

Psalm 26

- 1. Give judgement for me, O Lord, for I have walked with integrity;
I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered.*
- 2. Test me, O Lord, and try me; examine my heart and my mind.*
- 3. For your love is before my eyes; I have walked in your truth.*
- 4. I have not joined the company of the false, nor consorted with the deceitful.*
- 5. I hate the gathering of evildoers and I will not sit down with the wicked.*
- 6. I will wash my hands in innocence, O Lord, that I may go about your altar,*
- 7. To make heard the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all your wonderful deeds.*
- 8. Lord, I love the house of your habitation and the place where your glory abides.*
- 9. Sweep me not away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty,*
- 10. Whose hands are full of wicked schemes and their right hand full of bribes.*
- 11. As for me, I will walk with integrity; redeem me, Lord, and be merciful to me.*
- 12. My foot stands firm; in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.*

Refrain

Lord. I love the place where your glory abides.

Your love, O Lord, is before my eyes.

In Psalm 26, the psalmist asks that God declare him not guilty of charges made against him by his enemies. (vv.1,2) He prays for vindication on the ground that his heart and mind, that is, his inner life, will pass the test of God's examination, perhaps during a night spent in the temple.

Then (vv. 3-5), he takes an oath of innocence, 'For your love is before my eyes; I have walked in your truth,' Inspired by God's steadfast love, he remains in loyalty to God. He will have nothing to do with those, who hide their thoughts in order to deceive other people, and he hates the society of the wicked and godless. This is reminiscent of Psalm 1: 'Blessed are they who have not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the assembly of the scornful.'

The psalmist then performs a ritual to confirm his oath (vv.6,7). He washes his hands, an ancient way of declaring one's innocence. Pilate washed his hands. (Matthew 27,24: So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood, see to it yourselves.') The psalmist joins in a procession round the altar, singing of God's mighty acts in Israel's history, or perhaps of the deliverance, which God will grant him.

Finally (vv.8-12), the psalmist expresses his love for the temple, the place where Israel sees the authority and presence of God, as in Psalm 27: 'To behold the fair beauty of the Lord and to seek his will in his temple.' This is God's glory, his authoritative presence. He then renews his prayer for vindication, asks that his integrity be recognised, and affirms his confidence that God will deliver him and establish his position in the community.

We may try to follow the way of God faithfully, but it is not easy, and we may stray away. After all, there are many distractions in life; we may be influenced by other people's attitudes or scornful comments. We may be afraid of appearing too pious or hypocritical. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount that it isn't easy: 'Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that heads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.' (Matthew 7,13,14)

The psalms take up this position and speak of both the way one should avoid and the way one should follow. The clue to what one should do is found in v.12: 'My foot stands firm; in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.' It is the need to fix our eyes on God's loving kindness, and once we realise that we are loved, we are able to respond.

Prayer

Almighty God,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love toward you
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

(Collect for Trinity 6)