

PSALM 25

✠ This psalm is written in the form of a Lament.

✧ See the note about “lament” in the introduction to Psalm 3.

✠ This psalm is used (verses 6-12) at the vesting prayers of the clergy, at the washing of the hands.

✠ *The Orthodox Study Bible* indicates that this psalm may be understood as Christ’s intercession to the Father for the Churches at the heavenly Altar.

✠ Saint Athanasius recommends that we sing Psalm 25 at times when we are surrounded by enemies who have evil intent against us. Thus, we turn for protection and vindication to the Lord, the Righteous Judge. Saint Athanasius also recommends that we sing Psalms 34 and 42 at such times.

✠ Saint Augustine comments that this psalm refers to the whole Church which is perfectly rooted in Christ.

✠ Cassiodorus and Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrihus explain that this psalm fits the context of the Prophet and King David, and that it applies as well to the life of a Christian who is consoled by the kindnesses of God.

✧ Cassiodorus suggests further that this psalm is to be ascribed to Christ and the Body of Christ ; but it may likewise may be applied to a perfect Christian.

“Supplication of the Church, purified in the Blood of Christ”

“The prayer of a good conscience”

“Concentration encircles the Altar”

1 Of David.

V 1 About the Inscription : in the Masoretic (Hebrew) text, the Inscription is the same as the Septuagint Inscription. “Of David” gives the same meaning as “By David”.

✧ It is the opinion of Cassiodorus that the Prophet and King David spoke this psalm about himself and his life-circumstances.

✧ About “*of David*” : see Psalms 26:1 ; 27:1 ; 144:1.

[Κρίνον με, Κύριε Judica me, Domine]

Judge me, O LORD, for I have walked in my guilelessness ;/ hoping on the LORD, I shall not become weak.

✠ About “*judge me*” : Saint Athanasius advises us that when enemies persist and with bloodied hands try to drag us down and kill us, then we ought to let human judgement go, and to remember that God is the

true and righteous “*Judge*”, and that we ought to sing this psalm.

✧ Saint Augustine mentions that in asking that he be judged, there is a risk taken by King David by his praying to be distinguished from the wicked. This request for the sorting of the threshing floor takes into account the many activities of the wicked amongst those who are faithful. Saint Augustine recalls for us the entry into the Church in the fourth century of many who made a pretense of being Christian, but who remained pagan in their hearts. Concern is expressed that the good may be swept away with the bad, with no sorting or distinction.

✧ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) comments that the meaning is equivalent to “O Lord, do me right”.

✧ See the note about “*judging*” on Psalm 2:10.

✧ About “*Lord*” : see the note about “*Lord*” on Psalm 1:2.

✧ About “*I have walked in my guilelessness*” : the sense of this phrase is found also in words by the Prophet David in Psalms 14:2-5 ; 17:21-26.

✧ About “*guilelessness*” : see verse 11 ; see also the note on Psalm 7:9.

✧ About “*hoping*” : Cassiodorus explains that the request for the sorting that comes with judgement is rooted in the petitioner’s certainty of the Lord’s mercy. He cites the confidence of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:8. Without presumption, he puts his trust in the Lord that he will be covered by the Lord’s goodness and mercy.

✧ See the note about “*hope*” on Psalm 4:6.

✧ About “*become weak*” : see the note about “*became weak*” on Psalm 9:4.

2 Prove me, O LORD, and put me to the test ;/ test by fire my reins and my heart ;

V 2 About “*prove me*” : Saint Augustine interprets this phrase a request that the Lord reveal everything about him to himself and to others (since the Lord knows and sees all).

✧ Cassiodorus clarifies this as a request that the Lord bring about an improvement through awareness of sin so that repentance may be enabled.

✧ “*Put me to the test*” is another way of saying the same thing (i.e., “*prove me*”).

✧ See the note on Psalm 16:3.

✧ About “*put me to the test*” : this phrase translates the Greek verb *περάζω*, *perazō*, which also can be translated as “to make trial or proof of”, “to tempt”.

