

END OF PSALM 129

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: 129

**A prayer of a sinner, trusting in the mercies of God.
The sixth penitential psalm.**

1. Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord:
2. O Lord, hear my voice. Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.
3. If thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities; Lord, who shall stand it?
4. For with thee there is merciful forgiveness: and by reason of thy law, I have waited for thee, O Lord. My soul hath relied on his word:
5. My soul hath hoped in the Lord.
6. From the morning watch even until night, let Israel hope in the Lord.
7. Because with the Lord there is mercy; and with him plentiful redemption.
8. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

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: 129

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. “Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord.”
2. “Lord, hear my voice. Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.”
The Prophet being about to pray to God, first demands an audience, and then explains what he wants. He begins by comparing himself to one in a low valley, or a very deep well, who, unless he calls with a very loud voice, cannot be heard by one who is on a very high mountain, and thus, in fact, matters stand with us. For though God, by reason of his essence and power, be everywhere, still the sinner, by reason of his dissimilitude to God, is removed very far from God. God is always just and happy, and “dwelleth on high.” The sinner is always bad and miserable, and like Jonas the prophet, who, for his disobedience to God, was thrown not only into the depths of the sea, but even into the depths of the belly of the whale; and, nevertheless, when he cried from thence he was heard, for a fervent prayer breaks through and penetrates everything. David then says, “from the depths,” not from the depth, because a true penitent has need to cry from two depths, the depth of misery and the depth of his heart; from the former, as if from the valley of tears, or as another Psalm expresses it, “out of the pit of misery and the mire of dregs,” and from the latter, the depth of his heart; that is, from a thorough consideration and deep reflection on his own misery; for he that is not aware of, and that does not reflect on the depth in which he lies, has no wish to rise out of it, and, therefore, despises it, and thus sinks deeper again, as the Proverbs say, “the wicked man when he is come into the depth of sins contemneth.” But whoever will, on profound reflection, feel that he is an exile, a pilgrim, and in great danger of never arriving at his country; and what is infinitely worse, that though he is not just now in the lowest depths of hell, he deserves to be there by reason of his sins, it is impossible for such a one not to be thoroughly frightened and horrified, or to avoid calling out with all his might to him who alone can rescue him from such a dreadful depth, and extend a hand to him to get up. “Lord, hear my prayer.” However deep I may be, and however high you may be, as I cry with a very loud voice, you can hear me, and therefore, I beg of you to “hear my voice.” – “Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.”
However loud one may cry, he will not be heard, unless the person to whom he cries attend to him. People are often so absorbed in other matters, that they pay no heed to one talking to them and then one talks to them in vain. Now, God always sees and hears everything, but when he does not grant what we ask, he is like one that does not attend to us, as if he were thinking of something else, and, therefore, David,

being most anxious for a hearing, and not content with having called out with a loud voice, asks, furthermore, that God may deign to attend to him; that is, to receive his prayer, and grant what it asked.

3. "If thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities; Lord, who shall stand it?" Having got an audience, he now tells what he wants, and that is, that God should not deal with him in his justice, but in his mercy; that he should not require an exact account of the debt, but mercifully wipe it out; and, as he cannot summon sufficient courage to make such a request openly, he lays down a proposition with wonderful tact, and which must have been specially suggested by the Holy Ghost, for which he hopes to move God to grant his prayer. He, therefore, says as follows, "if thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities," you will condemn the whole world; and, as it would not be consistent with your goodness to do that, I should not be looked upon as too forward in asking you to pardon my sins, and to rescue me from those depths into which my sins alone have plunged me. As regards the words, iniquity means all sorts of sin that breaks the law; as we read in 1 John 3, "all sin is iniquity;" for all sins, strictly speaking, are not iniquity; that is, sins against justice; because there are sins of pride, of luxury, of the flesh, and many others. The word "observe" does not mean simply to look at; it means to note down, to record, to make an entry, as a creditor would against a debtor. The expression, "who shall stand it?" means, that should God choose to judge us, save us in his mercy, nobody could pass his judgment; because any offense offered to God is infinite, and we, without his grace, are not only unable to offer condign satisfaction, but we are even incapable of seeing the enormity of the offense, or of having a perfect sorrow for it, or even of the manner in which we should set about doing penance for it; besides, we know not the number nor the heinousness of our sins; for, "who can understand sins?" Now, God knows exactly the number of our sins; and he has them all written in his book; for, as Job says, "thou indeed hast numbered my steps." He, too, knows, and is the only one that knows, the infinite enormity of mortal sin, and how, then, can weak, ignorant men render an account to so exact a calculator, and so powerful an exactor? Thus, like one who is able to throw himself into a well without being able to get out of it, is the sinner who can transgress, but cannot make satisfaction for the transgression, unless he be mercifully helped thereto.

4. "For with thee there is merciful forgiveness: and by reason of thy law, I have waited for thee, O Lord. My soul hath relied on his word."

