

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Second Sunday in Lent

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Rector

Psalms:

Psalm 86. *Inclina, Domine.*

BOW down thine ear, O LORD, and hear me; * for I am poor, and in misery.

2 Preserve thou my soul, for I am holy: * my God, save thy servant that putteth his trust in thee.

3 Be merciful unto me, O Lord; * for I will call daily upon thee.

4 Comfort the soul of thy servant; * for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

5 For thou, Lord, art good and gracious, * and of great mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

6 Give ear, LORD, unto my prayer, * and ponder the voice of my humble desires.

7 In the time of my trouble I will call upon thee; * for thou hearest me.

8 Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; * there is not one that can do as thou doest.

9 All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship thee, O Lord; * and shall glorify thy Name.

10 For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: * thou art God alone.

11 Teach me thy way, O LORD, and I will walk in thy truth: * O knit my heart unto thee, that I may fear thy Name.

12 I will thank thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart; * and will praise thy Name for evermore.

13 For great is thy mercy toward me; * and thou hast delivered my soul from the nethermost hell.

14 O God, the proud are risen against me; * and the congregations of violent men have sought after my soul, and have not set thee before their eyes.

15 But thou, O Lord God, art full of compassion and mercy, * long-suffering, plenteous in goodness and truth.

16 O turn thee then unto me, and have mercy upon me; * give thy strength unto thy servant, and help the son of thine handmaid.

17 Show some token upon me for good; that they who hate me may see it, and be ashamed, * because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.

GLORY be to the Father, and to the Son, * and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, * world without end. Amen.

Psalm 142. *Voce mea ad Dominum.*

I CRIED unto the LORD with my voice; * yea, even unto the LORD did I make my supplication.

2 I poured out my complaints before him, * and showed him of my trouble.

3 When my spirit was in heaviness, thou knewest my path; * in the way wherein I walked, have they privily laid a snare for me.

4 I looked also upon my right hand, * and saw there was no man that would know me.

5 I had no place to flee unto, * and no man cared for my soul.

6 I cried unto thee, O LORD, and said, * Thou art my hope, and my portion in the land of the living.

7 Consider my complaint; * for I am brought very low.

8 O deliver me from my persecutors; * for they are too strong for me.

9 Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks unto thy Name; * which thing if thou wilt grant me, then shall the righteous resort unto my company.

GLORY be to the Father, and to the Son, * and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, * world without end. Amen.

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-seventh Verse of the eighth Chapter of the First Book of the Kings, commonly called the Third Book of the Kings.²

“If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be; What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;) That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. Moreover concerning a stranger, that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name’s sake; (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house; Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twelfth Verse of the third Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Colossians.³

“... Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

The Psalms take on new meaning when we read them as the Fathers read them. By “the Fathers” I mean the early theologians, most of them bishops, who worked out the theology that is preserved in the great Creeds. It was they who preserved the teachings of the Apostles and combated the great heresies that arose in the first few centuries as the Church developed structure, refined and standardized liturgical practices, and settled on the books that were to be included in the Bible.

The New Testament writers frequently quote verses from the Old Testament and apply them to events in the life of Christ and the church. Jesus Himself said to the religious leaders of His day, “You search the Scriptures believing that in them you have eternal life, but it is they that testify of me.”⁴

So the Fathers read the Psalms as prophecies and apply them to Christ. There were two Psalms read this morning. Let’s look at them through the same lens that was used by the Fathers, the Apostles and evangelists, and Jesus Himself.

Psalm 86 begins: “Bow down thine ear, O Lord and hear me; for I am poor and in misery.” That surely applies to Him who said, “Foxes have holes, and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”⁵

“Preserve thou my soul, for I am holy.” Who among us can say that? To be holy means to be set apart from the ordinary. The Apostles were holy because Jesus called them out of their ordinary lives and set them apart to be His emissaries. The Bible is holy because it stands apart from other books as the written Word of God. This building is Holy because it is set apart for the worship of God. But Jesus is holy because He is unique. He is no ordinary man. He is the Word of God made flesh.

The following verses tell how the Holy One prays daily to the Father, and how the Father hears Him and sends Him aid and comfort in the midst of all His troubles.

When we reach verse 9 we cannot help but think of the visit of the Magi: “All the nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship thee.” We should also think of the end of St. Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus sends His Apostles into the whole world to preach the Gospel to all people. That in turn was a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that in him (which is to say in his descendants) all the families of the earth would be blessed.

The mercy and honor of God are referred to throughout the Psalm, and we all know, or should know because we say it in the prayer of consecration, that it was in mercy that God sent His Son into the world to suffer and die for the redemption of the world. Toward the end the Psalm talks about the Passion and the Resurrection of Christ. “Thou hast delivered my soul from the nethermost hell.” “The proud are risen against me and [an assembly] of [ruthless] men (the Sanhedrin) sought my [life].”⁶

In verse 16 Jesus calls Himself “The son of thine handmaid.” You will recall that His mother called herself “the handmaid of the Lord” when she responded to the Annunciation that she had been chosen to bear the Savior of the world.

The final verse looks forward to the end of time when the glory of Christ is revealed for all to see and, as Charles Wesley wrote in one of our hymns (Number 5): “Those who set at naught and sold him, Pierced and nailed him to the tree, deeply wailing, deeply wailing, shall the true Messiah see.”

I won’t spend quite so much time on the other Psalm, number 142, but you can see, if you look through the eyes of the Fathers, how it refers to the Lenten wilderness experience described in last Sunday’s Gospel.

The temptations themselves are referred to as snares placed in the path that the Father laid out for Jesus to walk in. Jesus was alone when He faced those temptations. There was no man to help him. But he cried to the Father for help and was delivered. As it says in last Sunday's Gospel passage, "Angels came and ministered to him."

It is certainly fitting that these Psalms were selected to be read at the beginning of Lent when we focus our attention on the trials and sufferings of Jesus. But it is one thing to focus on them and another thing to share them and to follow His example as well as His teachings. When we do that we fulfill the final prophecy of today's readings from the Psalms: "The righteous shall resort to my company."

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St. David's Anglican Catholic Church
Charlottesville, Virginia
February 24, 2013

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xvii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² I Kings 8:37-43 (KJV).

³ Colossians 3:12-17 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 5:39.

⁵ St. Matthew 8:20; St. Luke 9:58.

⁶ RSV translation.