

who are separated by sin from him will perish altogether; just as the body perishes when the spirit leaves it, or as a house tumbles when the foundation is taken from it. "Thou hast destroyed all them that are disloyal to thee;" not only will those who estrange themselves from God perish, for want of that grace that is the life of the soul, but, with that, God having espoused those souls to himself, and being essentially a jealous God, he, therefore, most grievously punishes with eternal death those who are unfaithful to a spouse of such power and goodness.

28. "But it is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God: that I may declare all thy praises, in the gates of the daughter of Zion." He concludes the Psalm by saying, "it is good for me to adhere to my God." Let others judge as to what may be good for themselves, for me it certainly is good, useful, and honorable to stick close to my God; and, as I cannot embrace him, or lay hold of him in this life, it is good also, now "to put my hope in him," to stick to him through hope, and, meantime, to rejoice in the hope of perfect adhesion to him. "That I may declare all thy praises in the gates of Zion." That having been freed from all earthly desires by such perfect adhesion to God, I may be totally taken up in praising him, and that, "in the gates of the daughter of Zion," before the multitude of the faithful, I may teach the many how idle, nay, even hurtful it is to cling to the things of this world, and how good it is "to adhere" to God, and to put their hopes in the Lord their God.

END OF PSALM 72

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: 72

The temptation of the weak, upon seeing the prosperity of the wicked, is overcome by the consideration of the justice of God, Who will quickly render to every one according to his works.

1. How good is God to Israel, to them that are of a right heart!
2. But my feet were almost moved; my steps had well nigh slipped.
3. Because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners.
4. For there is no regard to their death; nor is there strength in their stripes.
5. They are not in the labor of men: neither shall they be scourged like other men.
6. Therefore pride hath held them fast: they are covered with their iniquity and their wickedness.
7. Their iniquity hath come forth, as it were from fatness: they have passed into the affection of the heart.
8. They have thought and spoken wickedness: they have spoken iniquity on high.
9. They have set their mouth against heaven: and their tongue hath passed through the earth.
10. Therefore will my people return here: P and full days shall be found in them.
11. And they said: How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?
12. Behold, these are sinners; and yet abounding in the world they have obtained riches.
13. And I said: Then have I in vain justified my heart, and washed my hands among the innocent
14. And I have been scourged all the day: and my chastisement hath been in the mornings.
15. If I said: I will speak thus; behold, I should condemn the generation of thy children.
16. I studied that I might know this thing, it is a labor in my sight:
17. Until I go into the sanctuary of God, and understand concerning their last ends.

Continued >

(continued from the preceding page)

18. But indeed for deceits thou hast put it to them: when they were lifted up, thou hast cast them down.
19. How are they brought to desolation! They have suddenly ceased to be: they have perished by reason of their iniquity!
20. As the dream of them that awake, O Lord; so in thy city thou shalt bring their image to nothing.
21. For my heart hath been inflamed, and my reins have been changed:
22. And I am brought to nothing, and I knew not.
23. I am become as a beast before thee: and I am always with thee.
24. Thou hast held me by my right hand: and by thy will thou hast conducted me, and with thy glory thou hast received me.
25. For what have I in heaven? And besides thee what do I desire upon earth?
26. For thee my flesh and my heart hath fainted away; thou art the God of my heart and the God that is my portion forever.
27. For behold, they that go far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that are disloyal to thee.
28. But it is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God: that I may declare all thy praises, in the gates of the daughter of Sion.

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: 72

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "How good is God to Israel, to them that are of the right heart!" David, speaking to the person of the weak and the infirm, whose temptations and troubles he undertook to explain, first lays a foundation of true faith, that we may understand, that neither he nor they whom he represented had suffered in their faith in the divine providence. Jeremias did the same, for in Chapter 12 he first says, "thou indeed, O Lord, art just, if I plead with thee;" and having laid so much down as a foundation, he adds, "but yet I will speak what is just thee. Why doth the way of the wicked prosper? Why is it well with all them that transgress?" In like manner, David first affirms here that God is good, and therefore just, but that it is only those who are endowed with sound judgment that see his goodness, while the wicked look upon him as perverse. He says then, not by way of interrogation, but of affirmation, "how good is God to Israel, to them that are of a right heart;" that is to say, God is exceedingly good to the Israelites, to those that are of all right heart. Thus God, who in himself is always good, upright, and just, is so in the opinion of Israel; still not of all Israel, but of those in Israel who have a pure heart, unclouded by passion, so that they can form a correct judgment; or, perhaps, "are of a right heart" means those whose heart is conformable to God's righteousness, for those who have a crooked heart look upon everything straight as crooked.

these things will perish, and leave their wretched votaries most unhappy. Justly, then, does the apostle admonish us, "that they would have the good things of this world should be as if they had them not, that they should not glory nor confide in them, for the fashion of this world passeth away." "As the dream of them that awake," which vanishes on awakening, "so in thy city, O Lord," which will be made visible and manifest on the last day, "thou shalt bring their image to nothing;" prove all their happiness to have been baseless and imaginary; for then will appear in what true happiness consists. Justly, says St. Augustine, will God in his heavenly kingdom reduced to nothing the image of those wicked beings, who on earth sought to reduce his image did nothing.