✧ See Psalms 34:16 ; 94:9 ; 105:14.

✧ About “*test by fire*” : Saint Augustine interprets these words as a request that the Lord purge him with fire as a remedy for his thoughts so that he will not think evil. He asks that the Lord do this with the fire of His word (Luke 12:49), with the heat of His Spirit (Psalm 18:7).

✧ Saint John of Kronstadt explains to us that being proved and put to the test by fire is necessary for those who love and follow the Lord. It is a similar situation with metals : without passing

through the fire, iron can seem to be steel ; tin can seem to be silver ; an alloy of silver can seem to be true silver ; bronze can appear to be gold ; gold mixed with earth can appear to be pure gold [as is so with iron pyrite, “fool’s gold”]. Only the testing can prove the true worth of these materials, and it is the same with human beings. By appearance, many people may appear to be entirely virtuous, but the trial often reveals that they are the opposite. We are tried by such things as sickness, sorrow, privations, losses, dishonour.

✧ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) writes that this request is that he be tried (tested), as with fire. He says that, as Saint Macarius the Great wrote, this is the fire of the Holy Spirit, who enabled the Apostles to speak in tongues (unlearned languages) ; who inspired and illumined the Apostle Paul ; who appeared unto Moses in the burning bush ; who caught up the prophet Elijah in a chariot of fire ; who inspired King David to write this verse.

✧ This phrase is related to, and a third and most intense way of expressing “*prove me*”. It is in part a literary device. However, “*test by fire*” is a term used with the smelting of metals, in which impurities are removed by fire. Human beings have sometimes historically been put to some sort of “trial by fire” in the desire to determine the truth. Therefore, it is truly the most intense sort of proving.

✧ See the note about “*tested me by fire*” on Psalm 16:3.

✧ About “*reins*” : see the note on Psalm 7:10.

✧ About “*heart*” : see the note on Psalm 4:3.

3 for Your mercy is before my eyes,/ and I have been well-pleased in Your truth.

V 3 About “*mercy*” : Cassiodorus explains that the Prophet David could not and would not forget the Lord’s mercy. He was constantly aware of the kindness that had been bestowed upon him by the Lord.

✧ Saint Jerome shows us that King David requests that he be judged in order that he may then proclaim to all how merciful is the Lord.

✧ See the note on Psalm 5:8.

✧ About “*well-pleased*” (and variants) : see Psalms 34:14 ; 39:14 ; 43:4 ; 48:14 ; 50:18, 21 ; 55:14 ; 67:17 ; 76:8 ; 84:2 ; 101:15 ; 114:9 ; 118:108 ; 146:10, 11 ; 149:4 ; 151:5.

✧ About “*truth*” : Saint Augustine comments that the Prophet David was pleased in the Lord’s truth because he has sought not the approval of human beings, but only the Lord, and he cites Galatians 6:4, “*let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another*”.

✧ Cassiodorus concurs with Saint Augustine, and he adds that this truth is in fact Christ, who would say : “*I am the Way, and the Truth and the Life*” [John 14:6].

✧ See the note about “*truth*” on Psalm 5:10.

I have not sat down with a council of futility,/ nor shall I enter with those transgressing the law.

V 4 About “*sat down ... futility*” : Saint Augustine comments that “sitting down” implies collusion or agreement with those sitting together. However, the agreement may be merely apparent, if the being seated is under duress. The heart and mind may, in fact, be elsewhere. If so, the person has not truly “*sat down*”. Nevertheless, the Lord who knows the hearts understands what is the truth of the matter in our hearts.

✧ We may take as an example a monk whose mind and heart may wander elsewhere than the monastery, and by contrast a person living in the world who may indeed have the heart as it were in the monastery and focussed on serving the Lord.

✧ Cassiodorus expands on the words of Saint Augustine, and he points out that this verse begins a supplementary explanation of verse 3, “*I have been well-pleased in Your truth*” by demonstrating details of his faithfulness to the Lord.

✧ See the notes on Psalm 1:1.

✧ About “*futility*” : see the note on Psalm 4:3.

