

me the grace of that spiritual joy that will appear exteriorly in my countenance, "that they who hate me may see" such calmness and tranquility of soul, "and be confounded;" for you, Lord, have helped me in the struggle, consoled me in my sorrow, and have already converted my sadness into interior joy and gladness.

END OF PSALM 85

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: 85

A Prayer for God's grace to assist us to the end.

1. Incline thy ear, O Lord, and hear me: for I am needy and poor.
2. Preserve my soul, for I am holy: save thy servant, O my God, that trusteth in thee.
3. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I have cried to thee all the day.
4. Give joy to the soul of thy servant, for to thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul.
5. For thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild; and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee.
6. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer: and attend to the voice of my petition.
7. I have called upon thee in the day of my trouble; because thou hast heard me.
8. There is none among the gods like unto thee, O Lord: and there is none according to thy works.
9. All the nations thou hast made shall come and adore before thee, O Lord: and they shall glorify thy name.
10. For thou art great, and dost wonderful things: thou art God alone.
11. Conduct me, O Lord, in thy way, and I will walk in thy truth: let my heart rejoice that it may fear thy name.
12. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart: and I will glorify thy name:
13. For thy mercy is great towards me: and thou hast delivered my soul out of the lower hell.
14. O God, the wicked are risen up against me: and the assembly of the mighty have sought my soul: and they have not set thee before their eyes.
15. And thou, O Lord, art a God of compassion, and merciful, patient, and of much mercy, and true.
16. O look upon me, and have mercy on me: give thy command to thy servant, and save the son of thy handmaid.
17. Show me a token for good: that they who hate me may see, and be confounded, because thou, O Lord, hast helped me, and has comforted me.

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: 85

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "Incline thy ear, O Lord, and hear me: for I am needy and poor." He begins his prayer by touching on God's greatness and his own poverty; an excellent form of prayer, and calculated to get what we want; for, "the prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds," Ecclesiastical 35. "Incline thy ear," for you sit so high, you have need to do so, in order to hear me, who lie so low, "for I am needy and poor." As I am the beggar sitting at the rich man's gate, incline thy ear to your poor servant, and hear him. By the poor and the needy he means the person, who, though he may abound in the riches of the world, still does not put his trust in them, takes no pride in them, does not despise others, but rather despises the wealth itself; and does not look upon himself one bit better or greater than those who are not possessed of such wealth. St. Augustine very properly remarks, that Lazarus was not taken up into Abraham's bosom by reason of his poverty, but on account of his humility; nor was the rich glutton buried in hell for his riches, but for his pride. Had such been the case, Abraham too, who abounded in riches, would have been buried in hell. But, as Abraham looked upon himself, and called himself "dust and ashes," Genesis 18, and observed the commandments of God so faithfully, that he was most ready to sacrifice, not only all his wealth, but even his only son for whom he had it in store, at the command of God, he was, therefore, not only himself brought to the place of rest after his death, but in his bosom would gathered together all who then died in the Lord. David, too, abounded in the riches of this world; but, as he took no pride in them, set no value on them, but depended entirely on God, in whom he had placed his entire hope, his strength, and his riches, and without whom he knew he was nothing, and could do nothing; he, therefore, with great truth, proclaimed himself really poor and needy.

2. "Preserve my soul, for I am holy: save thy servant, O my God, that trusteth in thee." He tells in what respect he wishes to be heard, and first proposes what is really uppermost in his mind, in which the Lord himself directed should be sought for in preference to everything, and that is, "seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you." "Preserve my soul," that so many enemies lie in wait for, in this my exile, "for I am holy." I ask for the safety of my soul, because I got it from you, and you have justified me who was dead in sin, through the blood of your Son, and you have sanctified me, and enlivened me. For, as St. Augustine says, when one feels a confidence that he has been justified through the sacraments, and calls himself holy, through the grace of God; such is not to be

St. Paul says, "by which he made us acceptable through his beloved Son;" that is, made us acceptable to him or received us into grace. "Patient," the word in Hebrew signifies long nosed, not easily provoked to anger, for with the Hebrews a long nose was looked upon as a sign of much patience; "and of much mercy;" abounding in mercy, "and true," or faithful. Hence we learn that God loves us with the affection of a father, and, therefore, most ready to forgive, most slow to be provoked, liberal, and ready to promise in his mercy, and faithful to carry out such promises; all of which afford incalculable consolation and confidence to pious souls, who, from their heart, attach themselves to God; for all this applies only to those who fear God, as is more clearly explained in Psalm 102. They who abuse God's goodness "treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the last judgment of God," Romans 2; to whom he says in Hebrews 10, "it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