21. "For my heart hath been inflamed, and my reins have been changed."

22. "And I am brought to nothing, and I knew not."

23. "I am become as a beast before thee: and I am always with thee."

24. "Thou hast held me by my right hand: and by thy will thou hast conducted me, and with thy glory thou hast received me." He now explains how we got at the solution of the question, and made great proficiency with God. The causative particle, "for," does not refer to the preceding, it refers to the 24th verse. "For my heart hath been inflamed" towards God, "and my reins have been changed," my carnal affections changed into spiritual ones. "And I am brought to nothing, and I knew not." I have been humbled and confessed my ignorance; nay, more, like a fool, "I am become as the beast before thee," determined to obey without a single murmur, and like a beast to submit to any burden, however grievous. "And I am always with thee;" from your faith and charity I will never depart, and for all these my virtues, gifts, of yours, "thou hast held me by my right hand," for fear those grievous temptations may cause me to stray from you; "and by thy will," in the spirit of your great kindness, "thou hast conducted me" in the right path; "and with glory hast thou received me" into your city, in hope here, and in reality thereafter.

25. "For what have I in heaven? And besides thee what do I desire upon earth?" Having said, "with glory thou hast received me," he now, with his mind's eye fixed on that glory, is so wrapt in spirit as to despise all created things. "For what have I in heaven?" What is there beautiful? What is there precious? That I could desire in heaven; "and besides thee what do I desire on earth?" What is there beautiful or precious that I could ask or desire upon earth? Nothing, positively nothing, I find nothing created to satisfy me, nothing with which my heart can rest perfectly content, either in heaven or on earth.

26. "For thee my flesh and my heart hath fainted away, thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever." He assigns a reason for desiring nothing but God, because, wherever he may place his heart or his flesh, they will rot and moulder, if not placed on God. "My flesh and heart have fainted away." They have become corrupted and rotten whenever I allowed them to rest on created things. "The God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever." The Hebrew makes it "the rock of my heart;" as much as to say, God alone is the rock on which my heart can securely rest, so that it can neither sink nor fall; he is the center of all my desires, he is my portion, my lot, my inheritance, the only thing I can hold for all eternity; let others have other portions, be they gold or silver, be they carnal desires or stately palaces, be they empires or kingdoms; God will suffice for me both for this world and for the next.

27. "For behold, they that go far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that are disloyal to thee." He made a good choice in standing on God as his rock, because all

by reason of the prosperity of the sinner, and the adversity of the just; and now, as if in a spirit of compunction and penitence, he says, "if I said" to myself, "I speak thus;" I will go to show how unjust is the prosperity of the wicked, and I will charge God with it. "Behold, I should condemn the generation of thy children;" by that very fact I should condemn and reprobate all thy children, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the rest of thy servants; for all those acknowledged that God directed all the affairs of men, and by a just judgment permitted the wicked sometimes to prosper, and the just to be afflicted. Or the meaning may be: I have condemned all the children of God as so many fools, who idly seek to lead a righteous life. All another interpretation, I have condemned the generation of thy children, because I looked upon them all as abandoned by God, which was most false and worthy of censure. And this is the first reason the Prophet assigns, to persuade the infirm to have no doubt in God's providence, that they may not be setting themselves up against all the children of God, the saints, prophets, and patriarchs; nor imagine that they were either foolish or deserted by God.

16. "I studied that I might know this thing, it is a labor in my sight."

17. "Until I go into the sanctuary of God, and understand concerning their last ends." To the first reason he now adds a second, taken from the difficulty of the question, we should make people be slow in condemning things they do not understand. "I studied that I might know this thing." I thought within myself that by investigation I might come at the bottom of this matter; but "it is a labor in my sight;" a great difficulty presented itself, "until I go into the sanctuary of God;" and through prayer obtain light from him, and by that light "understand concerning their last ends;" get a view of the last end of those wicked people; for then, only, will it clearly appear that they had by no means all the happiness they appeared to have.

