

Canticle (Daniel 3:57-88, 56)
God, the creator and redeemer

Praise our God, all you his servants. (Revelation 19:5)



All things the Lord has made, bless the Lord:
give him glory and praise for ever.
Angels of the Lord, all bless the Lord;
Heavens, bless the Lord.

Waters above the heavens, bless the Lord;
Powers of the Lord, all bless the Lord.
Sun and moon, bless the Lord;
Stars of heaven, bless the Lord.

Showers and dews, bless the Lord;
Winds, all bless the Lord.
Fire and heat, bless the Lord;
Frost and cold, bless the Lord.

Ice and snow, bless the Lord;
Nights and days, bless the Lord.
Light and darkness, bless the Lord;
Lightning and clouds, bless the Lord.

Let the earth bless the Lord;
give him glory and praise for ever.
Mountains and hills, bless the Lord;
Everything that grows on the earth, bless the Lord.

Springs of water, bless the Lord;
Seas and rivers, bless the Lord.
Sea beasts and everything that lives in water, bless the Lord;
Birds of heaven, bless the Lord.

Animals wild and tame, all bless the Lord;
Children of the earth, bless the Lord.
Israel, bless the Lord,
give him glory and praise for ever.

Priests, bless the Lord;
Servants of the Lord, bless the Lord.
Spirits and souls of the virtuous, bless the Lord;
Devout and humble-hearted people, bless the Lord.
Ananiah, Azariah, Mishael, bless the Lord;
give him glory and praise for ever.

Commentary: Let every creature bless the Lord

1. "Bless the Lord, all works of the Lord" (Dn 3: 57). A cosmic dimension imbues this Canticle taken from the Book of Daniel, which the Liturgy of the Hours proposes for Sunday Lauds in the first and third weeks. This marvellous litany-like prayer is well-suited to the Dies Domini, the Day of the Lord, that lets us contemplate in the risen Christ the culmination of God's plan for the cosmos and for history. Indeed, in him, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of history (cf. Rv 22: 13), creation itself acquires its full meaning since, as John recalls in the Prologue to his Gospel, "all things were made through him" (Jn 1: 3). The history of salvation culminates in the resurrection of Christ, opening human life to the gift of the Spirit and adoption as sons and daughters, while awaiting the return of the divine Spouse who will hand the world back to God the Father (cf. 1 Cor 15: 24).

2. In this text, in the form of a litany, it is as if our gaze passes all things in review. Our gaze focuses on the sun, the moon and the stars; it settles upon the immense expanse of the waters, rises to the mountains, lingers over the most varied elements of the weather; it passes from hot to cold, from light to darkness; considers the mineral and vegetable worlds, dwells on the various types of animals. Then the call becomes universal: it refers to God's angels, reaches all the "sons of men", but most particularly involves the People of God, Israel, the priests and the holy ones. It is an immense choir, a symphony in which the varied voices are raised in praise to God, Creator of the universe and Lord of history. Prayed in the light of Christian revelation, it is addressed to the Trinitarian God, as we are invited to do by the liturgy which adds a Trinitarian formula to the Canticle: "Let us praise the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit".

3. Reflected in the Canticle, in a certain sense, is the universal religious soul, which perceives God's imprint in the world and is lifted up to contemplate the Creator. However, in the context of the Book of Daniel, the hymn is presented as the thanksgiving ...

... of three young Israelites - Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael - who were condemned to die burnt in a furnace for refusing to adore the golden idol of Nebuchadnezzar, but were miraculously preserved from the flames. Against the background of this event is that special history of salvation in which God chooses Israel as his people and makes a covenant with them. It is the same covenant to which the three young Israelites want to stay faithful, even at the cost of martyrdom in the fiery furnace. Their fidelity meets with the fidelity of God who sends an angel to drive the flames away from them (cf. Dn 3: 49).

In this way the Canticle is patterned on the Old Testament songs of praise for danger averted. Among them is the famous song of victory, cited in chapter 15 of Exodus, in which the ancient Hebrews express their gratitude to the Lord for that night in which they would inevitably have been overcome by Pharaoh's army, had the Lord not opened a passage for them, dividing the waters and hurling "the horse and his rider ... into the sea" (Ex 15: 1).

4. It is not by chance, in the solemn Easter Vigil, that every year the liturgy makes us repeat the hymn sung by the Israelites in Exodus. That path which was opened for them, prophetically announced the new way that the risen Christ inaugurated for humanity on the holy night of his resurrection from the dead. Our symbolic passing through the waters of Baptism enables us to relive a similar experience of passing from death to life, thanks to the victory over death won by Jesus, for the benefit of us all.

By repeating the Canticle of the three young Israelites in the Sunday liturgy of Lauds, we disciples of Christ want to be swept up in the same wave of gratitude for the great works wrought by God, in creation and, above all, in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

In fact, the Christian discerns a relationship between the release of the three young men, mentioned in the Canticle, and the resurrection of Jesus. In the latter, the Acts of the Apostles see granted the prayer of the believer who, like the Psalmist, confidently sings: "you will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let your Holy One see corruption" (Acts 2: 27; Ps 15: 10).

It is traditional to associate the Canticle with the Resurrection. Some ancient records show the existence of the hymn in the prayer of the Lord's Day, the weekly Easter of Christians. Moreover, iconographical depictions which show three young men praying unharmed amidst the flames have been found in the Roman catacombs, thereby witnessing to the effectiveness of prayer and the certainty that the Lord will intervene.

5. "Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven praiseworthy and glorious forever" (Dn 3: 56). In singing the hymn on Sunday, the Christian feels gratitude not only for the gift of creation but also because we are the recipients of the fatherly care of God, who in Christ has raised us to the dignity of being his sons and daughters.

God's fatherly care makes us see creation in a new way and its astounding beauty offers an elegant sign in which we can catch a glimpse of his love. With these sentiments Francis of Assisi contemplated creation and lifted his praise to God, the ultimate source of all beauty. It comes naturally to imagine that the prayers of the Biblical text were echoed in his soul when at San Damiano, after touching the peaks of physical and spiritual suffering, he composed the "Canticle of Brother Sun" (cf. Fonti Francescane, 263).

Blessed John Paul II

General Audience, 2 May 2001

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010502_en.html