



THE PSALMS by Father Robbie Low

2. PSALM 131

There is, for each of us, what I would call 'a roadmap of the soul'.

Along that sometimes joyful, sometimes taxing pathway there are points at which the map seems to make little sense, progress painfully slow, if discernible at all, the excitement of setting out so many years ago a distant and unconvincing memory and the ultimate destination becoming anything from uncertain to cripplingly doubtful.

Don't worry, the great saints have been there before us.

In order to make progress at moments like this it is sometimes necessary to go back a little, to clear the decks, to declutter the psyche and recapture the essence of that moment when we first knew, when we first heard the call, that voice in a distant morning that summoned us on this mortal journey to the eternal Presence.

We are not God so we have no mastery of time. But we are made in His image and with His help we can make that journey. Within the image making factory of the soul and the often lost and deep canyons of memory, we can, by His Grace, retrace our steps without recourse to time travel.

Without obliterating a moment of what we have lived and travelled, we can be at the beginning again and, simultaneously, where we are. Nowhere are we more likely to find God's aid in doing just that than in this tiny and power packed psalm.

'Lord I am not high minded. I have no proud looks.'

So it begins. This can be a difficult psalm for clever people to pray. (It's not necessarily easy for the not so clever either.) But the truly clever know that, for all their cleverness, it is as nothing before the wisdom of God. The end of all human knowing is to know how little we truly know and how much remains to learn and how we long for the untrammelled eternity in which to do that. We know also that, for all our knowledge, this accumulation of information is not a key to either happiness or blessedness. We have to rediscover the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom and that perfect love in Jesus which casts out fear and reconciles us to the Father.

What stands in our way is often our dependence on our own carefully cultivated opinion and that cardinal sin which is the breeding ground of every other pestilential vice, Pride.

This psalm, as we pray it, invites us to put down our pretence to wisdom and autonomy, our confidence in ourselves and to replace it with God's wisdom and a loving relationship which both understands and rejoices in our dependence on Him. True humility is but the proper engagement with reality. We see things as they truly and ultimately are. This is an important part of our preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, for example – that glorious celebration of our liberation and our place in the affection of

Jesus and our understanding of the love that pours itself out in sacrifice at the Calvary, on the altar.

KISS was an old acronym for the instruction, 'Keep it simple, stupid.' Almost always good advice and the heart of what this psalm encourages us to do.

Much of our difficulty in the spiritual life in general is the over-complication which besets us. Our mind is too full of stuff. Distraction overwhelms real content. We are too busy – even in retirement – to have the time to simply BE and simply be WITH HIM.

Thus the psalmist prays:

'I do not exercise myself in great matters which are too high for me'

It is a simple invitation to put down the burden which you cannot bear and the complexity which you cannot resolve. Focus only on the love of God.

And the psalmist puts into our mouths and minds and hearts the very way in which we may do this.

'I refrain my soul and keep it low, like a child that is weaned from its mother.'

Here, in this beautiful and simple text we are invited to return to the childhood of the soul. In our minds and memories we are once more a little child. We are beyond the stage of breast dependent suckling on our mother and yet utterly dependent as, from her arms, we begin the first exciting steps of exploring the new found world. In our hearts, therefore, let us

return to the simple days of childhood and reflect on the adventure that has, from, that long distant beginning, brought us to this point. This simple verse invites us to return, beyond the crippling complexities of adult life to the simple, needful, formative and essential relationship.

This is how that master of the spiritual life, the Psalmist, describes it, *'My soul is as a weaned child'*.

Our spiritual exercise in this psalm then is immense. We return to the arms of our mothers, retracing the years. We return to the arms of Mother Church, fed by her and encouraged on our way. We nestle, with the Christ child, in the arms of Mary awaiting the moment to proclaim Him to the world.

I remember the first time I really encountered this psalm on a retreat as a young man. It was given to me as a spiritual exercise and it engaged me for three whole days and twenty pages of spiritual journal as the Holy Spirit of God led me back the years and illuminated the mysteries of relationship and untangled the resistant knots of sin that held me close.

In allowing the Lord to be my Father, in allowing the Church to be my Mother, in refraining my soul this great prayer invites God to recommence His healing work and strengthen us in our adult lives as His redeemed and grateful and joyful children.

We are able then, as the people of God, Israel, to emerge renewed, deepened, in the words of the old hymn, *'Ransomed, healed, restored,*

forgiven, and exhort ourselves and each other to *'trust in the Lord from this time forth and for evermore'*.

Track back the years. Become His child again. Let Him show you how He has led you and will lead you on. And trust in Him.

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