

## PSALM 20

1 *For the End; a psalm by David. †*

2

O Lord, the king shall be glad in Your power,  
And in Your salvation he will greatly rejoice.

3

You gave him his soul's desire,  
And You did not deprive him of his lips' request. (Pause)

4

For You anticipated him with blessings of goodness;  
You placed a crown of precious stones on his head.

5

He asked You for life, and You gave it to him,  
Length of days unto ages of ages.

6

Great is his glory in Your salvation;  
Glory and majesty You shall place upon him.

7

For You shall give him blessing unto ages of ages;  
You shall fill him with the joy of Your presence.

8

For the king hopes in the Lord,  
And in the mercy of the Most High he will not be shaken.

9

May Your hand be found on all Your enemies;  
May Your right hand find all who hate You.

10

You shall make them like a fiery furnace  
In the time of Your presence;  
The Lord shall throw them into confusion in His wrath,  
And the fire shall devour them.

11

You shall destroy their offspring from the earth  
And their seed from among the sons of men.

12

For they vented all their evils against You;  
They reasoned through a counsel they could not establish.

13

For You shall make them turn their back;  
Among Your remnants, You shall make ready their countenance.

14

Be exalted, O Lord, in Your power;  
We will sing and praise Your mighty deeds.

ATHANASIUS Psalm 21 reveals Christ's kingdom, and the power of his judgment, and his coming again in the flesh to us and the summoning of the nations. ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PSALMS p26

THEODORET: After that famous and illustrious victory and the unseen destruction of the Assyrians, blessed Hezekiah fell ill. Learning from the prophet Isaiah that he would die, he appeased God with his hot tears and gained release from the illness, and received a promise of fifteen years of life. Once again, therefore, the divine David wrote this psalm in the person of the people, singing the praise of God for the king's health.

REARDON : Holy Church, both East and West, rather early decided that Psalm 20 is best prayed during the earliest hours of Sunday morning, the resurrection day of her Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, traditionally it was chanted during the night's vigil between Saturday and Sunday, the weekly nocturnal watch commemorative of the Passover, wherein God's Church celebrates her freedom from the bondage of sin, death and hell. (That weekly service is referred to in Acts 12:5, 12; 20:7-11 and slightly alter in a letter of Pliny to Trajan.) This traditional liturgical context of Psalm 20 provides the proper interpretation of its final line, "Rise up, O Lord, in Your strength; we will sing and praise your deeds of power."

The voice of the Church herself is the voice of this psalm, glorifying the Father for the Son's paschal victory over sin, death and hell. The proper sense of Psalm 20 may be summarized as: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ....In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph 1:3.7)

For the end: a Psalm by David.

1. **O Lord, the king shall be glad in Your power,**
2. **And in Your salvation he will greatly rejoice.**
3. **You gave him his soul's desire, And You did not deprive him of his lips' request. (Pause)**

THEODORET: Being powerful and loving, he says, you received our king's prayer favorably, and granted him all his requests—or, rather, you gave him gifts beyond his requests, as he said further:

REARDON: This is the rejoicing of "Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising he shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb 12:2)

4. **For You anticipated him with blessings of goodness; You placed a crown of precious stones on his head.**

THEODORET: Without being asked you awarded kingship to him, adorning his head with the royal crown out of your peculiar generosity.

5. **He asked You for life, and You gave it to him, Length of days unto ages of ages.**

THEODORET: He received what he asked, the psalmist is saying, and gained life for which he longed. The word "forever", you see, indicates also the future life prepared for the saints which is indestructible.

REARDON: And what did Jesus pray during His Passion? "He asked life of You." answers the psalm. AND what sort of Life? The mere survival of his earthly body? Hardly. The object of Jesus' prayer was, was rather, the total life that stands forever victorious over death, the irruption of the divine life into the world by reason of His own passage through death to glory.

True eternal life is not a simple continuation of man's earthly existence. It is something new altogether... This is the divine life given in the Resurrection, of which Jesus said: "Amen, Amen, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5:25,26).

**6. Great is his glory in Your salvation; Glory and majesty You shall place upon him.**

THEODORET: You not only granted him salvation but also made him illustrious and exalted, and as well a cause of wonder both for the amazing death of the enemies and for the sun's moving backwards. Now, this became so well known everywhere on land and sea that the king of the Babylonians sent gifts to those who once upon a time gave gifts to the Assyrians, suspecting that it was on account of Hezekiah that the sun did this or had it done to it, prompted by the sign of the Assyrians' death.

**7. For You shall give him blessing unto ages of ages; You shall fill him with the joy of Your presence.**

THEODORET: He will be famous in all generations, the psalmist is saying, and on everybody's lips for the great degree of confidence he enjoys with you. Symmachus in fact put "before your presence" for "in your presence"; so his meaning is that he will have joy and constant satisfaction by winning your presence, that is, your favor. Now, his trust in you was responsible for this...

REARDON: This eternal life is joy forever in God's presence..

**8. For the king hopes in the Lord, And in the mercy of the Most High he will not be shaken.**

THEODORET: By enjoying your grace he is stronger than those at war with him, yet he enjoys it through trusting not in any human being but in your hope.

REARDON: By reason of His Resurrection, says the psalm, Jesus reigns as King, the very title that Pilate, in God's providential irony, affixed to the Cross itself

**9. May Your hand be found on all Your enemies; May Your right hand find all who hate You.**

THEODORET: Symmachus said this more clearly: "Your hand will lay hold of all your foes; your right hand will find all those who hate you." Now these words are consistent with the theme: the king's trust in your hope was not idle but arose from his knowledge that your right hand is stronger than all the enemies and will both lay

hold of the swiftest and succeed in undoing the strongest. "right hand" and "hand" once again mean "operation."

**10. You shall make them like a fiery furnace In the time of Your presence; The Lord shall throw them into confusion in His wrath, And the fire shall devour them.**

**11. You shall destroy their offspring from the earth And their seed from among the sons of men.**

THEODORET: It is easy for you to ignite them like a baking pan and to destroy them like inflammable material—and not only them but also their progeny (he called them seed and fruit)—so that all memory of them is blotted out. Now, the phrase "at the time of your appearance" means at the time of your wrath, when you think fit for it to happen and judge the moment for punishment appropriate.

**12. For they vented all their evils against You; They reasoned through a counsel they could not establish.**

THEODORET: Since they wagged their tongue against you, and employed blasphemous words.

THEODORET: While some of the copies have "succeed," Symmachus put it this way: "They considered impractical ideas." Now, in this he foretells the blasphemous remarks of the Assyrians: "Do not let the God in whom you believe deceive you into thinking he will deliver Jerusalem from my hand." (Cf 2Kings 18:29-35) In connection with these words he says, "They considered impractical ideas"...expecting to prevail over the true God like the idols.

**13. For You shall make them turn their back; Among Your remnants, You shall make ready their countenance.**

THEODORET: Symmachus, on the other hand, has this: "Because you will turn them about.": as they flee the angel's blow (Cf. 2Kings 19:35) you will rout them and force them to turn their backs so that as they depart they may broadcast what has happened.

**14. Be exalted, O Lord, in Your power; We will sing and praise Your mighty deeds.**

Not for being lowly is God exalted, nor does he receive what he does not possess; instead, what he possesses he reveals. So it was right for the psalmist to say, "Be exalted, O LORD in your power:" your exaltation is revealed in your ineffable power, which we shall continue to celebrate and sing, recounting your marvelous works.