

28. Psalms 83-86

Reflecting on Psalm 83 in Jesus' Company



Psalm 83 is not included in the Liturgy.

Foreign nations are conspiring to wipe out Israel. The psalmist assumes that because they are Israel's enemies they are God's enemies (verse 2). He is pleading with God to destroy them the way he destroyed Israel's enemies at the time of the Judges. He wants God to intervene and reduce the enemies to 'dung on the ground' (verse 10). This way they will be forced to acknowledge GOD 'as the Most High God over all the earth' (verse 18).

Psalm 83 is not a Christian prayer. We should recall that Jesus reveals a very different God, one who lets his sun and rain nurture all, the just and the unjust alike (see Matthew 5:45).

¹O God, do not remain silent;
do not hold your peace and do nothing!
²Even now your enemies are in an uproar.
Those who hate you are confident in victory.

³They lay crafty plans against your people.
They consult together against those you protect.
⁴They say, ‘Come, let us wipe out this nation;
let the name of Israel be remembered no more.’

⁵They conspire together.
Against you they make a pact:
⁶Edom and Ishmael, Moab and Hagar,
⁷Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia and Tyre.
⁸Even Assyria has joined them
to increase the forces of the children of Lot.



Note the absence of any mention of Babylon or Egypt.

⁹Do to them as you did to Midian, [Judges 6-8]
as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the Wadi Kishon. [Judges 4-5]
¹⁰Destroyed at En-dor, they became dung for the ground.

¹¹Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, [Judges 7:25; 8:31]
their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, [Judges 8:5ff]

¹²who said, 'Let us take the pastures of God for our own possession.'

¹³O my God, make them like whirling dust,
like chaff before the wind.

¹⁴As fire consumes the forest,
as flame sets the mountains ablaze,
¹⁵so pursue them closely with your tempest
and terrify them with your hurricane.

¹⁶GOD, cover their faces with shame,
so that they may seek your name.
¹⁷Let them be forever put to shame and dismayed.
Let them perish in disgrace.

¹⁸Let them know that you alone, O GOD,
are the Most High over all the earth.

Praying Psalm 84 with Jesus



¹How lovely is your dwelling place, O mighty GOD!

²How I long, how I am yearning, for the courts of GOD.

My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

O mighty GOD, my king and my God!

³Even the sparrow finds a home,

and the swallow a nest for her brood,

where she may lay her young by your altars.

⁴Blessed and happy are those who live in your house,

ever singing your praise.

⁵Blessed and happy are those who draw their strength from you

as they resolve to go to you on pilgrimage.

⁶As they go through the Baka' valley they enjoy a place of springs;

the early rains cover it with pools.

⁷They go from garrison to garrison.

In Zion they will see the God of gods.

⁸O mighty GOD, hear my prayer;
listen, O God of Jacob!

⁹God, our shield,
look upon the face of your anointed.

¹⁰One day in your courts
is better than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper
in the house of my God
than live in the tents of the wicked.

¹¹For GOD is our sun and shield,
bestowing favour and glory.
GOD never fails to bless
those who walk with integrity.

¹²O mighty GOD, blessed and happy
are they who place their trust in you.

The psalmist expresses his longing, his ‘yearning for the courts of GOD’ (verse 2).

He reflects on the happiness of those who make the pilgrimage to encounter God in his dwelling place.

‘In Zion they will see the God of gods’ (verse 7).

‘I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory’ (Psalm 63:2).

‘One day in your courts is worth a thousand elsewhere’ (verse 10).

Being in the temple is being in communion with God. Nothing matters more than this!

‘Blessed and happy the person whom you choose to bring near to live in your courts. We are filled with the goodness of your house, with the holy gifts of your temple’ (Psalm 65:4).

‘You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shade of the Almighty, will say to GOD: “My refuge, my fortress; my God, I place my trust in you” (Psalm 91:1-2).

Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall his love for Jerusalem and the temple.

We see Jesus as the new temple (John 2:19, 21; Apocalypse 21:22-23). We dwell in him: 'Abide in me as I abide in you' (John 15:4).

We see the Church community as the new temple.

'You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God' (Ephesians 2:21-22).

'You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first born who are enrolled in heaven' (Hebrews 12:22-23).

The ultimate temple is heaven.

'We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ... He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee' (2 Corinthians 5:1, 5).

