



THE PSALMS by Father Robbie Low

5. PSALM 84

Some of the most beautiful psalms are those that speak of the heartfelt longing for Jerusalem, for the final pilgrim ascent to the Holy City, for the moment when the faithful soul at last enters into the Temple of God. All prayers of the psalter have their favourites and this is one of mine. Nearly home.....

'How amiable are thy tabernacles O Lord of Hosts'

There is a warmth and intimacy about this vision of the homecoming. The very words imply a deep and longstanding friendship which, while it has never flagged, is about to be re-forged in the meeting up. There are a few friends in life with whom, when you meet up after long absences, not a moment seems to have past and the conversation and joy flow uninterrupted. Such a reunion is that of the pilgrim soul with the Lord of all. Astonishing thought.

'My soul longs for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.'

The very core of our being is longing, that sense of love and deeply anticipated fulfilment in the other that stretches the heart and increases its

capacity for both charity and glory. It is a yearning so deep that our very bodies, our corporeal selves are swept up in this reaching out and fervent anticipation. The soul longs for that reunion that is ultimate communion foreshadowed in the mystery of the Mass. Our declining physical selves look forward eagerly to that transfiguration into the heavenly body that knows no decay.

'The sparrow has found a house and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young – even thine altars O Lord of Hosts.'

I find this the most moving picture. It is referred to by Jesus in His assurances to us. God values every sparrow – don't worry the very hairs on your head are counted. There is an immensity of God's care for his creatures in this little portrait as they instinctively find a home in God's house at the most sacred of places. Would that that were Man's instinct too. Here, the unconsidered creatures can find sanctuary and a place for the next generation.

'Blessed are they who dwell in thy house.....whose strength is in thee....in whose heart are the highways to Zion.'

Who could wish for a finer destination? How do we get there? It is needful for the pilgrim to have in his heart the highways to Zion. He must know the way. He must set out determined. He must have a heart of praise. He must be ready for the long and winding road, his gaze set unswervingly on his destination. He must be ready to make the final ascent – all this and only in the strength of the Lord.

The pilgrim to the holy city, to the Temple courts will pass through the valley of misery, of sorrows. There will be times of hardship and discouragement but, with praise on his lips and blessing in his heart he will make the very desert place an oasis of fresh water.

'Behold O god our shield....Look upon the face of thine anointed.'

In New Testament imagery the shield is the shield of Faith. It is that mighty bulwark against the darts of the enemy. In the Old Testament God Himself is often described thus as the defender of His people. He will defend His Anointed and the anointed are those who are part of the body of THE ANOINTED ONE, which is Christ Himself. As Christians we are not ascending in pilgrimage to any ruined antique Temple but rather to the Temple that was raised in three days, Christ's own body which has been raised up in glory and dwells on the right hand of the Father. Our entry into this eternal Temple is the road back through the tight shut Gates of Eden into the Eternal Paradise and the Heavenly Jerusalem.

No wonder the psalmist proclaims that a day in God's court is better than a thousand anywhere else. Better to be a mere janitor in God's house than end up in the tents of wickedness. Listen to the promise, pilgrim.

The Lord is your sun, your light, your power, your energy, your source of life. The Lord is your shield, the heart of your faith and your defender.

He will give you grace, that ineffable gift. He will give you glory – the promise of Christ, the inheritance of the saints. No good thing will He withhold from you if you walk your earthly pilgrimage in uprightness of heart. Those who trust Him will be blessed.

What more could we ask and what more joyful song of ascent could we sing
on the journey home?

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