

END OF PSALM 143

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: 143

**The Prophet praiseth God, an prayeth to be delivered from his enemies.
No worldly happiness is to be compared with that of serving God.**

1. Blessed be the Lord my God, who teacheth my hands to fight, and my fingers to war.
2. My mercy, and my refuge; my support, and my deliverer; my protector, and I have hoped in him; who subdueth my people under me.
3. Lord, what is man, that thou art made known to him? Or the son of man, that thou makest account of him?
4. Man is like to vanity: his days pass away like a shadow.
5. Lord, bow down thy heavens, and descent: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.
6. Send forth lightning, and thou shalt scatter them: shoot out thy arrows, and thou shalt trouble them.
7. Put forth thy hand from on high; take me out, and deliver me from many waters: from the hand of strange children.
8. Whose mouth hath spoken vanity: and their right hand is the right hand of iniquity.
9. To thee, O God, I will sing a new canticle: on the psaltery, and an instrument of ten strings I will sing praises to thee.
10. Who givest salvation to kings: who hast redeemed thy servant David from the malicious sword.
11. Deliver me, and rescue me out of the hand of strange children; whose mouth hath spoken vanity: and their right hand is the right hand of iniquity:
12. Whose sons are as new plants in their youth: their daughters decked out, adorned round about after the similitude of a temple:
13. Their storehouses full, flowing out of this into that. Their sheep fruitful in young, abounding in their goings forth:
14. Their oxen fat. Thee is no breach of wall, nor passage, nor straying out in their streets.
15. They have called the people happy, that hath these things: but happy is that people whose God is the Lord.

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: 143

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "Blessed be the Lord my God, who teacheth my hands to fight, and my fingers to war." The Prophet praises God, and returns him thanks for the singular favor conferred on him, in enabling him to conquer the giant Goliath, the source of all his glory. "Who teacheth my hands to fight." He uses the word "teacheth," instead of strengtheneth, because the victory was owing more to skill than to strength; for, as we read in 1 Kings 17, "David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone." It certainly required no small amount of skill to let a stone fly from a sling so as to hit an adversary in one particular vital spot, on such an occasion; which, however, the Prophet, in his wisdom, does not attribute to his own science, skill, or coolness, but entirely to the gift of God. In like manner, we need art rather than strength in the spiritual contests we have daily to maintain with the devil; and Christ himself, of whom David was the type, conquered the devil more by his wisdom than by his power. It was by his patience and his humility that he laid his proud and cruel enemy prostrate; and, therefore, the Prophet, instead of saying, "who armeth my hands," says, "who teacheth my hands," which he repeats when he says, "and my fingers to war."

2. "My mercy, and my refuge; my support, and my deliverer; my protector, and I have hoped in him; who subdueth my people under me." In five expressions the Prophet tells the order in which God helped him to the victory, and in which he will help us too, if we put our entire confidence in him. First, God in his mercy looked upon David; for God's mercy is the primary source of all our blessings, and precedes all merit whatsoever, and he, therefore, places "my mercy" first. Having been thus called and taken by the hand through God's mercy, he looked towards him, and through hope and prayer fled to him, and thus God became "my refuge." Thirdly, God did not despise him, when he thus made him his refuge, but reached out his hand to him to protect and assist him, and he, therefore, adds, "my support." Fourthly, he delivered him, after having thus supported him, from captivity and from the imminent danger of death, and thus, he became "his deliverer." Finally, after having so delivered him, he protected, and continued to protect him as long as the fight lasted, lest he may be wounded or made captive, and he therefore styles him "my protector," and he adds, "and I have hoped in him who subdueth my people under me," as much as to say, God surely is my mercy, my refuge, my support, my deliverer, my protector, having done more for me than I could have ever hoped for or dreamed of, and I therefore, will put my whole hope and confidence in him, inasmuch as he

my fruits? This will I do, I will pull down my barns, and will build greater.” A thing that usually happens when the harvest is being brought in, and the surplus of the preceding crop is stored away, to make room for the new. “This sheep fruitful in young abounding in their goings forth. Their oxen fat.” Such is the fourth source of temporal happiness; numerous and fruitful flocks of sheep, “abounding in their goings forth,” which seem high countless, as they go out to pasture; and with them herds of fat oxen, too.

14. “Their oxen fat. There is no breach of wall, nor passage, nor crying out in their streets.” The last of the temporal blessings enjoyed by them consists not only in their houses and palaces being in perfect repair, but even their wall and their streets, in which there is neither noise nor confusion, but all is tranquil and peaceful.

