

Sermon: Psalm 3

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King David had to escape from Jerusalem, because his own son Absalom wanted to take over power in the land of Israel. David was in great danger!

In this context of danger David wrote this prayer to God. He had many enemies, they had multiplied in number. So David felt like a minority. Many were against him. If that is our situation, like David, we better pray to God.

We are also in danger. Dangers of political strife. Of religious enmity. Maybe of sickness. Or poverty. And each Christian always faces the great dangers of sin, disobedience to God, temptation.

David was worried about his enemies, who mocked him and said: 'God will not save him...'

It is bad if other people mock us. It is even worse if we accept that little voice in our brain that says: 'God will not help me... He is not there for me...'

The best response to this doubt is prayer. Lay it before the Lord. 'Lord, I am not sure that you will help me... Please come to my help!'

And in prayer, as we meet with him, as we talk with him and listen to him, He will remind us that He is a God who saves. He is our Father. Our Lord God is very near to us. And this is what David also prayed towards God.

You are a shield around me
my glory
the one who lifts my head up...

God is our shield for protection. When troubles come, he is there. When we have many difficulties, He is our help. When temptations come, and when sinful desires seem overwhelming, God comes to our aid. Because He is your shield, everywhere around you.

He is also your glory. St Origin of Alexandria, in his commentary on this Psalm, warns us to not find our glory expect in our Lord. He wrote:

People place their glory in various places, some in their country, some in family line, some in beauty, some in the strength of their bodies and in their skill of competing in the contest.

But none of this is lasting.

We serve the glorious eternal Father, and His glory is ours. What a privilege to be his child. The glory of our Father is also our glory. His wealth is our wealth. His eternity is our eternity. His power is our power. We belong to His eternal kingdom.

Much can be said about this 'glory' of God that is also ours. It certainly has to do with the fact that God is not only a protective shield outside us; he is even, in a mysterious way, inside us.

Read John 14:16-20.

Did you hear that? The Holy Spirit of God dwells with us, is among us, is in us. Just as Jesus is in us, and we are in Him, and he is in the Father.

We are intimately connected with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What a glory for us. What a comfort in times of need. What a protection against our enemies!

No wonder, in the midst of his problems, David could also speak of God who is the one 'who lifts up my head'.

In the midst of our everyday life, we can lift up our heads. Not because we had some successes in demonstrations, not because our work goes well, or because we live easy lives. We can lift up our head because God lifts up our head. He makes us satisfied, yes even proud. Proud not about ourselves. But proud that He shields us, and that He is our glory. Lift up your heads!

Is this something we experience each day? No. Do we experience all this automatically when we are in problems? No. David experienced this and rejoiced in it when he cried to God. It was the answer to prayer.

For us, our situation, whatever it is, must move us to God, to be with him, to ask from him. Then he will be our shield, our glory, the lifter of our head.

We need to ask God, and we need to remind ourselves each day. He is with me – to be my help in need, my light in darkness, my strength when I am weak.

David prayed, and God answered him from his holy hill. This holy hill was of course the mountain called Zion in Jerusalem. That is where David was installed as king over Israel by God; that is where the ark stood, the throne of God. Even though David had escaped from Jerusalem, God from his holy hill continued to answer David; to bless David.

Mankind is very able to stand up against God, against his anointed Christ, against Gods anointed servants, but God is seated on his throne and will never forsake us. He is our shield, our glory, the lifter of our head.

Interesting how David then describes that he sleeps well. Many church fathers saw this as a

prophecy about Jesus, who would die and rise on the third day. St Augustine uses a funny argument for this. Listen to this:

Unless one sees in this sleep the death, and in the awaking the resurrection of Christ thus prophesied, one is reduced to the silly supposition that the prophet wished to communicate to us the remarkable news that he himself fell asleep and later on woke up! (*City of God*, 17.18)

Maybe we can see in the words a prophecy about Jesus, but I disagree here with St Augustine. For David it was very important to tell us that he slept. The issue is that in spite of his troubles, he could have a good night's sleep as he knew that God would wake him up again.

His enemies were trying to find him and kill him! Would you sleep well?

I do not know about your sleeping habits, but when I have problems, it sometimes steals my sleep. Maybe you know the experience of thinking and thinking on your bed about problems, and how to solve them. Sometimes they can be so overwhelming...

A good habit, for me, is to write down the things I have to solve. The matters that really need decisions. The problems I face.

Write them on a list; number them from 1-10. Tackle them, in as far as you can, prayerfully, one by one. Use an agenda and write in your agenda when you will work on which problem. Do not leave it all circling in your mind but commit it to paper. That often helps very well in solving problems and in avoiding sleepless nights!

But we have to work on our problems prayerfully. And then, many problems are too large to solve in this way. You may need someone to help you. Discuss your problems with others; other people may be of help. But in any case – talk to God as David did.

Cry to the Lord. And even in the midst of unsolved problems – health, or money matters, or problems in your family, or whatever... you can go to bed and sleep ... knowing that God sustains you.

David had massive problems – but he was able to sleep well, because he trusted in God's protec-

tion. Not sleeping well often makes our problems bigger – we are too tired to think normally.

David was called by God to rule Israel as the king. He was not satisfied with being safe only – he did not settle for anything less than full victory over his enemies.

That is why he called to God to arise and strike all his enemies, to beat them in the face and break their teeth. A rather rough image that may not sound pleasant but that does show the need of David. His enemies had to be defeated.

In the last line of the Psalm, the last words of the prayer, David prays that God will bless God's people. Here the prayer goes beyond David's own needs. And I think this should be our attitude as well.

Let us live our lives trusting that God is our salvation; he is able to help us and he is willing to help us. But in our dark moments of need, let us not focus so much on ourselves that we forget to pray for others as well. This also helps us to see ourselves and our own problems in a different perspective.

Now some of our problems can be solved. But we will not solve all our problems in life. We have to live with many lasting issues. And if we defeat a few 'enemies', we get a few others in their place the next day. That's life.

If we want to live for our Lord Jesus Christ, we will always have our issues – temptations to sin, to not love God as we should, to not love our neighbours as ourselves. We will have to live with sickness, and many other things that are a normal part of this life on earth.

So till our last day we have to battle. But let us face them all, one by one, with the help of the Lord.

David ends with this important proclamation: Salvation belongs to the Lord. To save is his nature. So trust in him and pray to him for help.

And even though we face battle upon battle in our life, and sometimes we feel defeated – we know the final victory, on the last day, is ours, because God is a saving God.

+ in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit