

Psalms 27(26): 1-6

The Lord is my light and my help!



he Lord is my light and my help;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
before whom shall I shrink?

When evil-doers draw near
to devour my flesh,
it is they, my enemies and foes,
who stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me
my heart would not fear.
Though war break out against me
even then would I trust.

There is one thing I ask of the Lord,
for this I long,
to live in the house of the Lord,
all the days of my life,
to savor the sweetness of the Lord,
to behold his temple.

For there he keeps me safe in his tent
in the day of evil.
He hides me in the shelter of his tent,
on a rock he sets me safe.

And now my head shall be raised
above my foes who surround me
and I shall offer within his tent
a sacrifice of joy.

I will sing and make music for the Lord.

O Lord, hear my voice when I call;
have mercy and answer.
Of you my heart has spoken:
"Seek his face."

It is your face, O Lord, that I seek;
hide not your face.
Dismiss not your servant in anger;
you have been my help.

Do not abandon or forsake me,
O God my help!
Though father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will receive me.

Instruct me, Lord, in your way;
on an even path lead me.
When they lie in ambush protect me
from my enemy's greed.
False witnesses rise against me,
breathing out fury.

I am sure I shall see the Lord's goodness
in the land of the living.
Hope in him, hold firm and take heart.
Hope in the Lord!



1. Today we continue on our journey through Vespers with Psalm 27[26], which the liturgy separates into two different passages. Let us now follow the first part of this poetical and spiritual diptych (vv. 1-6) whose background is the Temple of Zion, Israel's place of worship. Indeed, the Psalmist speaks explicitly of the "house of the Lord", his "temple" (v. 4) of "safety, a dwelling, a house" (cf. vv. 5-6). Indeed, in the original Hebrew, a more precise meaning of these terms is "tabernacle" and "tent", that is, the inner sanctuary of the temple where the Lord reveals himself with his presence and his words. The "rock" of Zion (cf. v. 5) is also recalled, a place of safety and shelter, and an allusion is made to the celebration of thanksgiving sacrifices (cf. v. 6).

If, therefore, the liturgy is the spiritual atmosphere in which this Psalm is steeped, the guiding thread of prayer is trust in God, both on the day of rejoicing and in time of fear.

2. The first part of the Psalm we are now meditating upon is marked by a deep tranquillity, based on trust in God on the dark day of the evildoers' assault. Two types of images are used to describe these adversaries, symbols of the evil that contaminates history. On the one hand, we seem to have the imagery of a ferocious hunt; the evildoers are like wild beasts stalking their prey to pounce on it and tear away its flesh, but they stumble and fall (cf. v. 2). On the other hand, there is the military symbol of an assault by a whole army: a raging battle is waged, sowing terror and death (cf. v. 3).

The believer's life is often subjected to tension and disputes, sometimes also rejection and even persecution. The conduct of the righteous person is troubling, for it conveys tones of



reproof to the arrogant and the perverse. The ungodly described in the Book of Wisdom recognize this without mincing their words: "He became to us a reproof of our thoughts; the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange" (Wis 2: 14-15).

3. The faithful know that being consistent creates ostracism and even provokes contempt and hostility in a society that often chooses to live under the banner of personal prestige, ostentatious success, wealth, unbridled enjoyment. They are not alone, however, and preserve a surprising interior peace in their hearts because, as the marvellous "antiphon" that opens the Psalm says, "the Lord is light and salvation... the stronghold of life" (cf. Ps 27[26]: 1) of the just. He continuously repeats: "Whom shall I fear?", "Of whom shall I be afraid?", "My heart shall not fear", "Yet I will trust" (cf. vv. 1, 3).

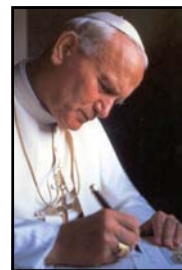
It almost seems as though we were hearing the voice of St Paul proclaiming: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom 8: 31). But inner calm, strength of soul and peace are gifts obtained by seeking shelter in the temple, that is, by recourse to personal and communal prayer.

4. Indeed, the person praying entrusts himself to God's embrace, and another Psalm also expresses that person's dream: "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (cf. Ps 23[22]: 6). There he will be able to "savour the sweetness of the Lord" (Ps 27[26]: 4), to contemplate and admire the divine mystery, to take part in the sacrificial liturgy and sing praise to God who sets him free (cf. v. 6). The Lord creates around his

faithful a horizon of peace that blocks out the clamour of evil. Communion with God is a source of serenity, joy and tranquility; it is like reaching an oasis of light and love.

5. To conclude our reflection, let us now listen to the words of the Syrian monk Isaiah who lived in the Egyptian desert and died in Gaza around the year 491. In his *Asceticon* he applies our Psalm to prayer during temptation:

"If we see our foes surrounding us with their cunning, their spiritual sloth, weakening our souls with pleasure, or failing to contain our anger against our neighbour when he acts contrary to his duty, or tempting our eyes with concupiscence, or if they want to entice us to taste the pleasures of gluttony, if they make our neighbour's words to us like poison, if they incite us to belittle what others say or if they induce us to distinguish between our brethren by saying: 'This one is good, this one is bad'; therefore, even if all these things surround us, let us not lose heart but cry out bravely like David: 'The Lord is the stronghold of my life!' (Ps 27[26]: 1)" (*Recueil Ascétique*, Bellefontaine, 1976, p. 211).



Blessed John Paul II
21 April 2004
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20040421_en.html

