and advance up to elevation, to supreme happiness. Four of them, “I will deliver him, protect him, hear him, am with him in tribulation,” belong to this life; and the four others, “I will deliver him, glorify him, fill him with length of days, and I will show him my salvation,” belong to the next life. “Because he hoped in me I will deliver him.” The deliverance that is promised here refers to deliverance from all evil, and may

angels charge over thee: to keep thee in all thy ways.” Each word in which requires an explanation. “For” does not refer to the preceding, but to the following sentence, the meaning being: whereas God gave you in charge to his angels, to guard you on the way, the angels will take you in their hands, for fear you should knock against a stone. “Angels” – Angels are blessed spirits, most noble princes, who guard with the greatest care, being most powerful, wise, and excellent, showing us how God values the human race in assigning such guardians to it. But why angels, instead of an angel? According to our Lord, we have a guardian angel every one of us; for he says, “their angels always see the face of my Father;” and when St. Peter knocked at the door, those within said, “it is an angel.” Granted: but we still have angels who have common charge of us, such as those who are in charge of towns, states, and kingdoms; on which we see chapter 10 of Daniel. “His;” they are called “his” angels because there are fallen angels also, of whom is said in the Apocalypse, “and the Dragon fought and his angels.” God, then, gave you in charge to “his angels,” and not the those angels who, instead of protecting you, would have sought to destroy you. “Hath given charge;” the reason why the angels take such care of us is, because God ordered them to do so, gave us in charge to them; for, though they guard us with right good will, loving us as they do, and though they have a horror of the evil angels, and wish the heavenly Jerusalem to be renewed as soon as possible; and though they know all this to be most agreeable to their King, Christ our Lord, still God’s command is uppermost, is their ruling motive for the whole; for they are conscious of being God’s servants, and there is nothing that he requires more strictly from his servants than prompt and implicit obedience; “over thee,” which means that God’s providence extends to all, and that he has given a guardian angel to each and every human being; but still that he has a peculiar regard for the just, for those that confide in him; and, therefore, that he has given special orders to his angels to look “over thee,” the just man, who trusts in his help, “to keep thee;” the charge God gave his angels regarding the just was to preserve him from his enemies, the evil angels; for man, by reason of the flesh that envelops him, can see nothing save through the eyes of the flesh, and, therefore, is no match for the evil spirits, unless he gets help from someone more powerful; “in all thy ways;” not on thy way, but in all thy ways; for numerous are the ways of man, and in every one of them he needs the help of his Guardian Angel. The law is the way, according to Psalm 118, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord;” and in the same Psalm, “I have run the way of thy commandments.” The way also means the works, as in Proverbs 8, “the Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways before he made anything” Finally, this life is a way to a certain extent. The way of the law is varied, for there are many laws; the way of the works is equally so, for there are many works; the way of life is also varied, for there are many parts, ages, and states of life. We require assistance in every one of them, since we are liable to fall in every law, work, age, and state of our life.

12. “In their hands they shall bear thee up: lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” A verse full of metaphors, but otherwise easily explained; we, therefore, have merely to explain what he means by the “angels’ hands,” what the “stones” and the “feet” signify. The angels’ hands signify the intellect and the will, or wisdom and power, for it is by understanding and by willing they do everything. The stones, all the obstacles that we meet in this life, be they temporal or spiritual, such as scandals, temptations,

against us?” Romans 8; as also, “and who is he that can hurt you, if you be zealous of good?” 1 Peter 3.

7. “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand: but it shall not come nigh thee.” The Prophet follows up the description of the victory of the just man who confides in God, and makes proper use of the shield of truth. He reminds the just of the great value they should set upon such a victory, it being a rare one, and that of the few over the many. For in this fight “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh to thee;” neither the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flieth in the day, nor the business that walketh about in the dark, nor the noonday devil shall come nigh to thee. “Thy side” means thy left side, being opposed to the right, and signifies adversity; whilst the right stands for prosperity; and many more fall from the latter than from the former; for prosperity is the source of pride, usury, licentiousness, impudence, and other like vices; while adversity renders men humble, chaste, and patient; for, as the apostle says, “tribulation worketh patience.” The numbers, a thousand and ten thousand, merely signify that many will fall on the left, but a great many more on the right-hand; and it is in such sense these numbers are understood in Kings, “Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands;” and, in Deut. 32, “how should one pursue after a thousand, and two chase ten thousand?”

