

PSALM 19

For the End; a psalm by David. †

1

May the Lord hear you in the day of affliction;
May the name of the God of Jacob defend you.

2

May He send you help from His holy place,
And may He support you from Zion.

3

May He remember every sacrifice of yours,
And may your whole burnt offering be honored. (Pause)

4

May He give you according to your heart,
May He fulfill all your counsel.

5

We will greatly rejoice in Your salvation,
And in the name of our God we will be magnified.

6

Now I know the Lord has saved His anointed;
He will hear him from His holy heaven;
The salvation of His right hand is mighty.

7

Some glory in chariots, some in horses,
But in the name of the Lord our God we shall be magnified.

8

Their feet were tied together; so they fell;
But we rose up and were restored.

9

O Lord, save Your King,
And hear us in the day we call upon You.

For the End; a psalm by David.

REARDON: Recited each morning at Matins as a sort of blessing that Christians invoke on one another at the day's commencement...

AGUSTINE: This is a well-known title; and it is not Christ who speaks; but the prophet speaks to Christ, under the form of wishing, foretelling things to come.

THEODORET: When in former times Sennacherib invaded Judah and dispatched a huge army commanded by Rabshakeh to besiege Jerusalem, he sent written word to Hezekiah [son of Ahaz and the 14th king of Judah, his reign was between c. 715 and 686 BC] full of every blasphemy and impiety. On receipt of this letter, blessed Hezekiah, a man adorned with utter godliness [he enacted sweeping religious reforms, during which he removed the worship of foreign deities from the Temple in Jerusalem, and restored the worship of Yahweh, God

of Israel], invited the prophet Isaiah to intercede for him, hastened to the divine Temple, opened the letter, and showed it to God, revealing the enemies' impiety, and beseeching him to account of the blasphemy committed to demonstrate to the Assyrians his peculiar force. Many generations previously, blessed David prophesies this, illuminated by the all-holy Spirit, and recites the present psalm, showing the people praying with the king and asking for his supplication to be accepted.

1. May the Lord hear you in the day of affliction;

EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA: This entire psalm voices a prayer as spoken by holy people to the person of Christ. For since for our sakes and on our behalf he received insult when he became man, we are taught to join our prayers with his as he prays and supplicates the Father on our behalf, as one who repels both visible and invisible attacks against us. PROOF OF THE GOSPEL 4.16.5.

2. May the name of the God of Jacob defend you.

3. May He send you help from His holy place,

And may He support you from Zion.

REARDON: The history of Christian piety knows another way to pray this psalm—namely, as a prayer of the Church addressed to Christ Himself, who on her behalf mounts the hill of Calvary "on the day of affliction"...

CHRYSOSTOM: Wherever the Holy spirit is present, He makes men of gold out of men of clay. Look, I pray you, at Peter now: examine well that timid one, and devoid of understanding; as Christ said, 'Are ye also yet without understanding? (Mt 15:16). Consider also the unanimity of the Apostles. They themselves ceded to him the office of speaking; for it was not necessary that all should speak. 'And he lifted up his voice,' and spoke to them with great boldness. Such a thing it is to be a spiritual man! Only let us also bring ourselves into a state meet for the grace from above, and all becomes easy. For as a man of fire falling into the midst of straw would take no harm, but do it to others; nor could he take any harm, but they, in assailing him destroy themselves. For the case here was just as if one carrying hay should attack one bearing fire: even so did the Apostles encounter their adversaries with great boldness.

For what did it harm the Apostles, even though the multitude was so great? Did not their adversaries spend all their rage? Did they not turn the distress upon themselves? Of all mankind, were ever any so possessed with both rage and terror, as those become possessed? Were they not in any agony, and did they not tremble and become dismayed? For hear what they say, 'ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us' (Acts 5:28).

Did the Apostles not fight against poverty and hunger: against ignominy and infamy (for they were accounted deceivers): were they not subjected to ridicule and mockery? For in their case the contraries met: some laughed at them, others punished them. Were they not made a mark for the wrathful passions, and for the mirth of whole cities, exposed to factions and conspiracies: to fire, and sword, and wild beasts? Did not war beset them from every quarter, in ten thousand forms? And were they any more affected in their minds by all these things that they would have been at seeing them in a dream or a picture?

With bare body they took field against all the armed, though against them all men had arbitrary power; against them were terrors of rulers, force of arms, in cities and strong walls: without experience, without skill of the tongue, and in the condition of quite ordinary men, matched against juggling conjurors, against impostors, against the whole throng of sophists, of rhetoricians, of philosophers, grown moldy in the Academy and the walks of the Peripatetics, against all these they fought out battle. And the man whose occupation had been about lakes, so mastered them, as if it cost him not so much ado as even a contest with dumb fishes: for just as if the opponents he had to outwit were indeed more mute than fishes, so easily did he get the better of them!

**4. May He remember every sacrifice of yours,
And may your whole burnt offering be honored. (Pause)**

THEODORET: Since also in time of peace he gave attention to divine worship, they are justified in recounting this of him, beseeching the God of all to take account of the king's godliness, remember his many rituals of all kinds and in turn give peace so that he may placate him with further sacrifices. Symmachus rendered this way: "and may he make your offering greater," that is giving the security that comes from peace, may he give you the opportunity to placate him with further sacrifices.