✧ About “*enter*” : Cassiodorus explains that this means literally, “go in”, and that it implies actual participation in an activity, in this case, transgression of the law. Therefore, it means that he refuses to join forces with the workers of iniquity.

✧ About “*transgressing the law*” (participle) : this phrase translates a Greek participle. The verb form is παρανομέω, *paranomeō*, which is the root of nouns, adjectives and participles. The meaning is “to transgress the law”, “to be lawless”, “to be a law-breaker”.

✧ See Psalms 70:4 ; 74:5 ; 118:51.

I hated the assembly of those doing evil,/ and with the impious I shall not sit down.

V 5 About this verse : Saint Cæsarius of Gaul exhorts us not to be malicious towards one another, and that we both resist and keep away from evildoers and evildoing. He notes that futility and wickedness are not the same as each other. He says that the futile, the vain, the empty, are concerned with inconsequential things, and empty talk. The wicked are those who actively reject the Holy Scriptures, who pose treacherous questions, and who pull themselves down to destruction and perdition.

✧ About “*I hated....*” : see Psalms 44:8 ; 96:10 ; 100:3 ; 118:104, 113, 128, 163 ; 138:21, 22.

✧ About “*assembly*” : this is a variant translation of the Greek word ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*, which is elsewhere translated as “church” (see verse 12). The variant is used in this case because of the context.

✧ See the note on Psalm 21:23.

✧ About “*doing evil*” : see the note on Psalm 5:5.

✠ About “*impious*” : see verse 9 ; see also the note about “*the impious*” on Psalm 1:1.

✠ About “*sit down*” : Saint Augustine comments that the determination not to “*sit down*” makes visible and apparent the inner refusal to participate in evil and emptiness.

✧ Cassiodorus further states that if a godly person will refuse to “*sit down*”, then that person must inwardly and outwardly reject and refuse all that is negative and vapid about the others who are seated. “*Hate*” indicates division and discord, whereas love indicates unity and harmony. He stresses with the Prophet David that both emptiness and evil must be completely forsaken.

6 I shall wash my hands amongst the innocent,/ and I shall circle around Your altar,
O LORD,

V 6 About “*I shall ... innocent*” : Saint Cyril of Jerusalem reminds us that during the Divine Liturgy we may see the hands of the clergy being washed. He explains that this is not simply because of any bodily defilement or uncleanness, but rather as a reminder that we must be clean from all sinful and unlawful actions. The hands are a symbol of action, and by washing them we symbolise the purity of our conduct.

✧ Saint Augustine reminds us that besides the Holy Table in the Temples where we worship, there is with and beyond this Table that Holy Table in the Heavenly Kingdom (Hebrews 6:20 ; 9:12) where stands Christ the High Priest. Saint Augustine admits that in our earthly experience, not every priest is completely innocent because of human failures. However, in the Kingdom, there will be no such paradoxical situation. There stand only those who wash their “*hands amongst the innocent*” and have been gathered to Abraham’s bosom. His words presume that the faithful people also wash their hands as they enter the Temple (there were formerly places for this), and that they make their confessions in order to remain interiorly clean.

✧ Cassiodorus reminds us that anyone, good or bad, may wash the hands, and he reminds us of Pilate as an example. However, the more important element is that whoever is eager to live a godly life amidst others takes care to purify all the aspects of life, and truly washes the hands amongst the innocent. Whoever washes the hands with tears (of repentance) washes them spiritually also.

✠ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) writes that verses 6-12 have become a liturgical prayer which accompanies the washing of hands by clergy in the introduction to the Divine Liturgy.

✧ These verses are, however, for the washing of purification, which are to be said by all who serve in the Altar. Although they are formally said by the bishops, presbyters, and deacons, it is quite correct that all wash, and that all say them.

✠ About “*wash*” : the meaning of this Greek word implies the washing of some part of the body.

✧ Saint Cyril of Jerusalem explains that the washing of hands before and during worship, and the washing of hands at other times, is for the purpose of spiritual and physical cleansing. By washing our hands, we express the purity and blamelessness of our intentions and of our conduct in the Presence of the Lord.

