

Psalm 24

1. *The earth is the Lord's and all that fills it;
the compass of the world and all who dwell therein.*
2. *For he has founded it upon the seas
and set it firm upon the rivers of the deep.*
3. *'Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, or who can rise up in his holy
place?'*
4. *'Those who have clean hands and a pure heart,
who have not lifted up their soul to an idol, nor sworn an oath to a lie;*
5. *'They shall receive a blessing from the Lord,
a just reward from the God of their salvation.'*
6. *Such is the company of those who seek him,
of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.*
7. *Lift up your heads, O gates; be lifted up, you everlasting doors;
and the King of glory shall come in*
8. *'Who is the King of glory?'*
'The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord who is mighty in battle.'
9. *Lift up your heads, O gates; be lifted up, you everlasting doors;
and the King of glory shall come in.*
10. *'Who is this King of glory?'*
'The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.'

The Lord of hosts is the King of glory:
the King of glory shall come in.

Psalm 24 is a liturgy in three parts, a hymn, an entrance liturgy for the people, and then an entrance liturgy for the Lord's coming to his temple as king.

During the festival of the enthronement of the Lord, a procession bearing the ark, the Lord's throne, comes up the hill of the Lord towards the gates of the temple. The people sing in praise of God's sovereignty and creative power (vv.1-2).

vv.3-6. The people ask the priests for the conditions of entry to the temple (Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord, or who can rise up in his holy place?).

The answer is that those who wish to worship in the temple must be clean in outward and inner life (hands and heart). They must not worship what is false (idols), and they must be honest in social relationships. This idea can also be seen in Psalm

16: 'Though the idols are legion that many run after, their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, neither make mention of their names upon my lips.'

Then twice the procession calls on the gates of the temple to open, and admit the Lord, symbolised by the ark. It was believed that when the gates of the temple opened, the gates of heaven (everlasting doors) opened as well. The God who seeks entrance is the King of glory, whose power and authority are unlimited.

This psalm gives a picture of movement, and we express this in our worship with processions. But God also moves about and is present in nature, and many people feel the closeness of God in beautiful scenery. Many people also find the presence of God in a fine church or cathedral. 'The earth is the Lord's and all that fills it', because God is creator and fills all life.

So we have to seek the face of God. This idea comes also in Psalm 27: 'To behold the fair beauty of the Lord and to seek his will in his temple.'

But we have to be faithful and not follow idols, selfishness, materialism or things which take us away from the awareness of God's presence. So when the King of glory comes, we are urged to be ready, not 'swearing an oath to a lie'. When God comes, he comes in light and glory. For us, especially, he comes in the person of Jesus, the light of the world, who said to Nathaniel (John 1 51): 'You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.' So here Psalm 24 is renewed in the person of Jesus, God with us in our world today.

Prayer

Lord God, the springing source of everlasting light,
pour into the hearts of your faithful people
the brilliance of your eternal splendour,
that we, who by these kindling flames
light up this temple to your glory,
may have the darkness of our souls dispelled,
and so be counted worthy to stand before you
in that eternal city where you live and reign,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Prayer for the Candlemas procession)