'God never fails those who walk with integrity' (verse 11).

External action (pilgrimage) is not enough. We must live in a way that is in accordance with God's will.

In his commentary on this psalm, Saint Augustine writes:

‘There remains nothing to desire apart from God. They no longer love the earth; they love the One who created the heavens and the earth. They love Him, but they are not yet with him. From this arises their desire, a desire that is not immediately satisfied, and so it grows so that it can hold as much as it desires. It will not be little what God will give to those who nurture such a desire, nor will the food be scarce for those who are determined to make themselves capable of receiving such a great good. God will not give to his creatures anything less than Himself, the Creator of everything. Train yourself, therefore, to welcome God. Long from afar for the Good that you are destined to possess for ever ...

Augustine (continued)

Let us not tire of giving praise to God. If you lack love, you lack praise. However, if love is eternal, because the beauty of God is inexhaustible, then do not fear, because you will be able to praise forever the One whom you can love forever ...

People desire myriads of days and want to live long lives here below. Have scant regard for these myriads of days and long only for that day which knows no beginning and no end; that unique day, that eternal day, not issuing from a yesterday, and not leading into a tomorrow. May our desire be for that unique day.'

Psalm 84

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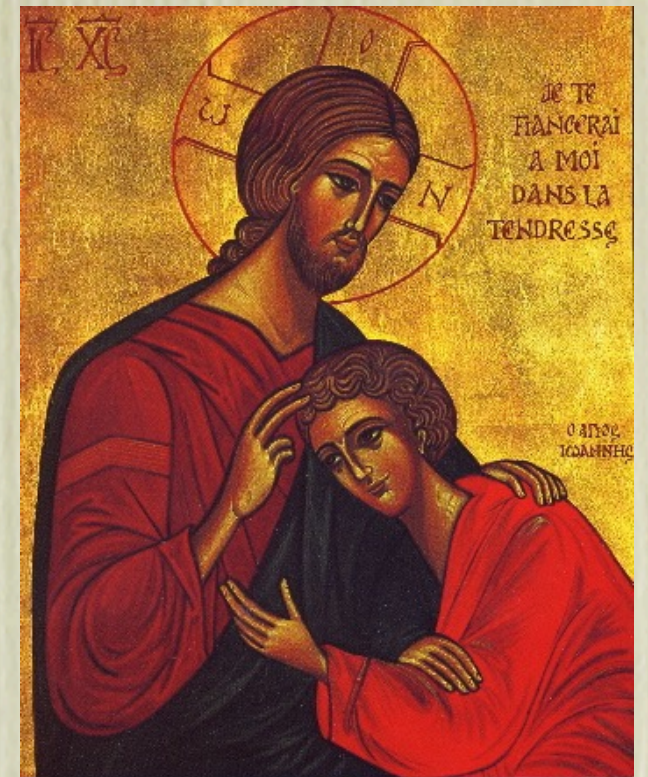
My heart and my flesh sing for joy
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as they resolve to go to you on pilgrimage.



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Praying Psalm 85 with Jesus



¹O GOD, you favoured your land;
you revived the fortunes of Jacob.

²You wiped away the guilt of your people.
You covered over all their sins.

⁴Revive us, O God our Saviour,

⁷Show us your covenant love, O GOD,
and grant us your salvation.

⁸Let me hear what GOD has to say,
a voice that speaks of peace:

peace to the people who turn to God in their hearts.

⁹Surely God's salvation is at hand for the faithful,
and God's glory will fill our land.

¹⁰Covenant love and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have embraced.

¹¹Faithfulness springs up from the ground,
and justice looks down from heaven.

¹²GOD will give prosperity,
and our land will yield its harvest.

¹³Justice clears a path for God.
Justice points the way to peace.

Omitted

3 You withdrew all your wrath, you turned from the heat of your anger.

4 End your grievance against us.

5 Will you be angry with us forever?

Will you prolong your anger generation after generation?

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

²You wiped away the guilt of your people.
You covered over all their sins.

The psalmist recalls God's grace poured out on his people in the past, especially God's readiness to forgive. Sin blocks our receiving God's grace, but it does not stop God offering grace, for God is always ready to 'wipe away our guilt', and 'cover over' our sins. Sin does not stop us from being God's people.

