

END OF PSALM 147

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: 147

The church is called upon to praise God for His peculiar graces and favors to His people. In the Hebrew this psalm is joined to the foregoing.

12. Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem: praise thy God, O Sion.
13. Because he hath strengthened the bolts of thy gates: he hath blessed thy children within thee.
14. Who hath placed peace in thy borders; and filleth thee with the fat of corn.
15. Who sendeth forth his speech to the earth: his word runneth swiftly.
16. Who giveth snow like wool; scattereth mists like ashes.
17. He sendeth his crystal like morsels: who shall stand before the face of his cold?
18. He shall send out his word, and shall melt them: his wind shall blow, and the waters shall run.
19. Who declareth his word to Jacob; his justices and his judgments to Israel.
20. He hath not done in like manner to every nation: and his judgments he hath not made manifest to them. Alleluia.

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: 147

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

12. "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem: praise thy God, O Sion." Jerusalem is a holy city, the more noble part of which is Mount Sion, with the temple of the Lord was built, and is often used to express the city itself; and, therefore, "praise the Lord, O Jerusalem," and "praise thy God, O Sion," signify one and the same thing. If it be referred to the Jerusalem above, nothing more appropriate could be applied to it; for in that heavenly city no one need be occupied in providing for their personal wants, or those of their neighbors, their being no poor, no needy, to be found therein, and can, therefore, devote their whole time, as they really do, in praising God. Most justly then, does he address the city, saying, "praise the Lord," for you have nothing else to do; for you are specially bound thereto by reason of the signal favors he has conferred on you; and, finally, because it has been your great good fortune to get so close a view of the beauty and the excellence of the Lord. The Church, in her exile, should also praise the Lord; but the whole Church cannot, nor can the Church at all times to it, in the midst of the cares and troubles that frequently disturb her. And if the Church cannot accomplish it, much less can the synagogue.

13. "Because he had strengthened the bolts of thy gates: he hath blessed thy children within thee." The reason why Jerusalem should bless the Lord arises from the fact of his having conferred on her that abundance and security of which human happiness consists. Security, without abundance, is no better than poverty, and abundance, without security, is replete with fear and danger. God, therefore, so strengthened the bolts of the gates of Jerusalem that they could not possibly be stormed, and those inside are quite safe, inasmuch as no enemy can enter, no friend will be excluded; nothing bad can come in, nothing good will go out; and the divine blessing brought an abundance of all good things into this highly fortified city; for it was not a particular blessing that God gave to the holy city, but a general, an absolute one, to use the expression of the apostle, "who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places." These two things perfectly apply to the Jerusalem above, where the security is eternal, and the blessing consists in the enjoyment of the supreme good. They also apply, to a certain extent, to the Church in her exile, though not so entirely; "for the gates of hell will not prevail against her," and she has many blessings within her; but, meanwhile, many wicked enter into her, and good revolt from her; she has the chaff mixed with the grain, the good with the bad fish, the kids with the lambs. There are other points of agreement also with the earthly Jerusalem, inasmuch as by reason of her being situated in the mountains, she appeared to be

well fortified, and abounded, at one time, with inhabitants and with wealth; but, as she was more than one sacked and destroyed, it does not appear that the expression, "he hath strengthened the bolts of thy gates," is quite applicable to her. One would rather say the expression in Lamentations 2 was, "her gates are sunk into the ground: he hath destroyed and broken her bars; and the bulwark hath moved; and the wall hath been destroyed together." Nor was there such an abundance in the city at the same time, when we read, "they said to their mothers, where is corn and wine? when they fainted away as the wounded in the streets of the city, when they breathed out their souls in the bosoms of their mothers."

14. "Who hath placed peace in thy borders; and filleth thee with the fat of corn." Not only is the holy city of Jerusalem highly fortified, but it is even exempt from the dangers of war, hence its name, Jerusalem, which signifies "the vision of peace," and the first that attempted to disturb that peace was expelled with such violence as to cause the Lord to say, "I saw Satan as lightning falling from heaven." "Who hath placed peace in thy borders;" who hath established universal peace through the length and breadth of Jerusalem. And further, not only does this city enjoy abundance, but even the most exquisite dainties, as conveyed in the expression, "the fat of corn;" and these without limit, as we can infer from the expression, "who filleth." All this implies to our heavenly country in the strict sense of the words, for there alone will our inferior be in strict peace with our superior parts, and our superior parts with God; and there, too, will be strict peace between the citizens of all grades, high and low; for there will be one heart, one soul, and as the Lord expresses it, John 17, "made perfect in one." There, too, "will all be filled with the fat of corn," for truth and wisdom being the food of the soul, they will have actual truth as it is in itself, and not in figures or enigmas, and they will taste of the sweetness of the Word Eternal without being enveloped by the sacraments or the Scriptures; they will drink of the fountain of wisdom, instead of applying to the streams that flow from it, or to the "showers falling gently upon the earth." They will be so filled that they will never again hunger nor thirst for all eternity. In the Church militant also, which, to a certain extent, is the Jerusalem, we have peace with God, though we, at the same time, suffer pressure from the world. We do what we can to keep the peace with all; but we are in the midst of those who hate peace, and, therefore, "combats without, fears within," are never wanting, and though we may feed on "the fat of corn," it is enveloped by too many coverings. We have the Word of God, but in the flesh; and though we eat of the flesh it is covered by the sacrament. We drink of the waters of wisdom, but it is from the shower of the Scriptures, and we are, therefore, never so satiated with those blessings as to make out happiness consist in hungering and thirsting for more. Much less applicable is all this to the earthly Jerusalem, the old synagogue of the Jews, to which it was applicable in a figurative sense only.

