

The last words of Jesus were mingled with sorrow and blessing. He was wounded for our transgressions, and by his stripes we are healed. By his command St. John takes the Blessed Virgin Mary to be his mother, and by His cry of dereliction, we are brought near to God the Father. As Christ hanged on the cross, he cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” These words were originally spoken by David in the 22nd Psalm, and they immediately strike the ear as the cry of a victim very near to death. Indeed, when Christ made his final cry from the cross, He spoke no words at all, but it says when He had cried out with a loud voice, He gave up the ghost. The Passover Lamb had been slaughtered for our sins. The One who knew no sin became Sin for us. The One who has the Name above every name – at whose name every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord – became for us nameless. The nameplate above His cross which read “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” was intended both to mock Him and to anger the Jewish leaders.

In our Savior's final moments, there seems to be no redemption. There is no voice from heaven. God the Father is silent, seemingly absent from the sufferings of his Son. The Son of God himself seems to be out of character, out of place, divided within himself. He who knew no sin had become Sin? How could He who had no fatherly lineage from sinful Adam, be counted among transgressors and the wicked sons of Adam? If we look at the psalm from which Christ quoted, we find a reason.

Psalm 22 is a psalm of lament, a particular genre of psalms that we find repeated throughout the psalter. In the psalms of lament, the psalmist presents his case before the Lord. He pleads to God for help. He presents evidence of his innocence and the guilt of his enemies. He states his confidence in God's mercy, and he ends, not in despair, but by praising God, who has judged in his favor. At the end of this psalm David says, "26 The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever. 27 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee."

Rather than issuing a cry of desperation, the psalms of lament depict Israel's confidence. She may be wounded and falsely accused, but she cries with confidence to her Father and her helper. Like a young bear cub cries to its mother. No one wants to be near the cub when the mother bear returns. Likewise, Jesus cried out to his Father in the words of Psalm 22 in his human weakness, having chosen not to see what He could clearly see by His divine power, unless the Father willed Him to see it. And yet, even as He waited for word from the Father – saying in the meantime, "why have you forsaken me?" – the fact that Christ quoted this psalm reveals that He had an unfeigned hope that the answer will come and that it will be an answer of love and mercy. Like a bride who asks her husband, "Do you love me?" Christ has taken our place, the place of the bride, crying out to the Father, "My God, my God, do you love me? Will you show me the love that you had for me before the world

began, and will you take me as the representative of this people, a wicked and adulterous generation? Will you take them again and make them yours? Father, I know that you will, because you have promised in your Holy Word, saying, “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.”

As the hymn says, “what more can He say than to you He has said?” What more could the Father say than what He has already promised in His holy word? In the moment that Adam and Eve sinned, God immediately swooped down like a mothering hen to rescue them from the curse of death that He had warned them about, clothing them, covering their nakedness, giving them a promise, that same day, that the Seed of woman would wound the head of the serpent. In the middle of Psalm 22, the answer to the question is given. After numerous verses of tortured lament, David abruptly changes his tone. Out of nowhere, in the midst of his prolonged cry for relief, he simply states, “You have answered me.” “You have answered me,” he says. Or in the King James, “thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.” “When?”, we might ask. “When did God answer?” David doesn’t say. He simply says “You have answered me.”

The answer that David is talking about, is in the cry itself. “*My God, my God.*” David is crying out to His God, His Father. And Christ, by using these words, is saying “He is *my* Father and I am the prodigal son.” As he hangs upon the cross,

Christ sees the prophecies in this psalm unfolding before him. For, in this psalm we read: “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.” We also read: “They pierced My hands and My feet”; and, “I may tell all my bones”; and finally: “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

Just like David, whose words prophesied the sufferings of Christ, so Christ knew that his lament would not end with the Father’s abandonment. Rather, he expected to say with David, “You have answered me.” And “23 Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. 24 For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.” Faith in God’s promise is the answer. That is the answer, though it does not bring immediate relief. That will come on Easter Sunday, and for us, at the resurrection of the last day. Until then, we see that Christ knows the answer already. Just as He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, overcoming him with God’s word of truth, so now Christ uses that same word as a prayer to God with a sure and certain confidence that His suffering on the cross was the fulfillment of God’s word, David’s prophesy, all of God’s promises that He would be our God and we His people. The Father had already given His answer at the beginning: “The Seed of the woman shall bruise the

head of the serpent.” Surely the Father will raise Him up, and when the Son of Man is high and lifted up, He will draw all men unto Himself. Indeed, in Him, all the nations of the world shall worship the God who made them and purchased their salvation with His precious blood.

Beloved, Christ has born our griefs. Whatever grief you have or will have, Christ has suffered it, and He knows it. If you believe in Him, if you are baptized into His holy name, then you are never alone in your grief. You are a member of the body of Christ, the Son of God. You are an adopted son or daughter of God. Let your grief be turned into joy in the wounds of Christ. It was our sin that held Him there until all things were accomplished. Let the wounds in his hands, his feet and his side bring healing to your wounds. Let your sorrows be cleansed in the blood that He shed for you while you were His enemy, and say, “The Soul of Christ sanctify me, and the Body strengthen me, and the Blood ransom me, and the Water wash me, and the Bruises heal me, and the Sweat refresh me, and the Wounds hide me.”

This is *Good* Friday after all. As St. Ephrem, the church Father says, “On Friday Adam and Eve sinned, and on Friday their sin was remitted. On Friday Adam and Eve died, and on Friday they came alive. On Friday Death reigned over them, and on Friday they were freed from his dominion.... From the right side of Adam went forth Eve, the mother of mortal offspring, and from the right side of Christ went forth baptism, the mother of immortal offspring.” In Christ there is no such thing as

despair. In Christ there is no death. In Christ there is no lasting sorrow. For those in Christ, there is no suffering that is not also immediately explained by the cross, the place where death was put to death and sin was wiped away. In Christ there is no silence, but in Him we all boldly and confidently approach the very throne of heaven, crying Abba Father, and confessing by faith in His word, in every trial and temptation, when God seems silent, saying as David “O Lord, you have answered, O Christ you have given all to me, and now I freely give all to you.” Let that be our prayer, and peace like a river will attend our way, all the days of our life, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever and ever.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who at the ninth hour of the day, with outstretched arms and bowed head, didst commend thy spirit to God thy Father, and by thy death unlock the gates of paradise: Mercifully grant that in the hour of our death our souls may come to the true paradise, which is Thyself; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, world without end. Amen.