

Psalm 147[147]: 12-20
In praise of God the Almighty

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.
(Ephesians 1:3)



praise the Lord, Jerusalem!
Zion praise your God!

He has strengthened the bars of your gates
he has blessed the children within you.
He established peace on your borders,
he feeds you with finest wheat.

He sends out his word to the earth
and swiftly runs his command.
He showers down snow white as wool,
he scatters hoar-frost like ashes.

He hurls down hailstones like crumbs.
The waters are frozen at his touch;
he sends forth his word and it melts them:
at the breath of his mouth the waters flow.

He makes his word known to Jacob,
to Israel his laws and decrees.
He has not dealt thus with other nations;
he has not taught them his decrees.

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Biblical scholars point out that this Psalm should be joined to the previous one, so as to form a single composition, as is the case in the original Hebrew. Indeed, we have here a single, coherent canticle in honour of the creation and redemption brought about by the Lord. It begins with a joyful call to praise: "Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is seemly" (Ps 146 [147],1).

2. If we focus on the passage we have just heard, we can identify three moments of praise, introduced by an invitation to the Holy City, Jerusalem, to praise and glorify her Lord (cf. Ps 147,12).

In the first part (cf. vv. 13-14), God's historical action is referred to. It is described in a series of symbols that represent the Lord's protection and his support of the city of Zion and its children.

First of all, there is a reference to the "bars" that reinforce and make impregnable the gates of Jerusalem. Perhaps the Psalmist is referring to Nehemiah who fortified the holy city, rebuilt after the bitter experience of the Babylonian exile (cf. Neh 3, 3.6.13-15; 4, 1-9; 6,15-16; 12, 27-43).

Among other things, the gate is a sign that indicates the whole city in its compactness and tranquillity. Inside the city, likened to a safe womb, live the children of Zion, namely, the citizens, that enjoy peace and serenity, enveloped in the protective mantle of divine blessing.

Commentary: Jerusalem, praise your saving God

The Lauda Jerusalem that we have just proclaimed is dear to Christian liturgy that often used Psalm 147 to refer to the Word of God which "runs swiftly" on the face of the earth, and also to the Eucharist, the true "bread of finest wheat" that God generously gives to "satisfy" human hunger (cf. vv. 14-15).

Origen, who comments on our Psalm in one of his homilies, translated and disseminated by St Jerome in the West, actually interweaves the Word of God with the Eucharist: "We read the Holy Scriptures. I believe that the Gospel is the Body of Christ. I believe that the holy Scriptures are his teaching. And when he says: he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood (Jn 6,53), although these words can also refer to the [Eucharistic] Mystery, yet the Body and Blood of Christ is truly a word of Scripture, the teaching of God. When we are about to receive the [Eucharistic] Mystery, if even a tiny crumb falls, we feel lost. When we are listening to God's Word, when our ears perceive the Word of God and the body and blood of Christ, what great danger would we not fall into were we to think about something else?" (74 Omelie sul Libro dei Salmi [74 Homilies on the Book of Psalms], Milano 1993, pp. 543-544).

The image of the joyful, tranquil city is exalted by the highest and precious gift of the peace that makes its borders safe. However, precisely because, for the Bible, peace-shalôm is not a negative concept that evokes merely the absence of war, but a positive gift of wellbeing and prosperity, the Psalmist speaks of being satisfied with "the finest of wheat", that is, of excellent grain, with ears full of grains. So the Lord reinforced the ramparts of Jerusalem (cf. Ps 87[86],2), has made his blessing descend (cf. Ps 128[127],5; 134[133],3), extending it to the whole country, he has given peace (cf. Ps 122[121],6-8) and satisfied his children's hunger (cf. Ps 132[131],15).

3. In the second part of the Psalm (cf. Ps 147,15-18), God appears above all as Creator. Indeed twice he connects the work of creation with the words that gave origin to being: "God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light".... "He sends forth his command to the earth ... he sends forth his word" (cf. Gn 1,3; Ps 147,15.18).

Here, under the banner of the divine Word, the two fundamental seasons burst forth and are stabilized. On the one hand, the Lord's order makes winter descend on the earth, picturesquely described as snow white as wool, by hoarfrost like ashes, by hail like bread crumbs, and by ice that freezes everything (cf. vv. 16-17). On the other hand, another divine command causes the warm wind to blow, bringing summer and melting the ice: so the rainwater and torrents can run freely, water the earth and make it fruitful.

Therefore, the Word of God is the source of the cold and the heat, of the cycle of the seasons and of the flow of life in nature. Humanity is invited to recognize and thank the Creator for the fundamental gift of the universe that surrounds it, allows it to breathe, feeds and sustains it.

4. We now move on to the third and last part of our hymn of praise (cf. vv. 19-20). We return to the Lord of history with whom we began. The divine Word brings Israel an even more important and precious gift, that of the Law, of Revelation. A specific gift: "He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances" (v. 20).

Thus the Bible is the treasure of the Chosen People who must draw on it with love and with faithful devotion. This is what Moses says to the Hebrews in Deuteronomy: "And what great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?" (Dt 4,8).

5. Just as there are two glorious actions of God in creation and in history, so there are also two revelations: one is inscribed in nature itself and open to all; the other given to the Chosen People, who must witness to it and communicate it to all humanity what is contained in Sacred Scripture. Two distinct Revelations, but God is one and his Word is one. All things were made through the Word - as the Prologue of John's Gospel says - and without him nothing was made of all that exists. Yet the Word also became "flesh", namely, he entered history and pitched his tent among us (cf. Jn 1,3.14).

Blessed John Paul II

General Audience, 5 June 2002

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20020605_en.html