

Psalms 113(112)



"Praise the name of the Lord!"



raise, O servants of the Lord,
praise the name of the Lord!
May the name of the Lord be blessed
both now and for evermore!
From the rising of the sun to its setting
praised be the name of the Lord!

High above all nations is the Lord,
above the heavens his glory.
Who is like the Lord, our God,
who has risen on high to his throne
yet stoops from the heights to look down,
to look down upon heaven and earth?

From the dust he lifts up the lowly,
from the dungheap he raises the poor
to set them in the company of princes,
yes, with the princes of his people.
To the childless wife he gives a home
and gladdens her heart with children.



1. We have just heard, in its simplicity and beauty, Psalm 113[112], a true introduction into a small group of Psalms that go from 113[112] to 118[117], commonly known as the "Egyptian Hallel". It is the Alleluia, or song of praise, that exalts the liberation from Pharaoh's slavery and the joy of Israel to serve the Lord freely in the Promised Land (cf. Ps 114[113]).

The Jewish tradition intentionally connected this series of Psalms to the Paschal liturgy. The celebration of that event, according to its historical-social and, more especially, spiritual dimensions, was perceived as a sign of liberation from the multifaceted forms of evil. Psalm 113[112] is a brief hymn that in its original Hebrew consists of only 60 or so words, all imbued with sentiments of trust, praise and joy.

2. The first strophe (cf. Ps 113[112]: 1-3) praises "the name of the Lord" who, as is known, indicates in Biblical language the person of God himself, his presence, living and working in human history. Three times, with impassioned insistence, the "name of the Lord" resounds at the centre of the prayer of adoration. All

being and all time - "from the rising of the sun to its setting", as the Psalmist says (v. 3) - are involved in a single action of grace. It is as if a ceaseless breath were rising from earth to heaven to praise the Lord, Creator of the universe and King of history.

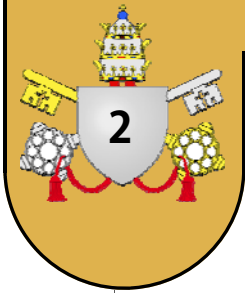
3. Precisely by means of this ascending movement, the Psalm leads us to the divine mystery. Indeed, the second part (cf. vv. 4-6) celebrates the Lord's transcendence, described with vertical images that go beyond the mere human horizon. It is proclaimed: the Lord is "sublime", "enthroned on high", and no one is equal; also, to look at the heavens he must "stoop", since "above the heavens is his glory" (v. 4).

The divine gaze watches over all realities, over all beings, earthly and heavenly. However, his eyes are not arrogant and distant, like that of a cold emperor. The Lord, the Psalmist says, "stoops... to look" (v. 6).

4. In this way, we pass to the last part of the Psalm (cf. vv. 7-9), which moves the attention from the heights of the heavens to our earthly horizon. The Lord attentively stoops down towards our littleness and poverty, which drives us to withdraw in fear. He looks directly, with his loving gaze and his real concern, upon the world's lowly and poor: "From the dust he lifts up the lowly, from his misery he raises the poor" (v. 7).



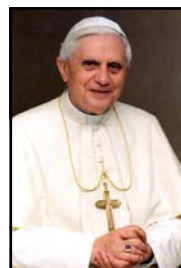
God bends down, therefore, to console the needy and those who suffer; this word finds its ultimate wealth, its ultimate meaning in the moment in which God bends over to the point of bending down, of becoming



one of us, one of the world's poor. He bestows the greatest honour on the poor, that of sitting "in the company of princes, yes, with the princes of his people" (v. 8). To the abandoned and childless woman, humiliated by ancient society as if she were a worthless, dead branch, God gives the honour and the immense joy of many children (cf. v. 9). And so, the Psalmist praises a God who is very different from us in his grandeur, but at the same time very close to his suffering creatures.

It is easy to draw from these final verses of Psalm 113 [112] the prefiguration of the words of Mary in the Magnificat, the Canticle of God's chosen one, who "looked with favour on his lowly servant". More radically than our Psalm, Mary proclaims that God "casts down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly" (cf. Lk 1: 48, 52; Ps 113 [112]: 6-8).

5. A very ancient "Hymn of Vespers", preserved in the so-called Apostolic Constitutions (VII, 48), takes up once more and develops the joyful introduction to our Psalm. We recall it here, at the end of our reflection, to highlight the customary "Christian" re-reading of the Psalms done by the early community: "Praise the Lord, O children, praise the name of the Lord. We worship you, we sing to you, we praise you for your immense glory. Lord King, Father of Christ, spotless Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. To you all praise, to you our song, to you the glory, to God the Father through the Son in the Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen" (S. Pricoco M. Simonetti, *La preghiera dei cristiani*, Milan, 2000, p. 97).



Pope Benedict XVI
18 May 2005
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20050518_en.html