

Psalms 15(14)

To dwell on 'your holy mountain'



Lord, who shall be admitted to your tent
and dwell on your holy mountain?

He who walks without fault;
he who acts with justice
and speaks the truth from his heart;
he who does not slander with his tongue;

He who does no wrong to his brother,
who casts no slur on his neighbor,
who holds the godless in disdain,
but honors those who fear the Lord;

he who keeps his pledge, come what may;
who takes no interest on a loan
and accepts no bribes against the innocent.
Such a man will stand firm forever.



1. Psalm 15[14] that is presented for our reflection is often classified by biblical scholars as part of an "entrance" liturgy. Like several other compositions in the Psalter (cf., for example, Psalms 23; 25; 94), it prompts us to imagine a sort of procession of the faithful jostling to pass through the door of the Temple of Zion to have access to worship. An ideal dialogue between the faithful and the Levites outlines the indispensable conditions for admittance to the liturgical celebration, hence, to intimacy with God.

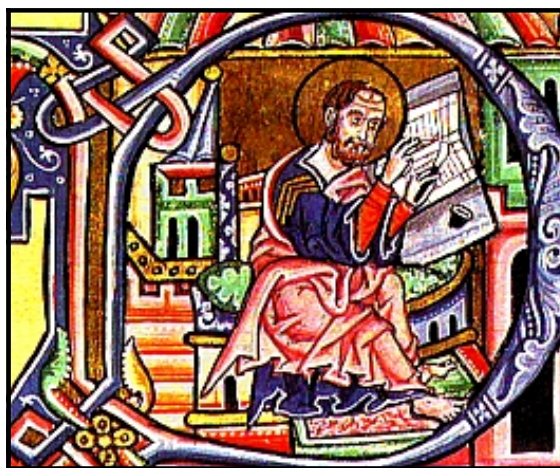
Indeed, on the one hand is raised the question: "O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy mountain?" (Ps 15[14]: 1). On the other, there follows a list of qualities required to cross the threshold that leads to the "tent", that is, the temple on the "holy mountain" of Zion. Eleven qualities are listed that make up an id.

2. The conditions required for entering the sacred hall were sometimes engraved on the façades of Egyptian and Babylonian temples. But there is a significant difference compared to those suggested by our Psalm. Many religious cultures require above all for admittance to the divinity an external ritual purity which entails special ablutions, gestures and garb.

Psalm 15[14], instead, demands a clear conscience so that the person's decisions may be devoted to love of justice and of one's neighbour. Therefore, we can feel in these verses the vibrant spirit of the prophets who continually invite people to combine faith and life, prayer and existential commitment, adoration and social justice (cf. Is 1: 10-20; 33: 14-16; Hos 6: 6; Mi 6: 6-8; Jer 6: 20).

Let us listen, for example, to the admonition of the Prophet Amos who in God's name denounces worship that is detached from daily history: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings... I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon.... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Am 5: 21-22, 24).

3. We now come to the 11 requirements listed by the Psalmist, which can constitute the basis for a personal examination of conscience every time we prepare ourselves to confess our sins in order to be admitted to communion with the Lord in the liturgical celebration. The first three conditions are of a general kind and express an ethical choice: to follow the path of moral integrity, to do what is right and, lastly, to speak with perfect sincerity (cf. Ps 15[14]: 2).



Three duties follow. We could describe them as relations with our neighbour: to abstain from slander, to avoid every action that could harm our brethren and to refrain every day from reproaching those who live be-



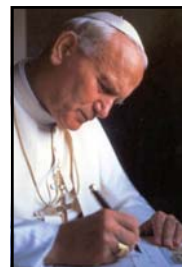


side us (cf. v. 3). Then comes the request for a clear choice of position in the social context: to despise the reprobate, to honour those who fear God. Finally, a list follows of the last three precepts on which to make an examination of conscience: to keep one's word or an oath faithfully, despite damaging consequences for ourselves; not to practise usury, a scourge that is also a reality in our time and has a stranglehold on many peoples' lives; and lastly, to avoid all forms of corruption in public life, another commitment that we should also be able to practise rigorously today (cf. v. 5).

4. Following this path of authentic moral choices means being ready to meet the Lord. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also proposed his essential "entrance" liturgy: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt 5: 23-24).

Those who act in accordance with the Psalmist's instructions, our prayer concludes, "shall never be moved" (Ps 15[14]: 5). In his *Tractatus super Psalmos* St Hilary of Poitiers, a fourth-century Father and Doctor of the

Church, comments on the Psalm's finale, linking it to the initial image of the tent of the temple of Zion: "Acting in accordance with these precepts, we dwell in the tent and rest on the mountain. May the preservation of the precepts and the work of the commandments, therefore, endure unchanged. This Psalm must be anchored in our inmost depths, it must be engraved on our hearts, stored in our memories; the treasure of its rich brevity must confront us night and day. Thus, having acquired its riches on our way towards eternity and dwelling in the Church, we will be able to rest at last in the glory of Christ's Body" (PL 9, 308).



Blessed John Paul II
4 February 2004
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20040204_en.html