✧ See 2 Moses 30:17-21 ; 38:27 ; 5 Moses 21:6-8 ; Psalm 57:11 ; 72:13 ; Matthew 27:24 ; John 13:8. See also the note about “*wash*” on Psalm 50:4.

✠ About *“innocent”* : see the note about *“innocent”* on Psalm 9:29.

✠ About *“circle around Your altar”* : It is implied in the Talmud that, as a part of the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (3 Moses 23:42–43), the people holding branches of the four plants (citron, date palm, myrtle, willow) would process round about the altar seven times for seven days. In modern times, there is a sevenfold procession about the synagogue as the people carry branches of the same four plants. Besides having originated in a harvest-festival (2 Moses 34:22), this week commemorates the forty years of wandering in the wilderness after the departure from Egypt as found in 2 Moses, as well as the completion of the annua rota of readings from the Torah. In Orthodox Christian practice, there is a threefold procession on three different sacramental occasions. There is a triple procession round about the baptismal font by those who are the newly-illuminated. There is a triple procession round about the table with the Holy Gospel of a newly-married couple. There is a triple procession round about the Holy Table by those about to be ordained to the major orders. For the Orthodox Christians, this procession signifies the unity of the person or persons involved with that which they encircle : the baptism in the font ; Christ and the Church in the Holy Gospels ; the Holy Table at which the clergy will serve and prepare the spiritual food of the Faithful. The perception of this sort of procession is in continuity and harmony with that of the Feast of Tabernacles.

✠ About *“altar”* : the Monk Evagrius of Pontus explains that our mind is the rational altar on which the fire from God burns up our irrational thoughts. He exhorts us to contemplate the Lord so that our mind may be cleansed, and so that we may be enabled to proclaim the marvels of God boldly (verse 7).

7 to hear the voice of Your praise,/ and to recount all Your wonders.

V 7 About *“hear the voice of Your praise”* : Saint Augustine comments that to hear God does not mean simply to perceive audible sounds, to which some are deaf. By the Holy Spirit, we learn how properly to hear and to understand words of praise. We learn to understand deep within ourselves that whatever good there may be belongs to God alone. Whatever bad there may be belongs to us. Therefore, we who have been thus illumined ought to hear the praise of God and never to turn it towards ourselves (1 Corinthians 4:7).

✠ About *“praise”* : see the note on Psalm 8:3.

✠ About *“recount”* : see the note about *“recount”* on Psalm 9:2.

✠ About *“wonders”* : see the note about *“wonders”* on Psalm 9:2.

8 O LORD, I loved the majesty of Your house,/ and the place of the tent of Your glory.

V 8 About *“majesty of Your house”* : Saint Athanasius explains that it is those in the Church who are adorned with the beauty of holiness, who are the majesty of the house.

✧ Saint Augustine comments that although there are people who do badly within the Church, it is nevertheless in this Church, the house of the Lord, where people who serve the Lord worship Him. He further mentions that the “*majesty of Your house*” means the same thing as “*the tent of Your glory*”. There, we find those who do not draw attention to themselves, but rather in everything they give glory to the Lord. Their boast is the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31). [See also Psalm 33:3-9.]

✧ Worship of God is our first responsibility. To nurture in our hearts love for God is of first importance.

✧ About “*majesty*” : this word means the quality of lofty or impressive dignity, of imposing aspect, of stately or grand deportment, of goodly appearance, comeliness. It is also the title of address of a monarch.

✧ Cassiodorus suggests that for “*majesty*”, “*beauty*” may be substituted. He adds that this beauty is not concerning mere outward appearances, but rather the content of the worship of the Lord in the glad singing of psalms, the sincerity of prayers, and the devotion of the Faithful.

✧ See Psalms 29:2 ; 92:1.

✧ About “*Your house*” : Bishop Theodoret of Cyrillus comments that “*Your house*” means “*God’s house*”. In this particular case, it refers to the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle (tent), because the Temple was not yet built.

✧ See the note about “*Your house*” on Psalm 5:8.