15. “They have called the people happy, that hath these things: but happy is that people whose God is the Lord.” Such is the conclusion of the holy Prophet, who, while he states that through “the strange child” may look on all those who enjoy the above-named blessings to be happy, yet, in his opinion, it is not the people who have such things, but the people who have the Lord for their God, that can be accounted happy. It must be remarked here that the abundance or the want of the things of this world makes no difference whatever between the children of God and the aforesaid “strange children.” Many children of God abound in the things of this world, and the Lord himself even promised a hundredfold for anything we may give up, with life everlasting in the next; and, on the other hand, many of the children of this world have had a wretched end, in want, in exile, in chains, or on the scaffold. The whole difference between the sons of the kingdom and the sons of hell, the children of this world and the children of light, consists in the affections; for they who look upon the things of this world as of immense value, and have such an affection for them as to despise their eternal happiness for them; and, on the other hand, who look upon the crosses of this life as the greatest of misfortunes, and so dread them as not to hesitate in offending God, and running the risk of losing their eternal salvation in order to escape them, they are “the children of the darkness of this world and of the pit,” and they are the parties the Prophet has in view when he says, “they have called the people happy that hath these things.” While they who look upon the goods of this world to be things of nothing, as they really are, and the loss of them as a matter of no moment; and, on the other hand, they who reckon the grace of God and the country above among the greatest blessings, and the offending of God, or the loss of eternal life, as the greatest of all misfortunes, they are truly the children of light, the children of God, the children of the kingdom, who have not turned a deaf ear to “seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you,” and that is what is conveyed in the words, “happy is that people whose God is the Lord;” that is to say, the good things of this world may be good in their way, but happiness does not consist in them. What constitutes a man supremely happy is the possession of the supreme good, which consists in the beatific vision.

not only saved me from the hand of Goliath, but he also set me as a prince over his people; for, immediately after his victory over Goliath, Saul gave him the command of a thousand soldiers, which soon extended to the whole kingdom, as we read in Kings, “all Israel and Juda loved David, for he came in and went out before them.”

3. “Lord, what is man, that thou art made known to him? Or the son of man that thou makest account of him?” From the consideration of such favors, David bursts forth into great admiration, that such of God, than whom nothing greater can be imagined, should condescend to make so much of man, a thing of nothing, as to deign to wish to be known and to be loved by him! And if such was the language of David, and expressed with so much piety, what should we not feel, say, and do, to whom God not only made himself known, but even assumed the form of a servant, and in such form, “humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” and thereby obtained a victory for us, “not against flesh and blood, but against Principalities and Powers, against rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places,” and who brought “many people under subjection to us,” and after raising us to a share in his kingdom, placed us with Christ, “over all his goods.” But to come to the text. “Lord, what is man, that thou art made known to him?” What did you see in man when you condescended to let yourself so down, and reveal so much about your wonderful mysteries and attributes to him? – “Or the Son of Man that thou makest account of him?” – A repetition of the preceding sentence, in which he again expresses his astonishment at the wonderful regard of God for man, with whom he desires so to commune, and to establish such relations of familiarity and friendship.

4. “Man is like to vanity: his days pass away like a shadow.” He now tells why he is so wrapt in admiration; it is because man is so insignificant a thing, and his very insignificance of such short duration, thus drawing the greatest possible contrast between the nothingness of man, and the greatness of God. God is the fullness of all good, and is so at all times, and never subject to change or diminution. While man, though he has not, exactly, vanity, “he is like to vanity,” because there is some little trifle in him that is capable of being turned to great account, should God take him in hands; but until he does, man is like a vain and empty thing; which he further elucidates by comparing man to “the shadows that pass;” for, as the shadows of the mountains are constantly shifting their position during the day, and ultimately disappear altogether on the approach of night; so with man, who is everyday advancing to the moment of his final departure from this world. All this applies to man in regard of his temporal life alone, as contrasted with that of God, because, in other respects, man is a being of great consequence and importance, inasmuch as he is created to the image and likeness of God, in order to know and to love him; and a being for whom the only begotten Son of God did not hesitate to spill his blood; and, in fine, a being destined to rank with the Angels in a state of eternal happiness, should he persevere in this his pilgrimage; in faith, hope, and charity. Though man should therefore, when compared to God, avow himself to be no more than dust and

ashes, yet, whenever the devil would tempt him by the suggestion of the evil desires that reduce him to the level of the beast, he should reflect on his own dignity, and seek rather to aspire to the place intended for him among the angels.

5. “Lord, bow down thy heavens, and descend: touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.”