5. "My soul hath hoped in the Lord." To be truly penitent, (the subject of the Prophet's instruction in this penitential Psalm,) we need two things; to reflect on our own wretched condition, and to know the extent of God's mercy; because he that is ignorant of the state he is in, seeks for no medicine, does no penance, and he that has no idea of God's mercy, falls into despair, and looks upon penance as of no value. The Prophet, then, having clearly shown in the preceding verses, that he was fully aware of his nothingness, because he cried from the depths, and because he said that his sins was so grievous, that it God were to be influenced by his judgment alone, no one could stand the ordeal; he now shows

that he has an idea of God's mercy, and, therefore, however great and numerous his sins may be, that he still hopes for pardon of them, and for salvation; and, in consequence, he says, "for with thee there is merciful forgiveness and by reason of thy law I have waited for thee, O Lord;" as much as to say, though no one can stand before you if you choose to mark our iniquities, still, knowing you, as I do, to be naturally merciful, and knowing that "with thee there is merciful forgiveness," and that, "by reason of the law" you imposed on yourself, to show no mercy to the impenitent, but to receive the penitent, it is "by reason of such law that I have waited for thee, O Lord," in the hope and expectation of pardon for my sins. "My soul hath relied on his word." He now begins to exhort others, whom he encourages by his own example, to put their hope in God, saying, I have been in the lowest depths of misery, but I never despaired of God's mercy; for "my soul," wounded, as it was, with the gores of sin, "relied," looked for a cure, "in his word," on his promise, for God frequently, through Moses, in Deuteronomy, and in various other parts of the Scripture, promised pardon to those who do penance. "And when thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him; yet if thou seek him with all thy heart, and all the affliction of thy soul." Hence David himself previously said, in Psalm 118, "be thou mindful of thy word to thy servant, in which thou hast given me hope." And he then repeats more clearly what he had just expressed rather obscurely, when he adds, "my soul hath hoped in the Lord," that he would get the pardon he looked for. David's example ought to be of great value to us; for he was in the depth of misery, whether we regard his sins or what he suffered for them. His sins were most grievous; he had been guilty of adultery, took the life of a most faithful soldier; offended that God who had bestowed a kingdom on him, the gift of prophecy, strength, beauty, prudence, riches on him. He was also in the depths of misery when he was constantly persecuted by Saul, and in daily danger of his life; and yet, as he did not despair; but rather clung to hope, he was delivered.

6. "From the morning watch even until night, let Israel hope in the Lord." Let all Israel, that is, all God's people, do what I do; let them, and whatever depth they may be, hope in the Lord: be they oppressed by sin or by the punishment of sin, let him trust in God's help. "From the morning watch even until night;" the whole day, from daybreak to the end of the night, let them not, for as much as one moment, cease to trust in God. We are bound to hope in God during the whole day, and during the whole night, for two reasons, because we are always in danger; nor is there one moment in which we do not need God's help and assistance; secondly, because we are at liberty to hope at all times in God; and our conversion or penance is always acceptable, be it in the morning; that is, in our youth; or at midday, in the prime of life; or in the evening, in our old age; or be it in the daytime of our prosperity; or in the night of our adversity.

7. "Because with the Lord there is mercy; and with him plentiful redemption." He assigns a reason why we should always confide in God; and at the same time predicts the redemption of man, through Jesus Christ our Lord. We can justly hope in God all day and night, "because with the Lord there is mercy." There are works of mercy that are not in God, hence we read, "the earth is full of the mercy of the Lord;" and in another place, "thy mercy is to the heavens;" pious souls, too, have a certain share of

mercy; but mercy, properly speaking, is found with God alone, rests in his bosom alone; mercy it is that removes misery; for, who can remove misery but one that cannot be subject to it? Who can cure all defects but the one that is free from them, who was Almighty? To God only can be applied what the same Prophet says, "for thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild, and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee;" and, therefore, it is that our holy mother, the Church, when appealing to God in her prayers, most commonly commences with, "O Almighty and merciful God." Nor should we hope in God by reason of his being merciful only, but with that, because "there is plentiful redemption with him" because, when God in his mercy determined to spare the human race, in order that he may satisfy his justice, he offered a ransom of infinite value, the blood of his only begotten, sufficient to redeem any number of captives in the most plentiful manner, to any amount. Man could have sold himself as a captive for his sins, or he could have been given up to the devil, to whose temptations he had yielded, to torture him for his sins, but he never could have redeemed himself, nor have rescued himself from the power of the devil. What man was unable to do, therefore, God's mercy did for him, and that through the blood of his only begotten. Now, when this Psalm was being written, the said mercy was with God, in his counsel and resolve, but at present "the earth is full of the mercy of the Lord," because the price that was paid for the redemption of the captives is being daily expended, and hence the apostle says, "for you are bought with a great price, glorify and bear God in your body," which is more clearly expressed by St. Peter, when he says, "you were not redeemed with corruptible gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled." Such redemption is called "plentiful," because "he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world," not only because such a ransom redeems us from captivity, but, besides, raises us to share in the inheritance, and the kingdom, whereby we become "heirs of God and coheirs of Christ."

8. "And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." The "plentiful redemption" will be clearly manifested to all, when "Israel" – that is, God's people – shall be redeemed, not as the carnal Jews idly expect, from the sovereign powers now in possession of it, but "from all his iniquities;" a thing the angel promised would be accomplished by our Savior, when he said to St. Joseph, "and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." This redemption has begun, and is going on, and will be completely accomplished on the last day, when we shall be delivered not only from our sins, but even from the punishment due to them, and from any danger of relapse, as is conveyed to us by David in Psalm 102, when he says, "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our iniquities from us;" and, again, in the same Psalm, "who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who satisfieth thy desire with good things;" and most clearly in Daniel, "that transgression may be finished, and sin may have an end, and iniquity may be abolished and everlasting justice may be brought."