

and your brethren, and all the house of your father, you shall gather unto you into your house; and it shall come to pass, whosoever shall go abroad beyond the door of your house, his blood shall be upon his own head” (see Joshua 2:18-19)?

Also, the sacrament of the Passover contains nothing else in the law of the Exodus than that the lamb, which is slain in the figure of Christ, should be eaten in one house. God speaks, saying, “In one house shall you eat it; you shall not send its flesh abroad from the house” (see Exodus 12:46).

The flesh of Christ and the holy of the Lord cannot be sent abroad, nor is there any other home to believers but the one Church. This home, this household of unanimity, the Holy Spirit designates and points out in the psalms, saying, “God, who makes men to dwell with one mind in a house.” In the house of God, in the Church of Christ, men dwell with one mind, and continue in concord and simplicity.

—St. Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Unity of the Church*

Questions to Think About

1. What part might I play in helping to bring all nations to praise God?
2. In my own Christian community, how can I be a force for unity rather than division?

PSALM 70

Surrounded by enemies, David faces not only danger but insults. The great military leader confesses himself “poor and needy” and admits that he can do nothing without God’s help.

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, for the memorial offering.

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!
Let them be put to shame and confusion
who seek my life!
Let them be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt!
Let them be appalled because of their shame
who say, “Aha, Aha!”

May all who seek thee
rejoice and be glad in thee!
May those who love thy salvation
say evermore, “God is great!”
But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!
Thou art my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not tarry!

Words to Remember

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!

Of the Method of Continual Prayer

St. John Cassian recommends that the words of this psalm be constantly on our lips, especially whenever we are assailed by temptations—our most vicious enemies.

Now to put our system to work. You made a good comparison when you said it was like teaching children. For children learning the first lessons in the alphabet need copies of the letters on wax, which they can look at and imitate every day, so that they can learn to trace out the shapes with a steady hand. In the same way, we must give you the shape of this spiritual contemplation so you can keep looking at it with all your concentration. Remember how much benefit there is in constant practice, and by practicing it, along with meditation, you can manage to climb to an even higher insight.

Here is the formula of our system, and of the prayer you should be praying. Every monk, as he makes progress toward keeping God in mind all the time, should keep it constantly going through his heart, and get rid of all kinds of other thoughts. For he cannot possibly hold onto it unless he has freed himself from all bodily cares and anxieties. And since a few of those who remained among the oldest fathers gave us this formula, so we only divulge it to a very few, and to those who are really eager.

And so for keeping God constantly in mind, always have this pious formula in front of you:

“Be pleased, O God, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me!”

For this verse has very properly been picked out from the whole of Scripture for this purpose.

It embraces every human feeling, and can be adapted appropriately to every condition and every attack. It calls

on God’s help against every danger. It includes humble and pious confession. It includes the alertness of anxiety and continual fear. It includes the thought of one’s own weakness, confidence in the answer, and the assurance of a present and ever-ready help. (If you are constantly calling on your Protector, you must be certain that he is always there.) It includes the glow of love and charity. It includes a knowledge of the plots and a dread of the enemies that hem you in day and night, and from which you confess that you cannot be set free without the aid of your Defender.

This verse is an impregnable wall for all who are suffering from attacks by demons, as well as impenetrable armor and a strong shield. It does not allow those who are in a state of moroseness and anxiety of mind, or depressed by sadness or all kinds of thoughts, to despair of saving help, as it shows that he who is invoked is always looking on at our struggles and is not far from his suppliants. It warns us who are destined for spiritual success and delight of heart that we ought not to be at all elated or puffed up by our happy condition, which it assures us cannot last without God as our protector, while it implores him to help us—not just always, but speedily.

You’ll find this verse helpful and useful to every one of us, in whatever condition we may be. If you want to be helped in everything all the time, you show that you need the assistance of God, not only in sorrowful or hard things, but just as much in prosperous and happy ones, so that you may be delivered from the hard times and made to continue in the happy times, since you know that in both of them, human weakness is unable to endure without God’s assistance. . . .