6. “Send forth lightning, and thou shalt scatter them: shoot out thy arrows, and thou shalt trouble them.” The holy Prophet from having been lost in admiration at the extent of God’s goodness to man, and then at his mercy in regarding a thing so miserable as man; now reflecting on the other hand, on the pride and blindness of many, who, in contempt of God, are entirely devoted to the oppression of the poor and the accumulation of riches, prays to God to display his power in regard of such people, who, as they will not be influenced by the love of justice or reverence for their Creator, may, at all events, be deterred from crime, through the fear of punishment. “Lord, bow down thy heavens, and descend.” Since all your favors have not had the effect of reducing the pride of man, to acknowledge or to fear you, make yourself known to them by your dark and gloomy clouds, by your fire from heaven, by your lightning’s and thunder that cause mankind so to fear and tremble. God is said to “bow down the heavens” when he visits them with dark, heavy, and gloomy clouds, that look as if they were a part of the armament; and he is said to “descend” by them, inasmuch as they demonstrate his interference by their effects, which are usually thunder and lightning. Thus, in Exodus, God is said to have descended on Mount Sinai, when he enveloped the whole mountain with a thick cloud and dense darkness, and heated the whole mountain so that it began to smoke, which he alludes to here, when he adds, “touch the mountains and they shall smoke.” God, however, principally displays his presence and his power, through the astounding roar of his thunder and the coruscations of his lightning, than which nothing more subtle, more fleet, more efficacious, of more horrible can be imagined; and he, therefore, adds, “said forth lightning and thou shalt scatter them,” meaning the proud, aforesaid; “shoot out thy arrows,” those celestial arrows, “and thou shalt trouble them,” for even the most hardened and fierce will quail before that thunder of yours, that no human power can resist; hence, we read, in 1 Kings 2, “the adversaries of the Lord shall fear him; and upon them shall he thunder in the heavens.”

7. “Put forth thy hand from on high; take me out, and deliver me from many waters: from the hand of strange children.” It would appear from this verse, that the Psalm was not written after David’s accession to the throne, and that the subject is not the same as that of Psalm 17; because, in that Psalm, he returns thanks for his delivery from Saul, and from all his enemies; while it would appear, from the present Psalm, that he is still at war with his “strange children,” the Philistines, and prays for victory over them. Having, then, prayed to God against the proud and the wicked in general, he now prays for himself in particular, saying, “put forth thy hand from on high.” Display your power from heaven; “take me out, and deliver me from many waters;” from the multitude of my enemies, the infidels, who daily harass me; and he explains the metaphor when he adds, “from the hand of strange children;” from the

Philistines, with whom he was then at war.

8. “Whose mouth hath spoken vanity: and their right hand is a right hand of iniquity.” He gives a description of the strange children by saying they were sinners in word and deed. “Whose mouth hath spoken vanity,” instead of your truth, or your law, or anything good; “and their right hand” does nothing but plunder, oppression of the poor, homicide, adultery, etc.

9. “To thee, O God, I will sing a new canticle: on the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings I will sing praises to thee.”

10. “Who givest salvation to kings: who hast redeemed thy servant David from the malicious sword.”

11. “Deliver me, and rescue me out of the hand of strange children: whose mouth hath spoken vanity: and their right hand is the right hand of iniquity.” After a parenthesis of two verses, expressive of his affection for God, he returns to a description of the “strange children.” – “To thee, O Lord, I will sing a new canticle.” Though I do not forget the favors I have received, I am about to ask for more, and I will, therefore, “Sing a new Canticle,” a beautiful one, one never heard before; and while singing it I will play upon the psaltery, too, on one of ten strings, and that because “you give salvation to kings,” as when you saved King Saul through my interference; and thou “hast redeemed thy servant David from the malicious sword;” from the sword of Goliath the giant; and as you have hitherto so regarded me, “deliver me.” Rescue me, I say, from “the strange children,” who are full of wickedness in words, as well as in deeds.

12. “Whose sons are as new plants in their youth: their daughters decked out, adorned round about after the similitude of a temple.” He now tells us what he means by the “strange children,” by informing us of their ideas and their affections; they are the persons who neither know nor care for anything but the pleasures of this world, the fecundity and the prosperity of their sons and daughters, the abundance of their corn, wine, and oil, their flocks and herds, and their produce, and the enjoyment of all those things in peace. Such is the first source of happiness with the “strange children.” A second source of happiness with them is handsome, beautiful daughters, likely to meet, at once, with good husbands. “Their daughters decked out, adorned round about after the similitude of a temple;” with a beautiful shape, and finally turned limbs. “After the similitude of a temple,” as beautiful as the temple that was studded with gold, silver, precious stones, silks, and fine linen.

13. “Their storehouses full, flowing out of this into that. Their sheep fruitful in young, abounding in their goings forth.” The third source of happiness to “the strange children” consists in the fullness of their granaries, which are so replete with all the necessities of life that they must needs remove them from one store to another. Happiness from this source is well described in the Gospel, where the rich man said, “what shall I do because I have not where to lay out together