

# 1 – BLESSED IS HUMANITY

Monday July 15, 2013



## LECTIO: Psalm 118

**1** Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good,  
For his loving kindness endures forever.  
**2** Let Israel now say  
That his loving kindness endures forever.  
**3** Let the house of Aaron now say  
That his loving kindness endures forever.  
**4** Now let those who fear Yahweh say  
That his loving kindness endures forever  
**5** Out of my distress, I called on Yahweh.  
Yahweh answered me with freedom.  
**6** Yahweh is on my side. I will not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?  
**7** Yahweh is on my side among those who help  
me.  
Therefore I will look in triumph at those who  
hate me.  
**8** It is better to take refuge in Yahweh,  
Than to put confidence in man.  
**9** It is better to take refuge in Yahweh,  
Than to put confidence in princes.  
**10** All the nations surrounded me,  
But in the name of Yahweh, I cut them off.  
**11** They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded  
me.  
In the name of Yahweh I indeed cut them off.  
**12** They surrounded me like bees.  
They are quenched like the burning thorns.  
In the name of Yahweh I cut them off.  
**13** You pushed me back hard, to make me fall,  
But Yahweh helped me.  
**14** Yahweh is my strength and song.  
He has become my salvation.  
**15** The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the  
tents of the righteous.  
"The right hand of Yahweh does valiantly.

**16** The right hand of Yahweh is exalted!  
The right hand of Yahweh does valiantly!"  
**17** I will not die, but live,  
And declare Yahweh's works.  
**18** Yahweh has punished me severely,  
But he has not given me over to death.  
**19** Open to me the gates of righteousness.  
I will enter into them.  
I will give thanks to Yahweh.  
**20** This is the gate of Yahweh;  
The righteous will enter into 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 cornerstone.  
**23** This is Yahweh's doing.  
It is marvelous in our eyes.  
**24** This is the day that Yahweh has made.  
We will rejoice and be glad in it!  
**25** Save us now, we beg you, Yahweh;  
Yahweh, we beg you, now send prosperity.  
**26** Blessed is he who comes in the name of  
Yahweh!  
We have blessed you out of the house of  
Yahweh.  
**27** Yahweh is God, and he has given us light.  
Bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the  
horns of the altar.  
**28** You are my God, and I will give thanks to  
you.  
You are my God, I will exalt you.  
**29** Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good,  
For his loving kindness endures forever.

## MEDITATIO / explanation and background of the text

Psalm 118 is a song filled with thanks and praise. A nice start for meditations about blessings. God blesses humanity. And the psalmist (and following him, the one who prays the psalm) thanks God for answered prayers.

It is remarkable that psalm 118 is situated between the shortest psalm (117) and the longest (119). There are bible experts who maintain that it is here where you find the middle of Scripture. Psalm 118 is book-ended by both the singing of praises to God and the illumination of the personal relation with God. Do you want to walk with him for the rest of your life? Do you want to be faithful to Him? Do you want to be bound to Him in good times and bad? Do you want to (continue to) build your life on Him?

In the Jewish tradition psalm 118 is part of a greater grouping of psalms, namely psalm 113 up to and including 118, which together are called the 'hallel' (hallel means praise; it is the root of our 'hallelujah or alleluia'). These are sung during the Jewish Passover, especially before and after the Pesach. These psalms sing about the path of freedom that the people of Israel were able to follow.

The verse fragment: "All the nations surrounded me" (verse 10) indicates that the people of Israel, over time, had made many treaties with other nations, but that the leaders of these nations had turned out to be unreliable. Thus Israel learned that it could only trust in God.

The relationship to Easter is also addressed in the Gospel. At the end of the Last Supper Jesus and his disciples sing these psalms after which they go to the Mount of Olives (see Matthew 26,30; Mark 14,26). Also in the Christian Easter Liturgy is psalm 118 an important psalm. A number of elements are immediately recognizable: (a) The stone which the builders rejected has become the corner stone (verse 22); (b) This is the day that Yahweh has made (verse 24); (c) Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh! (verse 26). A verse that we always sing or recite in the Holy, Holy, Holy of the Eucharistic Prayer. This verse has become a title for Jesus.

Whoever prays or sings verse 29 sees immediately that it is a repetition of verse 1. The psalm in a sense has come around and calls on us to 'simply' start anew.

It is easy to see a five-fold partition in the psalm. This is also indicated in the text above.

- The first part consists of a call to praise.
- The second part indicates that in time of need, calling the Name of the Lord can provide support. Verses 8 and 9 give us the central theme: it is better to trust the Lord. It fits with what we know from the Abraham story: God will provide (read Genesis 22, 8.14). This proverb was beloved by the founder of the Brothers CMM. Always trust God's providence.
- The third part sings about how God is the foundation of the psalmist's life, and of everybody who repeats it (or sings it) after the psalmist. The Lord is my strength, my song. Who does not know the Taizécanon: El Senyor és la meva força. That comes from this text. The right hand of the Lord is the symbol of a deep bond and trust in God.

