

'Why do nations and rulers stand against the Church?'

Psalm 2

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'Why' is a word used much in the past days among us, Christians. 'O, Lord why.'

Psalm 2 begins with the same word. The people of God were in need and cried out to God. Why are the nations, the people, the rulers against God and against us! Has God not promised to be with us and to bless us?

This Psalm echoes the promises of God to King David, from 2 Samuel 7:12-16. **Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16.**

Psalm 2 reflects these promises, but it does not seem to speak of just an earthly king. No one but our Lord Jesus Christ himself is introduced here. The apostles in the New Testament certainly understood the Psalm in this way, and they regularly quoted from it, applying it to our Lord Jesus, the Christ.

God has installed his King, and he told him: 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you...'

The first chapter of the letter to the Hebrews uses those literal words to show that our Lord Jesus is much higher than the angels.

The same words sounded from heaven when Jesus was baptized. And also when Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus on a mountain. 'You are my son. This is my son...'

Some church fathers had difficulties with the word 'today', in the sentence 'today I have begotten you.' For some this was a reason to think that this verse speaks in the first place about how Jesus became a man on earth.

But most early church fathers, like St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) believed that the verse 'today I have begotten you' focuses on the eternal generation of the Word of God, the Son of God. The word "Today" points to the eternal 'now' and not to any particular day in our world history. St Augustine said about this

In eternity there is nothing that is past, as though it had ceased to be, nor future, as though not yet in existence; there is present only, because whatever is eternal, always is. By this phrase 'today have I begotten you' the most true and catholic faith proclaims eternal generation of the Power and Wisdom of God, who is the only-begotten Son. (*Exposition of the Psalms*, 2.6.)

Verse 7 does not speak of God's son being created – this is not creation but generation. He is – in human terms – flesh of Gods flesh. In more theological terms, he is of the same

essence. In Jesus Christ, we meet with God himself.

And this anointed King, our Lord, does not only rule in our hearts or in Church. He rules eternally! He is king of heaven and earth! Our Lord sits, with his Father, in the throne of the universe.

There is something unbelievable in the idea that nations, peoples, kings, rulers, conspire against God and his Messiah. Why do the nations, the kings of the earth rebel against God and his Anointed, Jesus Christ?

Yes why?

Is it maybe because people do not like the commands of God? Is it because nations and their kings do not like his rule over us? 'Let us break the chains of God and his Messiah', people cry out.

We, followers of Jesus Christ, we have voluntarily accepted the yoke of our Lord Christ. Those who willingly accept his yoke, realize that it is light; it does not hurt, but it means eternal life. Living with him under his yoke, is lovely; it means salvation

Those who do not accept his yoke, can only see it in terms of chains. Of something that they hate. Something to be rejected. And those who reject God and his Christ, also reject those who are called after Christ – Christians – as they are a continuous reminder of the claims and the demands of the eternal God.

St Josemaria Escriva (1902-1975), founder of the Roman Catholic movement Opus Dei, wrote some wise words of the maltreatment of Christians today:

You see, nothing new. People opposed Christ, the anointed, even before he was born. They opposed him as he went his peaceable way along the roads of Palestine; they persecuted him and continue to do so by attacking the members of his real and mystical body. Why so much hatred...? Dei (*Christ is Passing By*, p. 185)

The Church is persecuted because it is part of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are through faith united with the Christ, hidden in the Christ, we are on his side, therefore we are called Christians. Therefore Psalm 2 is not only about Jesus Christ but about Jesus Christ *and those who are in him*. His church.

It is no coincidence that St Peter, in Acts 4, when he and his fellow apostles were badly treated by the authorities of Israel, quoted Psalm 2 in their prayer. **Read Acts 4:23-31.**

Interesting... Peter applies this 'kings and rulers' to Herod, and Pontius Pilate. The rulers who killed Jesus. And the nations and the peoples mentioned in Psalm 2:1 are the gentile nations and the peoples, the tribes, of Israel.

Peter in his prayer, when the church is persecuted, calls to mind the persecution of Jesus Christ. Those who belong to him should expect similar problems that their Master also suffered.

Peter also prays: Lord, consider their threats! He calls the Lord God of heaven and earth to help them against their persecutors. That is a good prayer. 'Lord, come and help!'

