

Psalm 118

1. *O give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his mercy endures for ever.*
2. *Let Israel now proclaim, 'His mercy endures for ever.'*
3. *Let the house of Aaron now proclaim, 'His mercy endures for ever.'*
4. *Let those who fear the Lord proclaim, 'His mercy endures for ever.'*
5. *In my constraint I called to the Lord; the Lord answered and set me free.*
6. *The Lord is at my side; I will not fear; what can flesh do to me?*
7. *With the Lord at my side as my saviour, I shall see the downfall of my enemies.*
8. *It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put any confidence in flesh.*
9. *It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put any confidence in princes.*
10. *All the nations encompassed me,
but by the name of the Lord I drove them back.*
11. *They hemmed me in, they hemmed me in on every side,
but by the name of the Lord I drove them back.*
12. *They swarmed about me like bees; they blazed like fire among thorns,
but by the name of the Lord I drove them back.*
13. *Surely, I was thrust to the brink, but the Lord came to my help.*
14. *The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.*
15. *Joyful shouts of salvation sound from the tents of the righteous.*
16. *'The right hand of the Lord does mighty deeds;
the right hand of the Lord raises up;
the right hand of the Lord does mighty deeds.'*
17. *I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord.*
18. *The Lord has punished me sorely, but he has not given me over to death.*
19. *Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter and give thanks to the Lord.*
20. *This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.*
21. *I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have become
my salvation.*
22. *The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*
23. *This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.*

24. *This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.*
25. *Come, O Lord, and save us, we pray. Come, Lord, send us now prosperity.*
26. *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;
we bless you from the house of the Lord.*
27. *The Lord is God; he has given us light; link the pilgrims with cords
right to the horns of the altar.*
28. *You are my God and I will thank you; you are my God and I will exalt you.*
29. *O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures for ever.*

Refrain

This is the day that the Lord has made;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118 is a thanksgiving liturgy for the king's victorious return from battle. In vv.1-4, the procession approaches the temple, and the priests call the congregation to general thanksgiving. The first verse, 'O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures for ever.' is like the first verse of Psalm 107, which states, 'O give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious, for his steadfast love endures for ever.' In vv. 2-4, Israel, the house of Aaron and those who fear the Lord correspond to those in Psalm 115.

In the next section (vv. 5-13), the king offers his thanksgiving. He had been hard pressed by enemies and called on God for help. (v.5. 'In my constraint I called to the Lord; the Lord answered and set me free.') The king was confident that God was on his side, and so, he has nothing to fear. (vv.6,7, 'The Lord is at my side, I will not fear; what can flesh do to me? With the Lord at my side as my saviour, I shall see the downfall of my enemies.') He feels that trust in God is better than manpower. (vv.8,9. 'It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put any confidence in flesh. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put any confidence in princes.')

God has always been his strength and has given him victory. (v.14, 'The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.') Because of the name of the Lord, that is, God's saving presence, he has defeated his enemies. (v.10, 'All the nations encompassed me, but by the name of the Lord I drove them back.')

In the next part (vv.15-18), the camp of the Israelites echoes with songs of victory. (v.15, 'Joyful shouts of salvation sound from the tents of the righteous.')

They praise the right hand, that is, the strength of God. (v.16, 'The right hand of the Lord does mighty deeds.')

and the king looks forward to a long reign, during which he will tell what God has done. (v.17, 'I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord.')

He sees his troubles as God's discipline. (v.18, 'The Lord has punished me sorely, but he has not given me over to death.')

In the next section (vv.19-25), the king arrives at the temple gates and requests admission, as in Psalm 24, which shows the conditions for entry. (Psalm 24, 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.')

The doors are called the gates of righteousness, because the temple is the place where God's justice is revealed. (v.19, 'Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter and give thanks to the Lord.')

Only those, who have been declared

innocent by God, can enter. (v. 20, 'This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.')

The king replies that his victory is evidence of God's favour. (v.21, 'I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me and have become my salvation.')

Then the people chant their praise of God's marvellous deed. He has made the building stone, which the nations despised, the most important in the building, and, as a result, this is a day of national rejoicing. (v.22, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.' And v.24, 'This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.')

We reinterpret this as referring to Jesus, who was rejected by Israel. Matthew (22, 42) quotes this section of Psalm 118 in his parable of the vineyard, where Matthew is thinking of the Passion of Jesus, his rejection and his being killed. He rises from the dead and becomes the chief cornerstone, Israel being replaced by the Church. We use v.24 to think of Sunday as the day, which the Lord has made.

In the last section (vv.26-29), a blessing is given by the priests, and the procession with palm branches and garlands moves to the altar. The king gives a final thanksgiving. (v.28, 'You are my God and I will thank you; you are my God and I will exalt you.'), and the congregation replies with the same words as in v.1.

Psalm 118 reveals God's steadfast love and mercy and his faithfulness to the covenant made with his people, even though the people on many occasions strayed away. The king's victory was seen as a sign that God remained faithful.

After a war, we rejoice and thank God for victory. We organise street parties and other celebrations. We may thank God for recovery from illness or for finding a solution to a difficult problem. But also, as human beings, we have a need to praise, to look forward and to try to see the positive in our lives, to thank God for the beautiful world in which we live and for other blessings, which we receive. This sentence in Eucharistic Prayer D expresses it splendidly: 'Father of all, we give you thanks for every gift that comes from heaven.'

It is all summed up in this hymn:
Have faith in God, my heart,
trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part
each promise he has made.

Prayer

We thank you, Father for all our joy and all our longing.
You have given us in this world beauty and love;
you have also given us the ordinary, necessary things of daily life.
We thank you, Father, not only for these things
but for the gift of hope,
and for all that reminds us of your promise of eternal life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Worship Now)