'Blessed and happy are they whose sins are forgiven. Blessed and happy are they to whom GOD imputes no guilt, whose spirit is no longer darkened by sin. If you remain silent, you will waste away, weighed down by sin day and night, your strength dried up as in a summer drought. If you acknowledge your sin and stop hiding your guilt, if you confess your transgressions, your God will forgive your sin and remove your guilt' (Psalm 32:1-5).

⁷Show us your covenant love, O GOD,

The Psalmist prays to God: ‘**show us your covenant love.**’ He goes on to declare that ‘**covenant love and faithfulness have met**’ (verse 10). The Hebrew word *hesed* is found 127 times in the psalms. Its primary reference is to the basic relationship that binds a family or clan together. Outside the family or clan it is supported by a treaty or an oath. Hence the translation ‘covenant love.’

It is used of GOD who is committed to love God’s people.

‘I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in covenant love (*hesed*), and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know GOD’ (Hosea 2:19-20).

hesed is often linked with 'emet, where 'emet emphasizes the permanency, certainty and lasting validity of the hesed of GOD. Being 'full of covenant love' is one of the qualities attributed to God in the creedal formula that recurs throughout the Bible: 'GOD, GOD, a God tenderly compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in covenant love and faithfulness' (Exodus 34:6).

'Return to GOD, your God, for he is gracious and tenderly compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in covenant love' (Joel 2:13).

'I knew that you are a gracious God and tenderly compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in covenant love' (Jonah 4:2).

'You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and tenderly compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in covenant love' (Nehemiah 9:17).

We find this creedal formula a number of times in the psalms:

‘You, O God*, are a God tenderly compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in covenant love and faithfulness’ (Psalm 86:15).

‘GOD is tenderly compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in covenant love’ (Psalm 103:8).

‘GOD is gracious and tenderly compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in kindness’ (Psalm 145:8).

The Bible uses an abundance of words to speak of God’s covenant love. God ‘sends’ covenant love (Psalm 57:3); ‘remembers’ covenant love (Psalm 25:6); ‘shows’ covenant love (Psalm 85:7); ‘keeps’ covenant love (Psalm 89:28); ‘surrounds’ with covenant love (Psalm 32:10) are just a few examples.

GOD's covenant love to us requires that we show this love to others:

‘What does GOD require of you but to do justice, and to show covenant love, and to walk humbly with your God?’ (Micah 6:8).

Return to your God, hold fast to covenant love and justice, and wait continually for your God’ (Hosea 12:6).

‘A throne shall be established in kindness in the tent of David, and on it shall sit in faithfulness a ruler who seeks justice and is swift to do what is right’ (Isaiah 16:5).

‘Thus says Mighty GOD: Render true judgments, show covenant love and mercy to one another’ (Zechariah 7:9).

⁹Surely God's salvation is at hand for the faithful

God's 'faithful ones' (ḥasidim) are those who welcome God's covenant love (ḥesed) to them and who are faithful to the covenant. The salvation that is 'at hand' was revealed finally in Jesus. Holding the child Jesus to his heart, Simeon declared: 'My eyes have seen your salvation' (Luke 2:30). Under house arrest in Rome, Paul says to the Jewish leaders: 'Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen' (Acts 28:28). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews states: 'Having been made perfect, Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him' (Hebrews 5:9).

⁹God's glory will fill our land.

In Jesus, God's glory 'fills the land.'

'God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Colossians 1:27).

'The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God' (2 Corinthians 4:4).

¹⁰Covenant love and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have embraced.

¹¹Faithfulness springs up from the ground,
and justice looks down from heaven.

¹²GOD will give prosperity,
and our land will yield its harvest.

¹³Justice clears a path for God.
Justice points the way to peace.

‘Just’ is sometimes translated ‘righteous’, which combines two words: ‘right’ and ‘wise’ (eous). To be ‘righteous’ one must be wise as to what is right and behave accordingly. This means doing the will of God. ‘The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Romans 14:17).

⁸Let me hear what GOD has to say,
a voice that speaks of peace:
peace to the people who turn to God in their hearts.

¹⁰justice and peace have embraced.

The Hebrew shalom means ‘peace’, but much more than the absence of war. It includes growth, prosperity, completeness, wholeness, and harmony. It is the result of God’s blessing. This is expressed beautifully in the priestly blessing:

‘May GOD bless you and keep you.