18. "But indeed for deceits thou hast put it to them: when they were lifted up, thou hast cast them down." The Prophet now shows that the last end of the wicked proves they could not have been happy in this world, and that God is a just judge. The very snares and artifices those wicked people employed to injure their neighbors, and get possession of their substance, have been, through your divine providence, O Lord, turned back upon themselves with a vengeance; for, though they may have got hold of their neighbor's money by such schemes, they lost eternal life to them. "When they were lifted up, thou cast them down;" when they rose to the enjoyment and honors and dignities, they were the cause of their being, through your just judgment, hurled down the precipice of everlasting death.

19. "How are they brought to desolation! They have suddenly ceased to be: they have perished by reason of their iniquity." He now explains what he had just rather obscurely expressed; and, in astonishment at the rapid destruction of the wicked, whose happiness had only begun when it ended; had only just shot forth, when it died away; he exclaims, "how are they brought to desolation!" They who have such an abundance of all things, are become like a desolate city, where nothing but ruins are to be seen; "they had ceased to be," though they thought they were to live forever.

20. "As the dream of them that awake, O Lord; so in thy city thou shalt bring their image to nothing." He most happily compares the prosperity of the wicked to a dream. Dreams are merely the appearance, not the reality. The dreamer who fancied himself in possession of a large sum of money finds, on his waking, that he was deluded by an empty phantom; so with the wicked in this world, who abound in its riches, they think themselves happy, but when the night of this world shall have passed away, then they will understand that they were not truly happy, and then "their image," their imaginary happiness, "shall be brought to nothing;" for that imaginary and momentary happiness, derived from gold and silver, servants and horses, palaces and gardens, honors and dignities, feasting and luxury, has no room in heaven, for all

2. "But my feet were almost moved; my steps had well nigh slipped." He now begins to explain the temptations to which the weak are subject, speaking in their person, as we observed already. He says, the pious faithful, who have a pure and upright heart, have no doubt in God's justice and goodness, in any position he may place them; but I am not so, for with a heart by no means pure and upright, I nearly fell into doubting God's justice. Such doubt he expresses figuratively by the movement of the hands and feet. When the feet begin to grow weak, and when one slips in walking, it is a sign of infirmity and weakness; and so with him who is tormented with doubts about the truth, he, too begins to totter, and, as it were, fall from the faith. "But my feet were almost moved." I began to totter, though I did not fall entirely. "My steps had well-nigh slipped." I began to trip in my walking without coming to the ground, giving us to understand that he all but fell into doubt of God's justice in Providence.

3. "Because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners" He tells us now whence those temptations proceeded, and says it arose from seeing the wicked, who should have been punished by God, enjoying the most profound peace, and many other blessings.

4. "For there is no regard to their death; nor is there strength in their stripes." He goes on recounting the various blessings of the wicked. They enjoy all manner of peace and prosperity, because such is their health that they never think of death, they fancy that they are to live forever; and though they may now and then be struck by sickness, it is one of no great duration, but quickly passes away. "There is no regard to their death." They never think of death themselves, nor do others think of it, when they see them always so robust, so happy, so healthy. "Nor is their strength in their stripes." When they do suffer any stripes of tribulation, there is no strength in such stripes, for they quickly disappear, leaving the wicked at once just as happy as ever.

5. "They are not in the labor of men: neither shall they be scourged like other men." To add to the happiness enjoyed by the wicked, in exemption from disease and bodily afflictions, they enjoy besides an abundance of all manner of things, so that they have not to contend with want, fatigue, litigation, grief, and other troubles, the lot of man in general, "who eat their bread in the sweat of their brow," and are oppressed by the stronger. But St. Bernard justly observes that the case will be otherwise with them in hell; for, the saying of the apostle "all who wish to live piously in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. 3; and, "for whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth; and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth," Hebrew 12.

6. "Therefore pride hath held them fast: they are covered with their iniquity and their wickedness." The Prophet now tells us the fruit produced in the wicked by prosperity – pride, and a mass of iniquity. For they spend their superfluities in gratifying their lust and oppressing the poor; while, on the contrary, very pious people are full of fear, and tremble in the days of their prosperity; they are afraid of prosperity, for fear it may be their reward, instead of the eternal reward they

so ardently long for. "Pride hath held them;" instead of their holding pride, it holds them as if with a chain. "For he that committeth sin is the slave of sin." "They are covered with their iniquity and their wickedness;" implying that the wicked, in their prosperity, commit sin, not only in private, that is, in their heart, as do the poor and wretched sinners who, in thought, are guilty of theft, adultery, vanity, which they commit not, not from want of will, but from want of means; (and thus, their sins are all interior;) but the wicked alluded to in this verse, who have the wealth of this world at their command, are so steeped in iniquity that they sin not only in thought and desire, but they use their eyes, hands, tongue, fee, and all the members of the body, to transgress in word and deed.