16. "O look upon me, and have mercy on me: give thy command to thy servant, and save the son of thy handmaid." Having explained God's goodness in so many terms, he now begs that he may have a share in it. "O look on me" with the eyes of your infinite goodness, and prodigal as you are of your mercies, "have mercy on me." "Give thy command to thy servant." Grant that my numerous enemies may not prevail over me, but, on the contrary, give thy servant strength and power to subdue and command them, and thereby "save the son of thy handmaid," whether from their secret snares or open persecutions.

17. "Show me a token for good: that they who hate me may see, and be confounded, because thou, O Lord, hast helped me, and hast comforted me." He concludes by asking for some external sign that may let even his enemies see that God always consoles and assists his faithful servants. "Show me a token for good," give me some sign that will assure me of something good, that is, of your grace and favor, "that they who hate me may see," that my enemies may see it, be confounded, and despair of subduing me, "because thou, O Lord, hast helped me and hast comforted me." As you have really helped me in the combat, and by your interior grace consoled me in my trouble, show also some external sign of your favor, that my enemies, on seeing it, may be confounded. A question has been raised, what is the sign he asks for? St. Jerome says, it is a sign of the cross of Christ, for it is a token for good, it being the token of redemption, and when the evil spirits, who hate us, behold it, they are confounded. St. Augustine explains it of the sign that will appear on the last day, which will be for good to the elect, and on the sight of which all their enemies will be confounded. Others interpret it of the sign given by Isaias to King Achaz when he said to him, "the Lord himself will give you a sign, behold, a virgin will conceive, and will bring forth a son." That was truly a token for good to David, to have the Messiah descended from him, and to the whole world that was to be delivered, through Christ, from all its enemies. Perhaps, the token for good means that spiritual joy, which he asked for in the beginning of the Psalm, when he said, "give joy to the soul of thy servant;" for such joy to a holy soul in tribulation is the clearest sign of the grace of God, and on the sight of it, all manner of persecutors are confounded, and then the meeting would be: "show me a token for good;" give

consolation's sake, but in order that, being refreshed by it as if with food, I may persevere in thy holy fear. By fearing to offend you I will be sure to proceed in the direct road of your commandments, to that country where I will serve you without any fear.

12. "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart and I will glorify thy name." To prayer he adds thanksgiving, for nothing tends more to obtain fresh favors than to appear mindful on and grateful for, the past. "I will praise thee, O Lord, my God;" I will render you the tribute of praise and thanksgiving, "what my whole heart," with the full tide of my affections. "And I will glorify thy name;" that is, thy power, "forever," while I live, incessantly.

13. "For thy mercy is great towards me: and thou hast delivered my soul out of the lower hell." The favor for which he returns thanks is, that God, in his great mercy, and not through the merits of the supplicant, should have delivered his soul from the lower hell; that is, should have justified him from the sins that would have carried him to hell, had he not been delivered through grace. And, in truth, the mercy of God, which converts the sinner into a just man, is as great as the punishment of eternal fire from which we are saved, or the everlasting happiness to which we get a right and free access. Hence St. Peter says, "who, according to his great mercy, hath regenerated us unto a lively hope." Various explanations are offered for the words, "lower hell." We adopt that of St. Augustine, Jerome, and Bernard, who say it means that part of hell where no one praises the Lord, and from which there is no egress.

14. "O God, the wicked are risen up against me; and the assembly of the mighty have sought my soul: and they have not set thee before their eyes." Having returned thanks, he comes again to pray, asking to be delivered from the multitude of the enemies that sought his life; and though some make him allude to his corporal enemies, or to those of Ezechias, some will have him allude to the enemies of Christ, who caused his death; the explanation of St. Augustine is more in accordance with the rest of the Psalm; and he says it is to be understood of the members of Christ's body of the just, or any person suffering persecution from their spiritual enemies, be they heretics or schismatics, or bad Christians. The man of God, then, delivered through the grace of Christ from the lower hell, fighting in the meantime with his spiritual enemies, in heavy groans exclaims, O my God, "behold the wicked are risen up against me;" neither few in number, nor weak in strength, but "an assembly of the mighty;" a great congregation of most powerful enemies "have sought my soul" to destroy it; and in their blindness and obduracy "have not set thee before their eyes;" have not considered that you are the protector of the just, and they presume to wage war, not with weak mortals, but with the Lord God of armies.