May GOD make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you.

May GOD lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace’ (Numbers 6:24-26).

It is our responsibility to welcome God's grace, and so this divine blessing of 'peace' is conditional upon our living a righteous life:

'The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever' (Isaiah 32:17).

Speaking of Jesus who brought together the Jews and the non-Jews into one family of love, Paul writes: 'He is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us' (Ephesians 2:14).

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favours!' (Luke 2:14).

'Jesus stood among them and said to them: Peace be with you' (Luke 24:36).

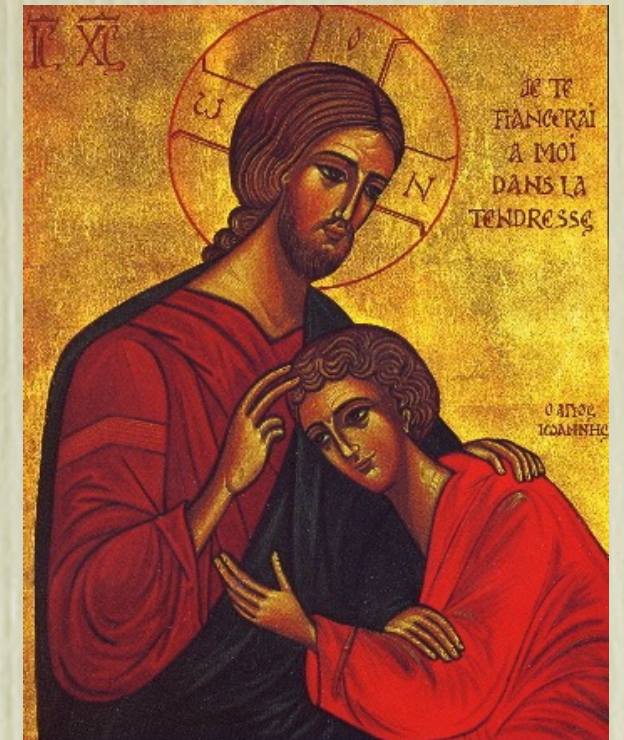
Paul prays: 'Peace be upon them, and mercy' (Galatians 6:16).

Psalm 85

¹O GOD, you favoured your land;
you revived the fortunes of Jacob.
²You wiped away the guilt of your people.
You covered over all their sins.

