

# Psalms 112(111)



## Openhanded he gives to the poor



Happy the man who fears the Lord,  
who take delight in all his commands.  
His sons shall be powerful on earth;  
the children of the upright are blessed.

Riches and wealth are in his house;  
his justice stands firm for ever.  
He is a light in the darkness for the upright:  
he is generous, merciful and just.

The good man takes pity and lends,  
he conducts his affairs with honor.  
The just man will never waver:  
he will be remembered for ever.

He has no fear of evil news;  
with a firm heart he trusts in the Lord.  
With a steadfast heart he will not fear;  
he will see the downfall of his foes.

Open-handed, he gives to the poor;  
his justice stands firm for ever.  
His head will be raised in glory.

The wicked man sees and is angry,  
grinds his teeth and fades away;  
the desire of the wicked leads to doom.



1. After yesterday's celebration of the Solemnity of all the saints of Heaven, we remember today all of the faithful departed. The liturgy invites us to pray for all our loved ones who have passed away, turning our thoughts to the mystery of death, an inheritance common to all men and women.

Enlightened by faith, we look upon the human enigma of death with serenity and hope. Indeed, according to Scripture, it is more than an end; it is a new birth, it is the obligatory passageway through which the fullness of life may be attained by those who model their earthly existence according to the indications of the Word of God.

Psalms 112[111], a composition with a sapiential slant, presents us with the figure of these righteous ones who fear the Lord; they recognize his transcendence and trustingly and lovingly conform themselves to his will in the expectation of encountering him after death.

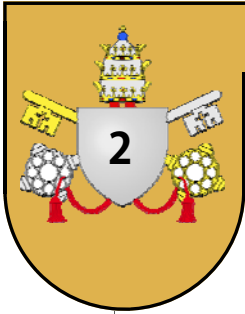
A "beatitude" is reserved to these faithful: "Happy the man who fears the Lord" (v. 1). The Psalmist immediately explains what this fear consists in: it is shown in docility to God's commandments. He who "takes delight" in observing his commandments is blessed, finding in them joy and peace.

2. Docility to God is therefore the root of hope and interior and exterior harmony. Observance of the moral law is the source of profound peace of conscience. According to the biblical vision of "retribution", the mantle of the divine blessing is spread over the righteous, giving stability and success to his works and to those of his descendants: "His sons will be powerful on earth; the children of the upright are blessed. Riches and wealth are in his house" (vv. 2-3; cf. v. 9).

However, to this optimistic vision are opposed the bitter observations made by Job, a just man who experiences the mystery of sorrow, feels himself unjustly punished and subjected to apparently senseless trials. Job represents many people who suffer harshly in the world. It is necessary then to read this Psalm in the global context of Revelation, which embraces the reality of human life under all its aspects.

At any rate, the trust the Psalmist wishes to communicate and be lived by those who have chosen to follow the path of morally irreprehensible conduct remains valid, rejecting every other alternative of illusory success gained through injustice and immorality.

3. The heart of this fidelity to the divine Word consists in a fundamental choice of charity towards the poor and needy: "The good man takes pity and lends... Open-handed, he gives to the poor" (vv. 5, 9). The person of faith, then, is generous; respecting the biblical norms, he offers help to his brother in need, asking nothing in return (cf. Dt 15: 7-11), and without falling into the shame of usury which destroys the lives of the poor.



The righteous one, heeding the continual warning of the prophets, puts himself on the side of the disenfranchised and sustains them with abundant help. "Open-handed, he gives to the poor", as is written in verse 9, thereby expressing an extreme generosity without any self-interest.

This Psalm answers: happy is the man who gives; happy is the man who does not live life for himself but gives; happy is the man who is merciful, generous and just; happy is the man who lives in the love of God and neighbour. In this way we live well and have no reason to fear death because we experience the everlasting happiness that comes from God.

4. In addition to the portrait of the faithful and charitable man, "generous, merciful and just", Psalm 112[111] presents finally, in only one verse (cf. v. 10), the profile of the wicked man. This individual sees the success of the right-eous person and is tortured with anger and jealousy. It is the torment of one who has an evil conscience, different from the generous man who has a "firm" and "steadfast heart" (vv. 7-8).

We fix our gaze on the serene face of the faithful person who "open-handed, gives to the poor", and we listen to the words of Clement of Alexandria, the third-century Father of the Church who commented on an affirmation of the Lord that is difficult to understand. In the parable of the unjust steward, the expression appears according to which we must do good with "unjust money". From there arises the question: are money and wealth unjust in themselves, or what does the Lord wish to say?

Clement of Alexandria explains this parable very well in his homily "What rich man can be saved?", and he states: Jesus "declares unjust by nature any possession one has for oneself as one's own good and does not make it available for those who need it; rather, he declares that from this injustice it is possible to accomplish a just and praiseworthy work, giving relief to one of those little ones who have an eternal dwelling-place near the Father (cf. Mt 10: 42; 18: 10)" (31, 6; Collana di Testi Patristici, CXLVIII, Rome, 1999, pp. 56-57).

Addressing the reader, Clement warns: "See in the first place that he has not ordered you to ask, nor wait to be asked, but you yourself search out those who are worth being listened to, insofar as they are disciples of the Saviour" (31, 7: *ibid.*, p. 57).

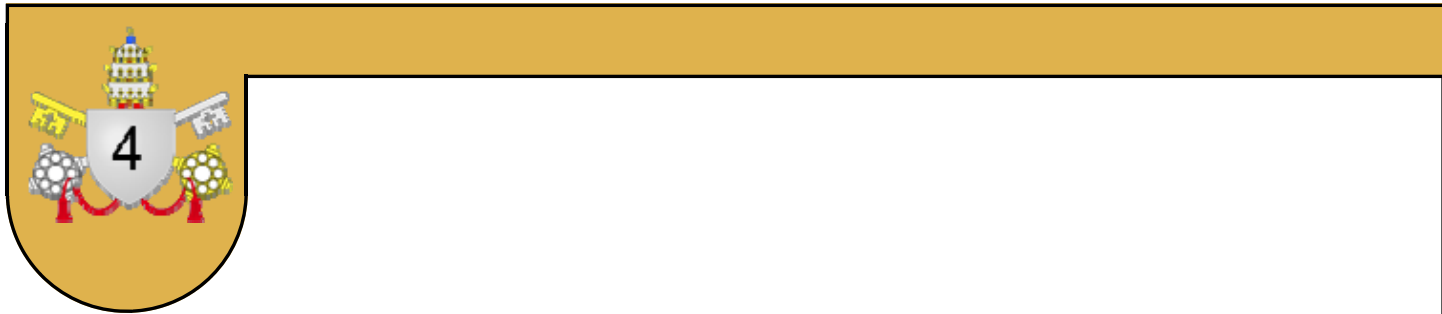
Then, citing another biblical text, he comments: "Beautiful, therefore, is the saying of the Apostle: "God loves a cheerful giver" (II Cor 9: 7), who enjoys giving and does not sparingly sow, so as to reap in the same way; instead, he shares without ramifications and distinctions and sorrow: this is authentic of doing good" (31, 8: *ibid.*).

On this day in which we commemorate the dead, as I was saying at the beginning of our meeting, we are all called to face the enigma of death and therefore with the question of how to live well, how to find happiness.



Pope Benedict XVI  
3 November 2005  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/audiences/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20051102\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20051102_en.html)





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