15. "And thou, O Lord, art a God of compassion, and merciful, patient, and of much mercy, and true." Having mentioned the quantity and the quality of his enemies, he now asks for help against them, and in various terms proclaims God's goodness, to show he was not rash in hoping for assistance from so good to God. He is a God of compassion, which in Hebrew signifies the regard a parent has for his child. "Merciful," which means a bestower of grace, or the making one acceptable, as

looked upon as the pride of a vain man, but the confession of one who is not ungrateful; but if one cannot venture to say, I am justified and cleansed, he can at least say, "I am holy;" that is, I am one of the faithful, a professor of our holy faith and religion, dedicated and consecrated to God through Baptism. "Save thy servant, O my God, that trusteth in thee:" a repetition of the preceding. The reason he wishes his soul to be saved is, that he may not lose life everlasting. St. Peter, in his first Epistle, uses similar language, when he says, "who, by the power of God are kept by faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." He asks, then, for life everlasting, for fear of losing which, he asks for the safety of his soul, assigning a reason, when he says, "thy servant that trusteth in thee;" because, when God saves his servant, he saves what belongs to himself; and, when he saves him that trusts in him, he shows himself to be just and faithful, in carrying out what he promised.

3. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I have cried to thee all the day."

4. "Give joy to the soul of thy servant, for to thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul." He had asked, in the second verse, for supreme happiness; that is, the salvation of his soul, the object of all his desires, and he now most properly asks for the means of arriving at such an end, namely, that interior joy that manfully bears up against the temptations and the dangers of this our exile, until it comes to that harbor of safety, where there will be no temptations, no dangers. "Have mercy on me, O Lord." In mercy hear my prayer, "for I have cried to thee all the day;" I have put up my prayers with the greatest fervor and perseverance, for nothing is more necessary in prayer than great fervor, which the expression, "I have cried," implies, and with perseverance, which the words, "all the day," convey. Here is the petition, which, in mercy, he asked should be listened to, and for which he cried the whole day, "give joy to do soul of thy servant." I am hemmed in on all sides by temptations, nothing about what is bitter presents itself to me in this valley of tears, while my very prosperity terrifies me as much as my adversity saddens me; therefore, "give joy to the soul of thy servant, for to thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul." As I have not found rest in anything created, I have raised up my soul on the wings of thought and desire to thee my Creator. Love bears one's soul; and it has been truly said, that the soul is more where it loves, than where it actually is. Thought and desire are the wings of love; for he that loves is borne on to, and abides in, what he loves, by thinking constantly on, and longing for, the object of his love. Whoever truly, and from his heart, loves God, by thinking on him and longing for him, lifts up his soul to God; while, on the contrary, whoever loves the earth, by thinking on and coveting the things of the earth, lets his soul down to its level. Thus he alone, with the Prophet, can truly say, "to thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul," and can with justice ask for consolation, saying, "give joy to the soul of thy servant," who has no inordinate affection for anything created, and is in no way stuck in the mud of this world.

5. "For thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild; and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee." A reason assigned for having raised up his soul to God in order to obtain consolation; because "God is sweet and mild;" and as St. John says, "God is light, and in him there is no darkness." So we can say God is sweet, and in him there is no bitterness; whereas in the consolations of this world there is an abundance of bitterness will little or no sweetness. And not only is God sweet, but he is also mild, offering no repulse to those who approach him, and bearing with our imperfections. St. Augustine observes that God's mildness is most remarkable in bearing with us when we pray; when, during our prayers, we divert our attention to so many different subjects. The judge would hardly have patience with the culprit who, while laying his petition before the court, would turn about to talk with his friends, especially on matters of no moment. And not only is God sweet and mild in himself, inasmuch as he repels no one approaching the fountain on the sweetness; but he is also "plenteous in mercy," for he freely admits and receives, and offers himself to be tasted of by all that call upon him, having no regard to rich or poor, Jew or Gentile "for whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." If he sometimes does not hear or have mercy on those who prayed to him, the reason is because they do not really call upon him, or do not call upon him as they ought. He very often hears us, but at the fitting time; and he very often hears the wish of him who prays, instead of the words he utters; for instance, when the petitioner asks a thing quite unsuited to him, and which he would not have asked had he known it to be so.