So we must pour forth the prayer of this verse continuously, without stopping—in adversity that we may be delivered, in prosperity that we may be preserved and not puffed up. Keep this verse going through your heart all the time. Whatever work you are doing, or office you are holding, or journey you are going on, do not cease to chant this. When you are going to bed, or eating, or in the last necessities of nature, think on this. This thought in your heart may be to you a saving formula, and not only keep you unharmed by all attacks of devils, but also purify you from all faults and earthly stains, and lead you to that invisible and celestial contemplation, and carry you on to that unspeakable glow of prayer of which so few have any experience.

When you go to sleep, you should still be thinking about this verse, till having been molded by the constant use of it, you get used to repeating it even in your sleep. When you wake, let it be the first thing to come into your mind; let it anticipate all your waking thoughts. When you get out of bed, let it send you down on your knees, and from there send you forth to all your work and business, and let it follow you about all day long.

You should think about it, as the Lawgiver commanded, “when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way” (Deuteronomy 6:7), sleeping and waking. You should write it on the threshold and door of your mouth—place it on the walls of your house and in the recesses of your heart—so that when you fall on your knees in prayer, this may be your chant as you kneel, and when you rise up from it to go forth to all the necessary business of life, it may be your constant prayer as you stand.

—St. John Cassian, *Conferences*

Questions to Think About

1. What efforts have I made to develop good habits in my prayer life? What habits could I adopt that would lead me to a closer relationship with the Lord?
2. When temptation attacks, do I remember to pray for help right away?

For God will come. He will come and will judge those who continue in their wickedness, ungrateful for the prolongation of his mercy, for his long-suffering, treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds: because the Lord is the “God of vengeance,” and therefore he *will* “shine forth.”

Then do not grumble against God, who seems to spare the wicked; but be good, and perhaps for a short time he may *not* spare you the rod, that he may, in the end, spare you in judgment.

—St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*

Questions to Think About

1. Do I ever wonder why I don't see God's judgment against people who have injured me or others? How could God change my heart to become more forgiving?
2. When life gets difficult, how might I see past the difficulties to how God might be forming and shaping me through them?

PSALM 100

This is a psalm of thanksgiving that expresses in poetry the spontaneous outpouring of joy we feel when God has answered our prayers.

A Psalm for the thank offering.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the lands!

Serve the LORD with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the LORD is God!

It is he that made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,

and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him, bless his name!

For the LORD is good;

his steadfast love endures for ever,

and his faithfulness to all generations.

Words to Remember

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the lands!

Serve the LORD with gladness!

Come into his presence with singing!

Make a Joyful Noise

If we truly understand our faith, St. Methodius tells us, then we should know that joy is always the appropriate response.

Come then, everyone, and let us rejoice in the Lord. Come, all you people, and let us clap our hands and make a joyful noise to God our Savior, with the voice of melody. Let no one be without a part in this grace; let no one come short of this calling, for the seed of the disobedient is appointed to destruction. Let no one neglect to meet the King, or he might be shut out from the Bridegroom's chamber. Let no one amongst us be found to receive him with a sad countenance, or he might be condemned with those wicked citizens—the citizens, I mean, who refused to receive the Lord as King over them (see Luke 19:27).

Let us all come together cheerfully; let us all receive him gladly and hold our feast with all honesty. Instead of our garments, let us strew our hearts before him. In psalms and hymns, let us raise to him our shouts of thanksgiving; and, without ceasing, let us exclaim, “Blessed is he that comes in the name of the LORD”; for blessed are they that bless him, and cursed are they that curse him (see Genesis 27:29).

Again I will say it, nor will I cease exhorting you to good: come, beloved, let us bless him who is blessed, that we may be ourselves blessed by him. This discourse summons every age and condition to praise the Lord: kings of the earth and all people, princes and all judges of the earth, both young men and maidens; [and raise] to God with thankful confession the hymn God taught them, as Moses sang it before to the people when they came forth

out of Egypt—namely, “Blessed is he that comes in the name of the LORD.”

—St. Methodius of Olympus, *Oration on the Psalms*

Questions to Think About

1. Do I, like the psalmist, recognize the connection between gratitude and joy?
2. Do I leave people happier for having talked with me?