⁴Revive us, O God our Saviour,
⁷Show us your covenant love, O GOD,
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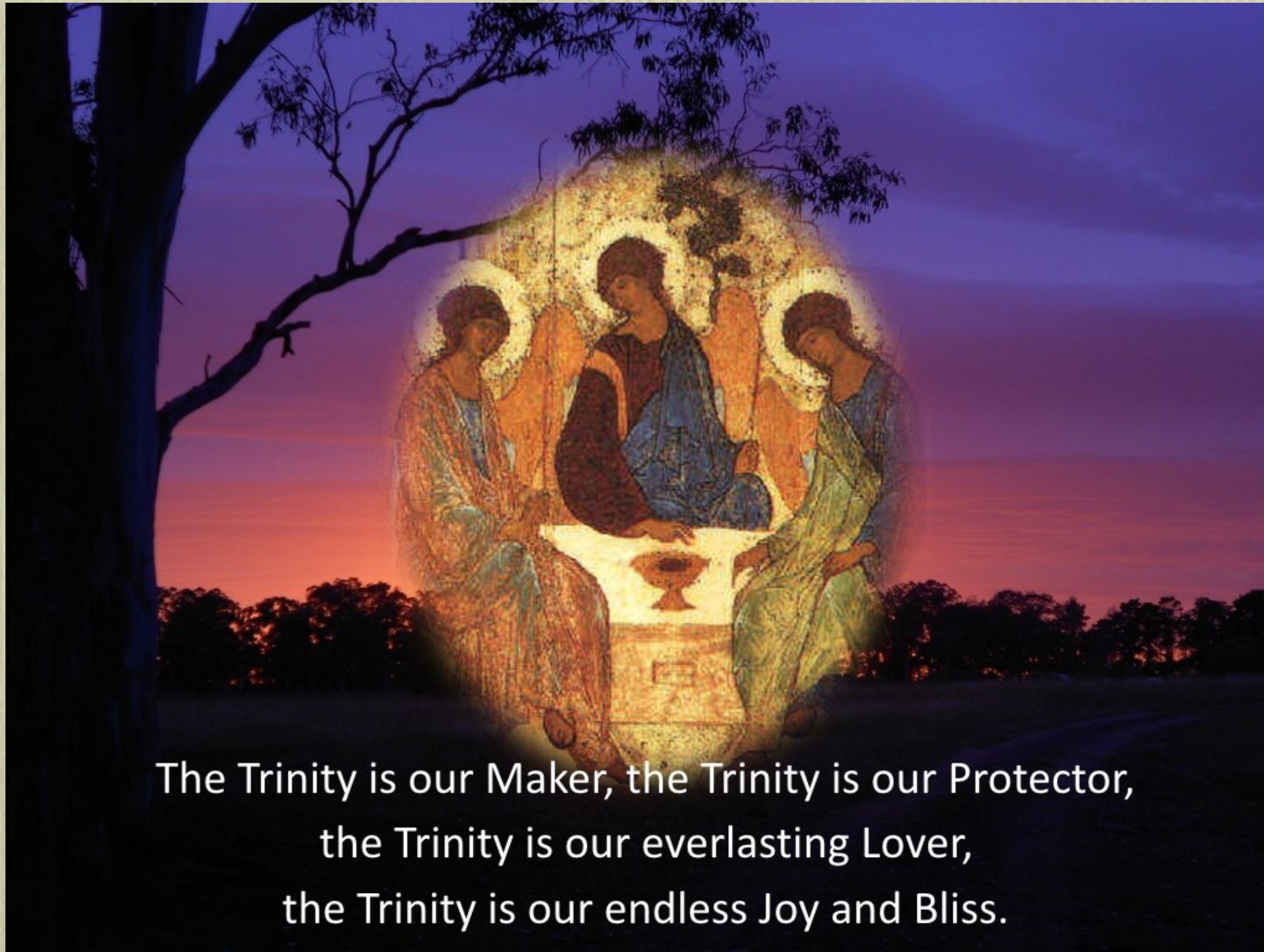
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Praying Psalm 86 with Jesus



Psalm 86 is a particularly beautiful psalm. We can hear Jesus praying it, and are invited to join him. The Church has chosen Psalm 86 for the Prayer of the Church, Night Prayer for Mondays.

It is also included in the Morning Prayer for Wednesday Week 3.

In the Lectionary it is chosen as the Responsorial Psalm for the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A.

¹Listen closely to me, O GOD,
answer me, for I am poor and needy.
²Watch over me, for to you I am devoted.
Save your servant, for I put my trust in you.

You are my God.
³Be gracious to me for to you I cry all day long.
⁴Give joy to your servant,
for to you, God*, I lift up my soul.

⁵You, my God*, are good and forgiving,
abounding in covenant love to all who call.
⁶Listen to my prayer; attend to my cry.
⁷In the day of my trouble I call on you,
knowing you will answer me.

⁸There is none like you among the gods, O God*.

There are no deeds like yours.

⁹All the nations you formed will come
and bow down before you.

They will glorify your name.

¹⁰For indeed you are great.

You do wondrous things; you who alone are God.

¹¹Teach me your way, O GOD,
that I may walk in your truth.

Give me an undivided heart
that I may revere your name.

¹²I thank you, my God, with all my heart,
and I will honour you forever.

¹³For great is your covenant love toward me.
You have rescued me from the grave.

¹⁴The insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life.
They give no thought to you.

¹⁵But you are God.
You are tenderly compassionate. You are gracious.
You are slow to anger,
abounding in covenant love and faithfulness.

¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious.
Give your strength to your servant.
Save the child of your serving girl.

¹⁷Show me a sign of your favour.
So that those who hate me may see and be put to shame,
because you, O GOD, are my salvation and my comfort.

⁵You, my God*, are good and forgiving,
abounding in covenant love to all who call.

‘If you, O GOD, should mark our guilt, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness. For this we revere you’ (Psalm 130:3-4).

The psalmist speaks of God’s ‘covenant love’ (hesed, verse 5, 13 and 15).

There are people who are wanting to kill the psalmist. They could not care less about God (verse 14). God has already saved the psalmist from death (verse 13). The psalmist is asking for another sign of God’s favour (verse 7).

