

## Psalms 16(15)

### My happiness lies in you alone



reserve me, God, I take refuge in you.  
I say to the Lord: "You are my God.  
My happiness lies in you alone."

He has put into my heart a marvelous love  
for the faithful ones who dwell in his land.

Those who choose other gods increase their sorrows.  
Never will I offer their offerings of blood.  
Never will I take their name upon my lips.

O Lord, it is you who are my portion and cup;  
it is you yourself who are my prize.  
The lot marked out for me is my delight:  
welcome indeed the heritage that falls to me!

I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel,  
who even at night directs my heart.  
I keep the Lord ever in my sight:  
since he is at my right hand, I shall stand firm.

And so my heart rejoices, my soul is glad;  
even my body shall rest in safety.  
For you will not leave my soul among the dead,  
nor let your beloved know decay.

You will show me the path of life,  
the fullness of joy in your presence,  
at your right hand happiness for ever.



1. After hearing it and making it a prayer, we have the opportunity to meditate on a Psalm that is charged with strong spiritual tension. Despite the difficulties the original Hebrew text presents, especially in the first verses, Psalm 16[15] is a luminous canticle with a mystical dimension, as the profession of faith at the beginning immediately suggests: "You are my God. My happiness lies in you alone" (v. 2). Thus, God is seen as the only good, and so the person of prayer chooses to rank himself with the community of all those who are faithful to the Lord: "He has put into my heart a marvellous love for the faithful ones who dwell in his land" (v. 3). This is why the Psalmist radically rejects the temptation of idolatry with its offerings of blood and its blasphemous invocations (cf. v. 4).

It is a clear and decisive choice of sides that seems to echo the choice expressed in Psalm 72, another hymn of trust in God acquired through a strong and deeply-felt moral choice. "What else have I in heaven but you? Apart from you I want nothing on earth.... To be near God is my happiness. I have made the Lord God my refuge" (Ps 73[72]: 25, 28).



2. Our Psalm develops two themes that are expressed through three symbols.

First of all, there is the symbol of the "heritage", a term that serves as the framework of verses 5 and 6: indeed, the Psalm speaks of "heritage", "cup", "lot". These words were used to describe the gift of the Promised Land to the People of Israel. We now know that the Levites were the only tribe that did not receive a portion of land because the Lord himself constituted their heritage. Indeed, the Psalmist declares: "O Lord, it is you who are my portion.... The lot marked out for me is my delight" (Ps 16[15]: 5, 6). Thus, he gives us the impression that he is a priest proclaiming his joy in being dedicated to serving God without reserve.

St Augustine comments: "The Psalmist does not say: O God, give me a heritage! What would you ever give me as a heritage? Instead, he says: all that you can give me other than yourself is vile. May you yourself be my heritage. It is you I love.... Hoping for God from God, being filled with God by God. He is sufficient; besides him, nothing can satisfy you" (*Sermone* 334, 3: PL 38, 1469).





3. Perfect and continuous communion with the Lord constitutes the second theme. The Psalmist expresses the firm hope that he will be preserved from death and be able to stay close to God, something that is no longer possible in death (cf. Ps 6: 6; 88[87]: 6). Yet, his words set no limits on this preservation; on the contrary, they can be understood along the lines of a victory over death that is an assurance of eternal intimacy with God.

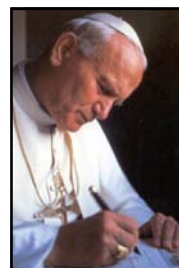
Two symbols are used by the person of prayer. In the first place it is the body he calls to mind: exegetes tell us that the original Hebrew (cf. Ps 16[15]: 7-10) refers to "loins", a symbol of the most secret passions and hidden inner feelings, to the "right hand", a sign of strength, to the "heart", the seat of the conscience, even to the "liver" that expresses emotionality, to "flesh" that points to the frail existence of human beings and lastly, to the "breath of life".

This is consequently a representation of the "whole being" of the person who is not absorbed or annihilated in the corruption of the grave (cf. v. 10), but is kept fully alive and happy with God.

4. Here, then, is the second symbol of Psalm 16[15]: the "path": "you will show me the path of life" (v. 11). It is the way that leads to "fullness of joy in your [the divine] presence", "at your [the Lord's] right hand, happiness for ever". These words fit perfectly into an interpretation that broadens the prospect to the hope of communion with God beyond death, in eternal life.

At this point it is easy to perceive that the New Testament incorporated this Psalm in connection with the Resurrection of Christ. In his discourse on Pentecost, St Peter quotes precisely from the second part of the hymn with an enlightening paschal and Christological application: "God raised him [Jesus of Nazareth] up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2: 24).

St Paul refers to Psalm 16[15] in his announcement of the Passover of Christ during his speech at the Synagogue in Antioch Pisidian. In this light, let us also proclaim him: "'You will not let your Holy One see corruption'. For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up", that is, Jesus Christ, "saw no corruption" (Acts 13: 35-37).



Blessed John Paul II  
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