8. “But thou shall consider with thy eyes; and shall see the reward of the wicked.” A fresh source of joy to the just man, who not only has been promised the victory, but that he will, furthermore, have great pleasure in seeing his enemies laid low, and punished according to their deserts, a promise that is sometimes fulfilled even in this world. Thus, the children of Israel saw the Egyptians cast dead on the shores of the Red Sea; Moses and Aaron saw Dathan and Abiron swallowed up alive; Ezechias saw the prostrate corpses of Sennacherib’s army; and Judith, we God’s people, saw the head of Holofernes cut off, and his whole army scattered and routed; but this promise will be completely fulfilled on the day of judgment, when we shall see all our enemies prostrate on the ground, naked and unarmed, without any strength whatever, and consigned to eternal punishment. “But thou shalt consider,” not in a cursory way, or in a hurry, but with diligence and accuracy, you will consider all your enemies, their number, their position, what they deserved, and what they are suffering; “with thy eyes;” you will not take it from hearsay or report, but you shall see with those very eyes with which you saw the arms and the dangers of your enemies: for your eyes will then be your own property, a thing they are not now, while curiosity opens them, sleep closes them, old-age dims them, and death destroys them, and all in spite of you. “And shall see the reward of the wicked;” you would then see plainly the reward the wicked get for all their labor. Hence will arise a beautiful order of things, that now seem in general disorder and confusion. For, while punishment should follow sin, and virtue should be rewarded, it often happens that the just are afflicted, and bad men honored; and thus sorrow comes from virtue, joy from sin; but, on the last day, all things will be righted and put in their proper place; guilt will meet its punishment, and that

in proportion to its enormity; while, on the contrary, justice shall be rewarded in proportion to its merits, too; and then will be accomplished when is prophesied in Psalm 57, “the just shall rejoice when he shall see the revenge;” that is, when he shall see the sinner duly punished; not that he will rejoice in their misfortunes, but for the vindication of the divine justice and wisdom, that will appear so conspicuous in the punishment of the wicked.

9. “Because thou, O Lord, art my hope: thou hast made the Most High thy refuge.” This verse is very easy, as far as the words are concerned, all of which have been explained when we discussed the first and second verses; but the connection is not so apparent; because, in the preceding verse, the Prophet seems to have addressed the just man; he now seems to speak to God, saying, “because thou, O Lord, art my hope;” and we don’t see why he says so; and then the second part of the verse, “thou hast made the Most High thy refuge,” is addressed to the just man again, but without any connection between the members of the sentence. The first part of the sentence is the voice of the just man speaking to God; the second part are the words of the Prophet; we have already observed that this Psalm is, to a certain extent, dramatic, in the form of a dialogue, though the characters are not named, however, that the Prophet speaks at one time, the just man at another, and God at another time. The Prophet, then, having said to the just man, “God will overshadow thee with his shoulders,” as the hen does her young; “will compass thee with a shield,” as a general would his soldiers; “you shall not be afraid of the terror of the night, nor of the day;” and hence many will fall on your right and left, but the danger will not come near you, but you will rather see your enemies conquered before your face – the just man, on hearing all this, turns to God, and says, “because thou, O Lord, art my hope,” I believe every word of it; it’s all true, and that because you, O Lord, art my hope; I trust not in my own strength of arm, nor in the strength nor in the arm of my friends; but in thee alone, who art my whole and sole hope, and in whom alone I confide. Now, God is said to be the hope of the just, because they not only hope for help from him, but they hope he will prove himself a strong citadel in their regard, to which they fly for protection in time of persecution; and dwelling in which, through faith, hope, and charity, through prayer and contemplation, they can suffer no injury. The Prophet understood that well, and, therefore, he adds, “thou has made the Most High thy refuge;” as much as to say, you have acted most wisely and properly in placing your hope in God; for thus you have selected your place of refuge in the highest possible and best fortified citadel you could select, God himself, where (as will be said in the following verse) no harm can possibly reach you.