Rulers stand up against God and his anointed Christ and his people, but God laughs about those rulers. On earth it may seem serious and grave. And it is. The persecutions, the immoral behaviour of many rulers is unacceptable and awful. But God laughs about it.

God's laughter is not about the pain we suffer. It is about the ridiculous idea that those evil kings and nations would be able to ever break the chains of God.

God mocks the arrogance of those nations, and of those rulers. And one day, he will finish them, if they do not change their life.

All those rulers are nothing in the eyes of eternity – because God has installed his own king on his holy mountain. This true King sits on the throne – the throne of the Universe.

God in heaven laugh about the arrogance of those who rule. And at the same time, God suffers with those who now suffer pain here down below.

Even in the midst of his heavenly home, in the midst of the throne, stands the lamb that is slaughtered. His pain, his wounds, his death, are remembered by God himself as they are the pain of God himself. God knows the pain of suffering. And he looks down from heaven to see what is happening in Egypt.

God has given the nations and the ends of the earth to his Messiah. All nations are his, in spite of their temporary kings. And he has gathered millions and millions of people throughout history who obey him and whose first loyalty is to Him.

Yes, we are loyal to our countries; we obey the laws of our countries; we respect those who rule our lands. We even pray for them. But

ultimately, our first loyalty is to the Lord our God and his anointed.

We also see that the Messiah will rule the nations with an iron rod, a sceptre. This is actually the staff of the shepherd. For those who are his obedient sheep, the staff is lovely because it holds us together in the flock, it is how he moves us to green pastures.

For wolves who want to kill the flock, his iron staff is deadly. He will dash them to pieces like pottery...

Does God like to punish? Not at all. He calls all people to repentance. That is why the Psalm advises those rulers urgently to repent and kiss the son, to accept our Lord, to avoid his sure revenge.

Let us pray for our leaders in accordance with the wise advise in the Psalm, in verse 11, that they:

- serve the Lord with fear
- rejoice with trembling
- kiss the Son
- take their refuge in him

St Origin of Alexandria (185-254 AD) summarized God's demands for those rulers in this way:

[Rulers,] it is to your advantage that you be subject to him by whom understanding and instruction are given to you. It is also to your advantage not to exercise lordship irresponsibly but to serve the Lord of all with reverence. (*Exposition of Psalms 2.9*)

And further:

How do kings serve the Lord with fear, except by forbidding and restraining with religious severity all acts committed against the commandments of the Lord? [And] by exerting the necessary strength to sanction laws that command goodness and prohibit its opposite... (*Letters*, 185.19)

So: rulers need good laws, and they must apply those if necessary with force. This is what St Origin pointed at; this is what we demand. This is what we plead for. This is what we pray for.

Interesting detail in this Psalm is that God actually invited his Messiah *to ask* for the nations and for the ends of the earth. He did not just donate it. The same church father, St Origin, writes about this:

It may be a dogma of some kind that no one receives a divine gift who does not request it. The Father, indeed, through the Psalm, urges the Saviour to ask that it may be given to him. [...] and the Saviour says [to us]: 'Ask and it will be given to

you... for everyone who asks receives.'
(*Commentary on the Gospel of John 13:5*)

Our Lord asked his Father for the nations, and he received them as his inheritance. So let us also ask God what we need, in order to receive what we need.

God wants the best for all people, even for evil rulers, and for those nations that rise up against him. That is why he warns them to turn to him in time, before judgement comes. And judgement will come, through the Son, to avenge and to punish, be assured of that. There will be a glorious day of retribution – great for those who suffered, awful for those who did wrong.

When St Peter was persecuted, in Acts 4, he pleaded with God: 'Lord, look upon their threats!' He asked God to intervene. But he did not ask for a comfortable life, an easy life. His major request was:

Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal,

and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. (Acts 4:29-30).

Peter's response to persecution was more obedience to God, more commitment, more prayer, more speaking about the Gospel of the Lord. He did not become shy, but bold!

This is the challenge for us. Troubles must not scare us; they must make us more obedient to our Lord. And the advice given to the evil rulers and bad people is also very valuable for us:

- serve the Lord with fear
- rejoice with trembling
- kiss the Son
- take your refuge in him

Take refuge in him; if we hide in him, we are already with him, in our inner life, connected with the throne room of heaven.

You are like a strong tree, planted at fresh water. So bear much fruit, for the glory of our Lord, God's Anointed King, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.