***Psalm 85***

*1. Lord, you were gracious to your land; you restored the fortunes of*

*Jacob.*

*2. You forgave the offence of your people and covered all their sins.*

*3. You laid aside all your fury and turned from your wrathful indignation.*

*4. Restore us again, O God our Saviour,*

*and let your anger cease from us.*

*5. Will you be displeased with us for ever?*

*Will you stretch out your wrath from one generation to another?*

*6. Will you not give us life again, that your people may rejoice in you?*

*7. Show us your mercy, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.*

*8. I will listen to what the Lord God will say,*

*for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful,*

*that they turn not again to folly.*

*9. Truly his salvation is near to those who fear him,*

*that his glory may dwell in our land.*

*10. Mercy and truth are met together,*

*righteousness and peace have kissed each other;*

*11. Truth shall spring up from the earth and righteousness look down from heaven.*

*12. The Lord will indeed give all that is good, and our land will yield its increase.*

*13. Righteousness shall go before him and direct his steps in the way.*

**Refrain**

Show us your mercy, O Lord,

**and grant us your salvation.**

In the first part of Psalm 85 (vv.1-3), a voice praises God for his mercy in forgiving Israel’s sin and for ceasing to be angry. The psalm may have been composed after the exile, and the return from Babylon may be seen as the greatest example of God’s forgiving love.

In the second part (vv.4-7), the congregation pleads for a new revelation of God’s steadfast love. His wrath has placed the people in the realm of death (death often means being separated from God and his way). So, they pray, ‘Will you not give us life again, that your people may rejoice in you?’

In the third part (vv.8 and 9), a priest says that he will listen for God’s answer to the nations’ prayer. He is confident that God will assure his faithful people of peace and salvation and also his glory, that is, his presence among them. ‘I will listen to what the Lord God will say, for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful, that they turn not again to folly.’

In the fourth part (vv.10 and 11), God’s answer is that salvation is a meeting full of joy, as between friends, who have been separated for a long time. This will be a meeting between God’s love and the people’s loyalty. (v.10, ‘Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.’)

In the last part, (vv.12 and 13), the congregation acknowledges that its welfare is the gift of God and there is confidence that God will come in justice and the land will prosper. (‘The Lord will indeed give all that is good, and our land will yield its increase.’)

Psalm 85 if often used during the Christmas season, as it proclaims God’s healing and reconciling power. Jesus came to reveal God to us and to show us how to love, to bring us back and restore us when we have strayed away. He came to assure us that God is always with us, and that he loves us as we are. So, we can pray vv.10 and 11 with that in mind:

‘Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other;

truth shall spring up from the earth and righteousness look down from heaven.’

When that seed is sown, we are set free to be people of love, justice and peace.

**Prayer**

Almighty God,

in Christ you make all things new:

transform the poverty of our nature

by the riches of your grace,

and in the renewal of our lives

make known your heavenly glory;

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, Epiphany 2)