10. “There shall no evil come to thee: nor shall the scourge come near thy dwelling.” The Prophet now tells what good the just man is to derive from having made the Most High his refuge, and says it consists in is being most safe from all evil. Evil is twofold, that arising from sin, and that arising from the punishment consequent on sin. The evil of sin is absolutely and radically evil, and to it applies the first part of the verse, “there shall no evil comes to thee;” the evil of punishment is not simply evil, and therefore, to it applies the second part of the verse, “nor shall the scourge come near thy dwelling.” That the evil of sin is simply and absolutely evil, and that such is not the case with the evil punishment, it is clear from the fact that the former renders

man absolutely evil, while the latter makes him only miserable; nobody can turn the evil of sin to good account; not so as regards the evil of punishment. The evil of sin cannot be called good, for it is not right to call it so, it being iniquity; nor is it of use, when he who sins always loses more than he gains; the evil of punishment may be called good, for it is frequently both good and useful. God, being the author of all good, is not the author of the evil of sin; while the evil of punishment has God, as being a just Judge, for its author. That can be inferred from the words of the Prophet; for when he says, “there shall no evil come to thee,” he speaks of the evil that is in us, and cannot be outside us; such is the evil of sin, which must of necessity be within us, that is, in the power of our free will; and when he adds, “nor shall the scourge come near thy dwelling,” he speaks of the evil that may happen to our property, our children, our house, our land; and such is the evil of punishment. A serious doubt arises here regarding the truth of this promise; for David was certainly one of those just who trusted in God, and still the evil of sin: adultery, murder, and the scourge, nay, even more scourges, “came near his dwelling;” for he says himself, “I washed my hands among the innocent, and I have been scourged all the day;” which may also be said of Job, Tobias, of the prophets and apostles, nay, even of Christ himself, who, too, was scourged; nay, even the Lord “scourgeth every son whom he receiveth,” Heb. 12. To this objection two answers maybe made; the first is, that the promise does not regard this life, but the next, when that prophecy will be fulfilled, “thou shalt consider with thy eyes; and shalt see the reward of the wicked;” for then, when we shall have entered the heavenly tabernacle, we will be quite safe from all the evil of sin, as well as of punishment; for God’s reason for “strengthening the bolts of the heavenly Jerusalem, and “placing peace in its borders,” was that the scourge may not possibly come near it. The second answer is, that the promise does regard this life, but that is to be understood with some restriction; for the evil of sin will not come near the elect and those who trust in God; not that they cannot possibly fall into sin, but because, through God’s singular providence, their very sins will tend to their improvement, making them more humble and cautious, and more inflamed by the love of God, in proportion to the extent they are indebted to his grace and mercy. So St. Gregory applies it to St. Peter, which also holds in the case of St. Thomas, Mary Magdalene, and many others. The scourge, that is, the evil of punishment, will not “come near their dwelling,” because in spirit, they are dwelling in the heavenly tabernacles, and, with the apostle Paul, engrossed entirely in meditation, they scarcely feel such temporal evils, or if they do, they despised them; nay, more, so far from looking upon them as evils, they consider them positive blessings and graces, for which they hope to reap an abundant crop of glory; such were the feelings of the apostle when he said, “I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation.”

11. “For he hath given his angels charge over thee: to keep thee in all thy ways.” The just man might have said: I am quite sure that no evil can possibly happen to me, when I shall have got within that heavenly tabernacle; but I will like to know who is to guard me on the way to it, to prevent my going astray, or falling in with robbers, or into a pit? The Prophet replies: never fear, “for he hath given his