

Psalm 4

1. *Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness;
you set me at liberty when I was in trouble;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.*
2. *How long will you nobles dishonour my glory;
how long will you love vain things and seek after falsehood?*
3. *But know that the Lord has shown me his marvellous kindness
when I call upon the Lord, he will hear me.*
4. *Stand in awe, and sin not;
commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.*
5. *Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put your trust in the Lord.*
6. *There are many that say, 'Who will show us any good?'
Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon us.*
7. *You have put gladness in my heart,
more than when their corn and wine and oil increase.*
8. *In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for it is you Lord, only, who make me dwell in safety.*

The Lord has shown me marvellous kindness;
when I call, he will hear me.

There are various interpretations of this psalm. It may be a pious man's reproof of those who have ceased believing in God owing to bad harvests.

Or it may be the defence of an official (king or high priest) accused of having abused his office. Or it may be an encouragement to those who have been disheartened by bad times.

The reference to nobles, people of standing or wealth, in verse 2, suggests a legal context. Cases which could not be solved by legal

evidence were taken to the temple, where the accused swore an oath of innocence. The psalm may then have been modified as a hymn of confidence.

The psalm begins with a cry to God for help. 'God of my righteousness', God who declares me innocent. The psalmist's accusers, by lying, have attacked his dignity, but he is confident that God, who has supported him in the past, will answer him again. So he urges his accusers to stop lying and to trust in the Lord.

But the accusers show their lack of trust by complaining about their lot. But the psalmist's thought of his innocence and trust in God give him more joy than his enemies have in their material possessions.

So, confident of God's protection, he sleeps peacefully as soon as he lies down, possibly in the temple during his trial.

So the conclusion is that the light of God's presence brings true inner joy and gladness, and God's promise of peace amid all our problems and difficulties shows a different way, revealing that it is only that way which leads to true life. This psalm is used in the service of Night Prayer (Compline), as it speaks at the end of sleeping soundly in the consciousness of the protecting presence of God.

Prayer

Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy
but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Collect for Lent 3)