

Psalms 67(66)

Hymn of thanksgiving to the Creator for the gifts of the earth



God, be gracious and bless us
and let your face shed its light upon us.
So will your ways be known upon earth
and all nations learn your saving help.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

Let the nations be glad and exult
for you rule the world with justice.
With fairness you rule the peoples,
you guide the nations on earth.

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.

The earth has yielded its fruit
for God, our God, has blessed us.
May God still give us his blessing
till the ends of the earth revere him.



1. "The earth has yielded its fruit", exclaims Psalm 67 [66], one of the texts inserted into the Liturgy of Vespers that we have just proclaimed. The sentence calls to mind a hymn of thanksgiving to the Creator for the gifts of the earth, a sign of divine blessing. This natural element, however, is closely interwoven with the historical aspect: nature's fruits are taken as an opportunity to ask God again and again to bless his people (cf. vv. 2, 7, 8); thus, all the nations of the earth address Israel, seeking through her to reach God the Saviour.

So it is that the composition has a universal and missionary outlook, in continuity with the divine promise made to Abraham: "by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" (Gn 12: 3; cf. 18: 18; 28: 14).

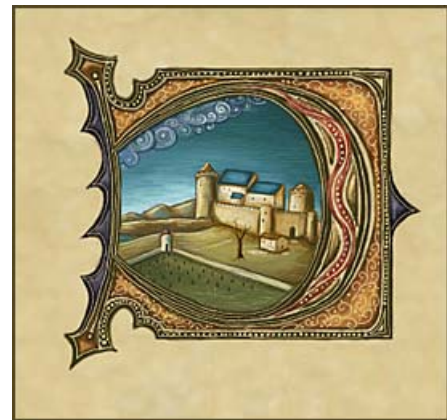
2. The divine blessing implored for Israel is expressed in the productivity of the fields and in fertility, that is, in the gift of life. Hence, the Psalm opens with a verse (cf. Ps 67[66]: 2) that refers to the famous priestly blessing mentioned in the Book of Numbers: "The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to

shine upon you and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" (Nm 6: 24-26).

The theme of blessing re-echoes in the finale of the Psalm in which the fruit the earth has yielded is mentioned (cf. Ps 67[66]: 7-8). And it is here that we find the universal theme that gives the spiritual substance of the whole hymn surprisingly broad horizons. This openness reflects the sensitivity of an Israel that is henceforth prepared to confront all the peoples of the earth. Perhaps the Psalm was composed following the period of the Babylonian Exile when the people had already begun to experience life in the Diaspora, in foreign nations and new regions.

3. Thanks to the blessing implored by Israel, all humanity was to know the Lord's "ways" and his "saving help" (cf. v. 3), that is, his plan of salvation. It is revealed to all cultures and to all societies that God judges and governs the peoples of every part of the earth, leading each one towards horizons of justice and peace (cf. v. 5).

This is the great ideal to which we aspire, the most involving announcement that emerges from Psalm 67 [66] and from so many of the Prophets' writings (cf. Is 2: 1-5; 60: 1-22; Jon 4: 1-11; Zep 3: 9-10; Mal 1: 11).



This was also to be the Christian proclamation that St Paul described, recalling that the salvation of all the peoples is the heart of the "mystery", in other words, the divine plan of salvation: "the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the



promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (Eph 3: 6).

4. Henceforth, Israel can ask God to involve all the nations in his praise; they will form a universal choir: "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!", is repeated in the Psalm (cf. Ps 67[66]: 4, 6).

The hope this Psalm expresses heralds the event described by the Letter to the Ephesians, which might be an allusion to the dividing wall in the Temple that separated the Jews from the pagans: "In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility.... So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2: 13-14, 19).

This message is for us: we must pull down the walls of division, hostility and hate so that the family of God's children may once again live in harmony at the one table, to bless and praise the Creator for the gifts he lavishes upon all without distinction (cf. Mt 5: 43-48).

5. Christian tradition has reinterpreted Psalm 67[66] in a Christological and Mariological key. For the Fathers of the Church, "the earth has yielded its fruit" is a reference to the Virgin Mary who brought forth Christ the Lord.

Thus, for example, in his Exposition on the First Book of Kings St Gregory the Great comments on this verse, interspersing his remarks with many other scriptural citations: "Mary is rightly called a 'richly fruitful mountain' because from her was born an excellent fruit, that is, a new man. And the Prophet, seeing her beautiful, decked out in the glory of her fruitfulness, exclaims: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots' (Is 11: 1).

David, exulting at the fruit of this mountain, says to God, "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its fruit...'. Yes, the earth has yielded its fruit, for the One whom the Virgin brought forth was not conceived by a human act but by the Holy Spirit who spread his shadow over her. Therefore, the Lord says to David, Prophet and King: "the fruit of your body will I set upon your throne' (Ps 132[131]: 11). Consequently, Isaiah says: "the fruit of the land shall be honour and splendour' (Is 4: 2). Indeed, the One whom the Virgin conceived was not only a "human saint' but also "Mighty God' (Is 9: 5)" (Marian Texts of the First Millennium, III, Rome, 1990, p. 625).



Blessed John Paul II
17 November 2004
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20041117_en.html