REARDON: Our Lord's immolation on the Cross is the point of reference...Prayed in this way, our psalm is the "Amen" of the Church to the pouring out of the redemptive blood, when "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many." (Heb 9:28)

**5. May He give you according to your heart,
May He fulfill all your counsel.**

THEODORET: We beseech the righteous judge, he is saying, to grant a response appropriate to your purity of soul.

REARDON: The Amen of the Church to the prayer Christ makes for her benefit: "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word....I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am." (John 17:20,24)....

**6. We will greatly rejoice in Your salvation,
And in the name of our God we will be magnified.**

THEODORET: When you receive the requests, we shall share the joy, becoming the cynosure [center of attention] of all eyes, thanks to the power of God.

REARDON: In like manner when we say, "May the Lord fulfill all your requests," it is especially the "Amen" of the Church to such petitions as, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do (Luke 23:34) and, "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me." (John 17:11)

**7. Now I know the Lord has saved His anointed;
He will hear him from His holy heaven;**

THEODORET: We have learned from the events themselves, he is saying, that our king trusted in God and will win salvation; offering supplications in the Temple below, he receives help from on high. In fact after he showed him praying below he shows him being helped from on high.

The salvation of His right hand is mighty.

THEODORET: The greatest force for salvation is the power of his right hand, which he extends to those approaching him. Now once more he said "right hand" in human fashion, referring to the divine operation in this way.

**8. Some glory in chariots, some in horses,
But in the name of the Lord our God we shall be magnified.**

**9. Their feet were tied together; so they fell;
But we rose up and were restored.**

THEODORET: They trusted in horses and chariots, he is saying, and enjoyed no benefit from them, but were caught up in unseen entanglements and collapsed. We by contrast invoked divine assistance and won salvation in visible manner, and emerged superior to the adversaries, as if the enemies had been stricken down with fear.

REARDON: In contrast to the worship of the Church, who trusts thus in the blood of the Lamb, there are those who place their confidence elsewhere: "some trust in chariots, and some in horses." This horse trusting appears likewise in the prophets (e.g. Is 31:1; 36:9)

These "horses" in which men put their trust, represent the designs of the worldly and powerful, but they are profoundly vain. Holy Scripture will finally describe these horse as white and carrying a conqueror, as red and bearing a warrior, as black and transporting famine, as pale and ridden by Death. These horse and their riders represent the forces of the world in its opposition to God, and "power was given to them over a fourth of the earth" (Rev 6:1-8). That is to say, these horses, in which men put their trust, will return to exact their toll on human happiness and human history.

OREGIN: If one of us remembers with gratitude the benefits he has received and wishes to offer God praise, how many of them would each of us have to recount in detail? for souls that have become for the most part barren, when they perceive the sterility of their own governing reason and the barrenness of their own mind, through persistent prayer they conceive from the Holy Spirit saving words filled with visions of the truth; and they give birth to them. And because there are vast hosts of the opposing power who war against us and wish to exterminate us from faith in God, how many enemies march against us? But if we take courage from the fact that they call upon chariots and they call upon horses, while we call upon the name of the Lord, then we shall see that in truth a horse is a vain hope for salvation (cf Ps 32:17). Moreover, the one who trusts in praising God often cuts in pieces even the chief captain of the adversary, that deceptive and plausible word, who makes many even of those who suppose they are believers cower in fear. And what must we say about all those who, when they have repeatedly fallen into temptations hard to overcome and more burning than any flame, have suffered nothing from them, but have passed through them entirely unharmed, not even getting as they ordinarily would the harm of the smell of hostile fire? (cf. Song of the Three Children, Dan 3:27). Still more, among how many wild beasts made savage against us, evil spirits and savage men, have some fallen and have stopped their mouths with prayers, since they have not been able to strike their teeth against those of us who have become

members of Christ (cf. 1Cor 6:15, 12:27)? For often the Lord has crushed together the fangs of the lions for each one of the saints, and they have been set at naught like water that runs away (cf. Ps 57:6-7). And we know that fugitives from God's orders who have been swallowed up by death, which at first prevails over them, have been saved through repentance from so great an evil, since they did not despair of being able to be saved even though they had been made captive in the belly of the death (cf. Jonah 2:1-2). For death has prevailed and swallowed them up, but against God has taken away every tear from every face (cf Isa 25:8).

**10. O Lord, save Your King,
And hear us in the day we call upon You.**

THEODORET: Having enjoyed such support, therefore, we beg that we ourselves and our king may share in it unceasingly.

REARDON: Yet it still remains for Christ to finally triumph in our lives. Hitherto, after all, "it has not yet been revealed what we shall be" (John 3:2). There is still a future tense to the Christian life. "we shall be magnified in the name of the Lord our God, says the psalm. Until that magnification be finally done, each of us must confess, "not that I have already attained, or am already perfected," (Phil 3:12) We continue, then, to plead: "O Lord, save the King," and "hear us on the day we call upon you.