6. "Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer: and attend to the voice of my petition." A repetition of the first part of the first verse, in different language, in order to express his great desire for what he asks.

7. "I have called upon thee in the day of my trouble; because thou hast heard me." This verse was seen to have been introduced as an explanation of the preceding. He said therein, "give ear, O Lord, to my prayer," and God may fairly have asked him, when did you pray? When will you have me give ear to your prayer? The Prophet answers, I have prayed every day, and I will pray every day while I stray about in this exile. Every day of my exile is a day of trouble, for he who loves his country cannot but loathe his exile. "In the day of my trouble;" during the whole time of my exile, I found nought but trouble and sorrow; and therefore I have always "called upon thee," and with so much confidence, "because thou hast heard me."

8. "There is none among the gods like unto thee, O Lord: and there is none according to thy works." He assigns a reason for flying to God alone, for invoking him, and for seeking to lift up his soul to him, because there is no one, not only among men, but even among gods, like God; either in essence or in power, or in wisdom, or in goodness. If by the word "gods" we understand false gods, idols, and demons, of which it is said in Psalm 95, "all the gods of the Gentiles are devils;" then, what he says here is absolutely true; for idols have eyes and do not see, and depend on man both for motion and protection; but the true God sees without corporeal eyes, depends on no one, but all things depend on him; "for in him we live, move, and have our being." The demons, it is true, were made to God's image, but they lost by sin. "And there is none according to thy works." Not only is there no god like

unto thee, O Lord, but none of them have produced any one work equal to any of yours; for God made the heavens, and the earth, and everything in them, from nothing, or the gods only work from the matter which our God created.

9. "All the nations thou hast made shall come and adore before thee, O Lord: and they shall glorify thy name." From this verse we learn that, in the preceding one, he referred to the false gods, who were adored by the sinners as true and supreme gods; for the Prophet proves that none of those gods are like our God, that their worship will one day cease, and their falsity and vanity be made perfectly clear; while the worship of our God will be everlasting, a fact partly accomplished in the Church of Christ, and fully so on the day of judgment. For, though in the days of David there were gods of the Moabites, of the Ammonites, of the Philistines, and of various nations, still, on the promulgation of the Gospel of Christ, idolatry began to disappear, and the worship of the true God to be introduced among all nations. Thus, "all the nations shall come;" that is, they came from all nations, and, after abandoning their false gods, they adored the true one; but, on the day of judgment, all men, without any exception, shall know that the gods of the Gentiles were demons, or empty images, and, whether they will or will not, shall bow the knee before the Lord, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaias "for every knee shall be bowed to me," a text applied by St. Paul, Romans 14, and Philippians 2, to Christ as the true God. "And they shall glorify thy name;" but in a different manner; the just will love, and with pleasure; but the wicked will through fear, and against their will, glorify the Lord on the day of judgment, and will say, "thou art just, O Lord, and righteous in thy judgment."

10. "For thou art great, and dost wonderful things: thou art God alone." The reason why the worship of false gods will cease, and all nations will adore and glorify the Lord is, "for he is God alone," truly great, "and does wonderful things," that nobody else can do; a thing that will be well-known on the day of judgment, especially when, at his nod, all the dead shall arise, and be gathered before the tribunal of Christ, when, without the slightest resistance or opposition, the just shall be exalted to their kingdom, and the wicked shoved down to everlasting punishment. Hence the apostle, when speaking of said judgment, uses the expression, "of the great God," for it is in the Last Judgment that his greatness is most clearly exhibited, "waiting for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ."

11. "Conduct me, O Lord, in thy way, and I will walk in thy truth: let my heart rejoice that it may fear thy name." For fear of straying from the path that leads to his country, he has again recourse to prayer, in which he asks for guidance in this his wandering and his exile, and at the same time, asks for spiritual help and succor, for fear he may faint on the way. "Conduct me, O Lord, in thy way." Show me the way, through the assistance of your grace, not only by enlightening my mind, but by moving my will; and thus, "I will walk in thy truth," according to the truth of your law and of your faith. "Let my heart rejoice;" he asked in the third verse "that his soul should have joy;" let it, then, rejoice when you gladden and console my heart, "that it may fear thy name;" I do not seek consolation for