7. "Their iniquity hath come forth, as it were from fatness: they have passed into the affection of the heart." He now shows that their iniquity arose from the bad use of the temporalities so abundantly bestowed on them by God. They did not share them with the poor, as they should have done; they kept all to themselves, and, becoming fat in consequence, they oppressed the poor like so many untamed horses or bulls. St. Augustine appositely remarks, that the poor become wicked from leanness, the rich from fat. Ask the poor why they steal, and they will tell you want drove them to it; ask the rich why they unjustly seize another's land, and they will answer, if they will condescend to give an explanation at all, that they have land adjoining, which absolutely requires the addition of that of their neighbor. Thus, Achab took away Naboth's vineyard, not because he wanted it, but because it bounded his palace. And that the wealth of this world, when not shared with our needy neighbors, is the cause of much wickedness, we read in Ezech. 16, where he says, "behold, this was the iniquity of Sodom;" that is, the iniquity that brought fire from heaven on it, "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance, and the idleness of her and of her daughters: and they did not put forth their hand to the needy and to the poor. And they were lifted up, and committed abominations before me, and I took them away, as thou hast seen." "They have passed into the affection of the heart." A different passage, and variously explained. My opinion is, that "passing into the affection of the heart" means to be so transformed and possessed by carnal desires that the whole man becomes animal; as St. Paul says, when "God gave them up to the desires of their heart;" and in the end of the same chapter when he says, "for this cause God delivered them up to shameful affections," Rom. 1; for the thoughts and the affections are most united, and taken for the same. Man desires nothing but what he thinks on and what he knows. Thus, the adulterer, who places all his affections on a woman, and prefers her even to eternal happiness, is not actuated by the fact of her being the fairest and most beautiful person in existence, but because he thinks she is, and paints her to himself as such; thus, the sinners, in the abundance of the goods of this life, "passed into the affection," and thoughts, and pictures of their own heart, because they have devoted themselves entirely to the creations and the concupiscence of their hearts.

8. "They have thought and spoken wickedness: they have spoken iniquity on high." He goes on to show the perversity of the wicked, who enjoyed so much prosperity, says they entertained blasphemous thoughts against God and man, were not afraid to proclaim it publicly, and derided God's majesty and his servants; and those who

"were on high," were most forward in doing so; that is, those who were in the highest positions among them.

9. "They have set their mouth against heaven: and their tongue hath passed through the earth." Such was the wickedness of the impious that they were not afraid to blaspheme, to open their mouth against heaven, fearing neither God nor angels; and their tongue hath passed through the earth, detracting, deriding God's servants, as if their "hope were vain."

10. "Therefore will my people return here: and full days shall be found in them."

11. "And they said: how doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" The Prophet again speaks in the person of those weak in faith, to explain the temptations that assail them, in consequence of the happiness enjoyed by sinners. "Therefore will my people return here." In consequence of the crimes and the prosperity of the wicked, my people, a faithful and God-fearing people, "will return here," to reflect and consider on those matters. "And full days shall be found in them;" which means, they will find that the wicked are truly happy, and they even enjoy the longest life, so that their days are full when they come to old-age. "And they said: how doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" Those wavering in the faith said: how can God know and permit such things? Has God on high any knowledge? Or, which is he ignorant of, or does not reflect on such things?

12. "Behold, these are sinners, and yet abounding in the world they have obtained riches."

13. "And I said: then have I in vain justified my heart, and washed away my hands among the innocent."

14. "And I have been scourged all the day: and my chastisement hath been in the mornings." He assigns his reason for doubting in God's knowledge of what happens on earth, and still speaks in the person of one of the infirm, but with a view to the easier relief of them. "Behold, these are sinners; and yet, abounding in the world, they have obtained riches." The reason for my doubts in God's providence were, that sinners, who deserved to be afflicted, have all the good things of the world and abound in riches. "And I said," turning the thing in my mind, "then have I in vain justified my heart;" in vain have I kept my heart free from sin, and in vain have I "washed my hands among the innocent;" leading a life of innocence in vain, I say, for God favors the sinner, and not the just; nay, more, he afflicts them; for I, always desirous of justice, "have been scourged all the day;" have been always in trouble; "and my chastisement hath been in the mornings;" begins at dawn of day, and never stays or allows me a moment's rest.

15. "If I said: I will speak thus; behold, I should condemn the generation of my children." He now begins to administer medicine, as it were, to the infirm. Hitherto he entered into their complaints, and their cause of being scandalized