¹⁵You are God. You are tenderly compassionate. You are gracious.
You are slow to anger, abounding in covenant love and faithfulness.

Verse 15 repeats the creedal formula of Exodus 34:6.

⁸There is none like you among the gods, O God*.

The psalmist does not deny the existence of other gods, but his claim is that none of them is like the God of Israel (verse 8). We find this claim in other psalms.

‘How many wonderful things you have done, GOD, my God, how many things you have thought up to favour us.

There is no one like you’ (Psalm 40:5).

‘You have done great things, O God, who can compare with you?’ (Psalm 71:19).

‘Who in the skies can be compared to GOD?

Who is like GOD among the heavenly beings?

God is feared in the council of the holy ones,

great and awesome throughout his court’ (Psalm 89:6-7).

The psalmist claims that all nations are formed by GOD. He looks forward to the day when all nations will recognise GOD, and ‘**will bow down before you God*, and glorify your name**’ (verse 9).

Only GOD is really God: ‘You who alone are God’ (verse 10). We find the same claim elsewhere in the psalms.

‘Let them know that you alone, O GOD, are the Most High over all the earth’ (Psalm 83:18).

¹¹Give me an undivided heart

The psalmist wants to do God’s will. He is confident that he will walk securely because of God’s faithfulness to him, and he is praying that he will be faithful to God.

¹³You, O GOD, are my salvation and my comfort.

The word 'comfort' (Hebrew *nĕm*) is found in 5 other psalms.

'Though I should walk in death's dark valley I fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff give me comfort' (Psalm 23:4).

'Insults have broken my heart. I have reached the end of my strength. I looked in vain for compassion, for comforters, but none could I find' (Psalm 69:20).

'You will comfort me once again' (Psalm 71:21).

'In my anguish, I search for you, my God*. My hands are raised at night without ceasing; my soul refuses to be comforted' (Psalm 77:2).

'This is my comfort in my distress, that your promise gives me life ... Let your covenant love become my comfort according to your promise to your servant' (Psalm 119:50, 76).

‘I am he who comforts you’ (Isaiah 51:12).

‘As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you;
you will be comforted in Jerusalem’ (Isaiah 66:13).

Jesus assures his disciples that those who mourn now will be comforted (Matthew 5:4). At the Last Supper he promises his disciples: ‘I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter to be with you forever ... You know the Spirit, because the Spirit abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you ... You will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you’ (John 14:16-20).

Luke records that the Church increased in numbers 'in the comfort of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 9:31).

Paul exhorts the Christian community in Philippi: 'If there is any appeal in Christ, any comfort from love, any communion in the Spirit, any movements of compassion and feelings of love, make my joy complete, be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one soul and one mind' (Philippians 2:1-2).

Psalm 86

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answer me, for I am poor and needy.
²Watch over me, for to you I am devoted.
Save your servant, for I put my trust in you.

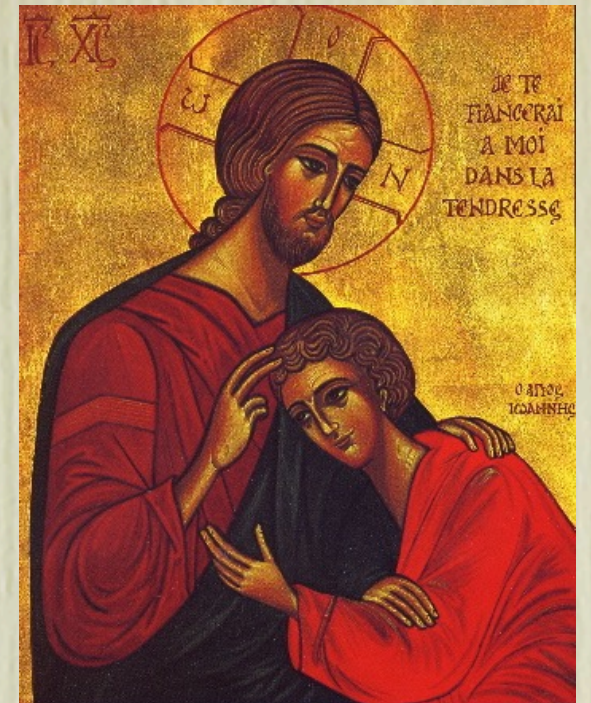
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