✧ About “*the tent*” : see the note on Psalm 5:12.

✧ About “*glory*” : see the note about “*my glory*” on Psalm 3:4.

9 Do not destroy my soul together with the impious,/ and my life with men of blood,

V 9 About this verse : Saint Augustine teaches that this verse gives the thrust of this whole psalm. The prayer is that we not be destroyed along with the winnowed chaff, and with the bloodthirsty, but rather that we be saved. See his comment about “*judge me*” on verse 1. [See Matthew 13:24-30.]

✧ About “*do not destroy*” : see Psalm 27:3. See also the note about “*destroy*” on Psalm 5:7.

✧ About “*destroy*” : see the note on Psalm 5:7.

✧ About “*soul*” : see the note about “*soul*” on Psalm 3:3.

✧ About “*impious*” : see the note on verse 5.

✧ About “*men of blood*” : see the note on Psalm 5:7.

✧ About “*blood*” : see the note about “*blood*” on Psalm 5:7.

10 in whose hands are lawless acts :/ their right hand was filled with bribes.

V 10 About "*lawless acts*" : this phrase translates the Greek word for "*lawlessness*", but in the plural.

✧ See Psalms 31:1 ; 37:5 ; 38:9 ; 39:13 ; 50:11 ; 52:2 ; 73:20 ; 78:8 ; 84:3 ; 88:33 ; 89:8 ; 102:3, 10, 12 ; 105:43 ; 106:17 ; 129:8. See also the note about "*lawlessness*" on Psalm 5:5.

✧ About "*right hand*" : see Psalms 44:5 ; 72:23 ; 88:26, 43 ; 136:5 ; 143:8, 11.

✧ About "*bribes*" : Saint Augustine explains that a "*bribe*" does not imply only money, gold, silver or presents. It goes deeper. We offer a bribe when we praise someone for the sake of what we might obtain from a person. Words associated with this sort of bribery are "*fawning*", "*flattering*", "*currying favour*", "*sycophancy*", and pronouncing an unjust judgement for the sake of praise. By such behaviour, we forsake our conscience.

✧ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) comments that "*bribes*" in the Greek text is a plural noun (δῶρον, *dōrōn*), and it can mean "*usury*" or any sort of property obtained by dishonest means.

✧ About "*bribes*" : see 2 Moses 23:8.

✧ Usury, the lending of money and charging interest of any sort was, in the Old Covenant, forbidden (see 2 Moses 22:24 ; 3 Moses 25:36 ; 5 Moses 23:20 ; Ezekiel 18:17). In modern times, the meaning has changed to imply much more imprecisely and vaguely the making of unethical or immoral monetary loans which unfairly enrich the lender.

✧ See the note about "*interest*" on Psalm 14:5.

11 But as for me, I have walked in my guilelessness ;/ redeem me, and have mercy on me.

V 11 About "*guilelessness*" : see verse 1.

✧ About "*redeem me*" : see the note on Psalm 7:3.

✧ Both Saint Augustine and Cassiodorus explain that the redemption comes through the Incarnation, Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, accomplished in love.

✧ About "*have mercy on me*" : see the note on Psalm 6:3.

12 My foot has stood in uprightness ;/ in the churches shall I bless You, O LORD.

V 12 About "*uprightness*" : see the note about "*uprightness*" on Psalm 9:9.

✧ About "*in the churches*" : see the note on Psalm 21:23.

✧ About "*bless You*" : Saint Augustine points out the fact that not all who bless the Lord are in fact living a life consistent with such a blessing. Their acts contradict their words. He exhorts us all to bless the Lord in every one of our deeds.

✧ It is for us to live in such a manner that as we bless the Lord, we bless everything in and about

our lives and also the creation around us.

✠ About “*bleſs*” : ſee the note about “*bleſs*” on Psalm 5:13.

O Lord, generously grant Your mercy to Your ſuppliant ſervants,
and make us fervent in Your truth ;
that, with our conduct reſtored to innocence,
we may be able to be freed from the impious. — Roman