15. "Who sendeth forth his speech to the earth: his word runneth swiftly." Having exhorted the holy city to thank God for the favors conferred on itself, he now exhorts it to praise God for the favors conferred on other nations, from

which they may learn how much more liberal he has been in their regard. He, therefore, exhorts them to praise that God, “who sendeth forth his speech to the earth,” who issues the precepts and decrees of his providence to the whole world; and “his word runneth quickly;” such precepts and decrees are borne with the greatest expedition to all created beings, penetrate all things, and are put into immediate execution. These words explain the order of divine providence that extends itself to everything, and that with the greatest velocity because God is everywhere “upholding all things by the word of his power,” Hebrews 1; and “reaches from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly,” Wisdom 8. Hence, David says, in Psalm 118, “all things serve thee.”

16. “Who giveth snow like wool; scattereth mists like ashes.”

17. “He sendeth his crystal like morsels: who shall stand before the face of his cold?” From God’s universal providence he now takes up one particular effect of it, in which the admirable power and wisdom of God are most conspicuous, and for which he deserves merited praise, even from the citizens above, exempt as they are from such changes. The wonderful effects of God’s power and wisdom, which, however, are most familiar and visible to us all, are to be found in his creation of heat and cold in the air. In certain countries, snow, frost, and ice will so abound, at certain times, that lakes, rivers, and even seas will become so congealed, that wagons, heavily laden, will be carried over them, as they would through so many roads or fields. The ice becomes so hard that bars of iron will hardly break it; and yet, God, let it pleaseth him, by a simple change in the wind, in one instant causes all to melt, and streams of water flow down from the housetops, from the hills, and the mountains. Thus, God, in one moment, converts the extreme cold into a most agreeable warmth. To enter into particulars. “Who giveth snow like wool;” who rains down snow in such abundance, that every flake of it looks like flocks of wool, not only by reason of its whiteness, but also of its size. “Scattereth mists like ashes;” raises mists so dense, that they seem more like a cloud of ashes than a vapor. “He sendeth his crystal like morsels;” who congeals the water when forming it into hail, so as to appear in small crystals like crumbs of bread. “Who shall stand before the face of his cold?” An apostrophe of the Prophet in admiration of God’s great power in producing so much cold; as much as to say, who can stand or bear so much cold?

18. “He shall send out his word, and shall melt them:; his wind shall blow, and the waters shall run.” Having described the extreme cold caused by the snow, frost, and ice, he now shows with what ease and celerity God causes them all to disappear. “He shall send out his word,” his simple command, “and shall melt them,” the snow, frost, and ice, and, at once, the cold disappears; and he explains how simply God effects that, when he adds, “His wind shall blow, and the waters shall run;” at his command the wind shifts to the south, causing the snow and the ice to thaw, and thus converting them into water.

19. “Who declareth his word to Jacob; his justice and his judgments to Israel.”

20. “He hath not done in like manner to every nation: and his judgments he hath not made manifest to them. Alleluia.” He concludes by showing how differently God, in his providence, deals with his own people, and with other nations, because he instructed other nations, merely by natural causes and effects, so as to know their Creator through the things created by him; but he taught his own people through the prophets. “Who declareth his word to Jacob;” that is to say, Jerusalem praise that Lord, “who declared his word to his people Jacob,” by speaking to them through Moses, and the prophets, and who pointed out “his justice and his judgments to Israel,” through the same Moses, to whom he gave the law, in order to hand it over to his people of Israel, and from it you will be able to understand “that he hath not done in like manner to every nation,” because to you alone, and to none others, “hath he made manifest his judgments,” meaning his laws. All this applies literally to the Jerusalem on earth, to whom God sent his prophets to announce his words, and explain his laws; but it is much more applicable to the spiritual Jerusalem, the Church, that received the incarnate word of God himself, through the preaching of the apostles, and learned a much more sublime law, judgments and justifications. It is more applicable, again, to the Jerusalem above, to which God openly announces his word; and in his word all its inhabitants behold the judgments of God, the order, disposition, and secrets of his divine providence, that to us are a great abyss.