- In the fourth part of this psalm one enters the house of God. The petitioner calls for the gates to be opened for him/her. He/she wants to enter to praise God. And he likens himself to the rejected corner stone. The people have dismissed him, but God takes him the way he is. That is the victory to be won.
- The fifth part is an answer from the faith community: he, who enters like that, enters in (with? through?) the Name of the Lord. That must be a blessed person. And the circle comes back to God: praise God always.

NOTES

## CONTEMPLATIO / Reflection

- Praising God is not obvious. It requires a life in gratitude. But we also have a lot to complain about. The book of Psalms, therefore, does have its share of lamentations. Complaining after all is easier. It is, as it were, on the tip of our tongue. Anybody who pays attention to daily life hears many people complain. Thus, there are – at least in the Netherlands – many complaint desks where you can go. Grumbling and complaining is a deeply human reaction to whatever we do not like, disagree with or are disappointed with. Sometimes complaining is justified. But is that true for all our complaints? Unfortunately there are no gratitude desks. Or maybe yes: if we can call our churches that, then there are a great many. But often in churches too, many complaints can be heard.
- Psalm 118 strikes a different chord and calls out for something else. The psalmist asks us to praise the Lord and he gives a number of reasons for doing that. Can you praise the Lord because he helps you when you are in need? Can you praise the Lord because you experience that he is your help and support in your life? Can you praise the Lord because he promised you eternal life in Jesus Christ? Can you praise the Lord because you may enter his church and approach his altar?
- The psalm requires a heart that can thank God. Precisely in the Eucharist we meet again the rhythm of this psalm. We come to the Lord with our complaints and we sing: Kyrie Eleison (Lord, have mercy on us). We listen to his Word as the Word that is addressed to us personally. That Word of God wants to be the light on our way; a word that wants to be the power in our life; a word that consoles and encourages us. A word that calls on us to put our trust in the Lord for all we do. After the Service of the Word we celebrate the Eucharist. Celebrating the Eucharist is nothing else than thanking God for everything. We may thank the Lord for what he gives to us; for the way he saves us in our hour of need and for the way he is united with us in and through the Holy Communion.
- The psalmist prays that the enemies will be resisted by calling the Name of the Lord. Somebody who has been surrounded by people who threatened him or her knows what the psalmist refers to. No escape seems possible. But the psalmist thanks God because he escaped anyway. Two elements here deserve additional attention: enemies and the Name of the Lord.

1. The first element is the enemy. Talk about enemies in the psalms is very real. It may concern external enemies and threatening situations in which you get entangled. We find it easy to ask the Lord for help with the struggle in which we find ourselves.

But there may be – inside that first element – another meaning that can be discerned. The enemy can also be an internal enemy. The enemy is a power which wants to keep us away from God and from Jesus. This enemy has many faces: cynicism, indifference, rivalry or competition, arrogance, envy or jealousy, a feeling of depression, egotism, and so on. Precisely to defeat this enemy it is important to trust

in the Name of the Lord. The Lord who shows us the way of trust, involvement, cooperation and connectedness, of optimism, of altruism and so on. The Lord gives us his Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self control (See Galatians 5,22-23)

2. A second element is the Name of the Lord. In the entire Jewish Scripture the Name of the Lord is the most frequently used word: JHWH. In Judaism this name is not pronounced aloud, but replaced by 'Adonai'; the Lord. The Scripture announces JHWH as the creator, the law-giver and the redeemer. This announcement first of all demands faith: do you believe in JHWH the creator of heaven and earth? Then comes step two: what relationship does the believer want with JHWH. Which Name for JHWH expresses what JHWH means to the believer? Since this concerns a personal relationship everybody will choose a different name for JHWH. You can choose to talk about 'God'; others prefer to say 'Father' and others again use "The Almighty". You probably know many other words you can use to talk about JHWH.

- The special part is that the Name is time and again pronounced as a blessing over us. God's Name is a blessing for the faithful. May we stand in that blessing.

NOTES

*We take an intermediate step: somebody reads the Bible text once again aloud. After that we are still for a longer time to let some things sink in personally. The time of silence can vary, about 10 minutes*

## COLLATIO / sharing

We are sitting together as a whole or in smaller groups. And we are going to talk with each other about this Bible text and about what the meditation has contributed to our insights: what can you use? What bothers you? What does it evoke in you? What challenge does this Bible text carry for you? You can make this concrete by using the following questions:

- About what do you complain? How easily are you ready with a complaint? How do you express it?
- To what extent are you a grateful person? How do you express your gratitude?
- The greatest enemy is in us. With which enemy do you battle the most?
- What happens to you when you call out the Name of the Lord? When do you experience that Name the most often as a blessing over your life?

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## **ORATIO / prayer**

We finish our conversation in and with a prayer; we can pray spontaneously; we can also use a prayer that already exists and which is relevant to the subject of our conversation. In this prayer we can re-use words, images and themes from the Bible text or from the meditation

PRAYER