

6. "The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us; thou hast given gladness in my heart." The prophet replies by saying that the path of justice has been pointed out to us by God; that we have a master within us, the light of natural reason, to point out the real truth, for "this light is signed upon us" indelibly, that is, on our superior part; for we consist of two parts, the soul, the superior, and the body, the inferior. In the superior part is the light that puts us above the brutes, a light derived from the countenance of God, and wherein we are the image and likeness of God. By means of this light we can, in the first place, understand the road that leads to happiness; for the natural law, so written on our hearts, that even iniquity itself cannot blot it out, teaches that we should not do to another what we would not have done to ourselves, and therefore, that we must not steal, commit adultery, etc. Through the grace of God we can also understand that real happiness consists in making ourselves as like as possible to God, for the perfection of an image is to be as like as possible to the original. Such considerations produce great joy, hope, and love of God in the mind, for what is more pleasing than the reflection of one's being the living image of a thing of infinite beauty, and that he is clearly beloved by that same omnipotent original? However, as all have not such emotions, David concludes the verse by saying, thou hast "given gladness," not in their hearts, but "in mine," which all just and pious people equally experience.

7. "By the fruit of their corn, their wine, and oil, they are multiplied." Another argument from which men may understand that God is the author of all good, for it is he who, in the fitting time, multiplies the grain and produces the fruit, as Saint Paul has it, Acts 14: "Nevertheless he left not himself without testimony, doing good from heaven, giving rains and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

8. "In peace in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest." David's conclusion then is, whatever the conduct of those whom I have been exhorting may be, my desire is to confide entirely in God, and rest altogether in him. "In peace," that is, in the most perfect tranquility; "in the selfsame" that is, in union, along with "I will sleep and rest," that is, I will securely lie down, and profoundly sleep. Observe the word "selfsame," a word of frequent use in the Psalms, and signifies with, or in union with.

9. "For thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope." A reason for his casting all his solicitude on God, and for his saying that he would sleep and rest in peace in the other world, because God, by his most true and faithful promises, made him to settle himself in hope alone. Thus the just man, the friend of God, dwells in divine hope alone, as he would in a fortified house, doing what in him lies for this world as well as for the next, not confiding in his own strength nor in anything created, but in God alone, and, therefore, is not confounded, but securely sleeps, and will sleep with equal security in the world to come.

END OF PSALM 4

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PSALMS **(SONGS OF PRAISE)**

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;*
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 4

The prophet teacheth us to fly to God in tribulation, with confidence in him.

- 1. When I called upon him, the God of my justice heard me: when I was in distress, thou hast enlarged me. Have mercy on me: and hear my prayer.**
- 2. O ye sons of men, how long will ye be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?**
- 3. Know ye also that the Lord hath made his holy one wonderful: the Lord will hear me when I shall cry unto him.**
- 4. Be ye angry, and sin not: the things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds.**
- 5. Offer up the sacrifice of justice, and trust in the Lord: many say, Who sheweth us good things?**
- 6. The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us: thou has given gladness in my heart.**
- 7. By the fruit of their corn, their wine, and oil, they are multiplied:**
- 8. In peace in the self same I will sleep, and I will rest:**
- 9. For thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope.**

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 4

Explanation of the Psalm

1. "When I called upon him, the God of my justice heard me: when I was in distress, thou hast enlarged me. Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer." David, in the person of the Church, or any faithful soul advising sinners to follow its example, exhorts them to be converted, to put their confidence in God, to abandon evil, and do good, giving himself as an example -- for when he was in trouble, he invoked the Almighty, and was heard. "The God of my justice heard me," that is to say, the God from whom all my justice proceeds, whose grace makes me just. He then tells how he was heard, "When I was in distress thou hast enlarged me." God sometime hears us by removing the tribulation; sometimes by giving patience to bear it, which is a greater favor; sometimes by not only giving the patience to bear it, but even to be glad of it, which is the greatest favor of all, and it is that of which the Prophet speaks here. Tribulation hems us in; joy enlarges our hearts; but when one glories in tribulation, his sadness is changed into joy, and tribulations bring to such persons not hemming in, but enlargement. "Have mercy on me; and hear my prayer." He asks for continuation of the grace, as if he said: Hear me always, pity me always, as you have done hitherto. The holy Prophet knew that while here below we are always exposed to danger, if his mercy do not only go before, but also accompany and follow us.

2. "O ye sons of men, how long will ye be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?" That is to say, how long will you have a heart of stone, a hard one, inclined to the earth, thinking of nothing but the goods of this world? For, according to the Lord, "The hearts are weighed down by excess, drunkenness, and the cares of this world;" and because hardened hearts are not susceptible of celestial thoughts, but only of terrestrial and transitory, they only love what is terrestrial and transitory; and as we take trouble only in seeking for the things we ardently love, the Prophet adds, "Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?" The goods of this world are called vain and fallacious, because they are neither stable nor solid, though they may seem to be so; and are therefore, with justice, designated as false and fallacious, especially when compared to those of eternity.

3. "Know ye also, that the Lord hath made his Holy One wonderful; the Lord will hear me when I shall cry unto him." This is the strongest reason that can be advanced for man holding himself disengaged from temporal things. Because the Holy One of God, meaning the Son of God, the only one among men free from sin, came from heaven to us. Hence the demon, in Mark 1, exclaimed: "I know you are the Holy One of God."

And this Holy One went his way, doing good, suffering persecutions, despising the things of this world, holding up those of the other, and by such a new route arrived at eternal happiness, corporally reigning in heaven, and spiritually happy forever. And as he is our guide, and went before us to prepare a place for us, undoubtedly, if we walk in his footsteps, we will come to true and everlasting happiness. And as he is not only our Leader, but also our Advocate and mediator, David therefore adds: "The Lord will hear me when I shall cry unto him;" that is to say, I am now quite sure of being heard when I know there is on the right hand of God an intercessor on my behalf.

4. "Be ye angry, and sin not: the things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds." The Holy Ghost having severely reprov'd and admonish'd mankind, and advised them to repent, tells them now what they ought to do, and instructs them to have a holy horror of sin, to resist their evil desires, and, by such means, to avoid sin; and, should they happen to fall, at once to be sorry and contrite; and not to stop at the doing no harm, but to go further, by offering the sacrifice of justice in doing good. "Be angry, and sin not;" that is to say, when your wicked and rebellious temper, the top and bottom of all our sins, stirs us up, let your anger vent itself on your own poor corrupt self; contend with it, so that you shall not fall into sin. Saint Basil tells us that anger was implanted in us by God, to be a source of merit. "The things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds;" that is to say, in the dead hour of night, when you shall be alone in your bedchamber, free from all cares; then turn over all your shortcomings, and in God's presence be sorry for them, imitating the example of David himself, who in Psalm 6 says, "Every night I will wash my bed; I will water my couch with my tears," thus carrying out the advice he gave to others.

5. "Offer up the sacrifice of justice, and trust in the Lord: many say, Who showeth us good things?" The second part of sanctity is here portrayed, namely, the going farther than doing no evil, but producing good. Good works are here called the sacrifice of justice, by reason of their being highly agreeable to God, and their contributing to his glory. "Let them see your good works, that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven," saith our Lord. Saint Paul on alms says: "I have received your offerings in the odor of sweetness;" on fasting, and other corporal works he says, Rom. 12, "I beseech you, therefore, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God." Observe, though, how he adds: "and trust in the Lord," for fear of presumption, which is always lying in wait on our good works. We must work well, but in such manner as not to be proudly confident in our works, like the Pharisee, "Who gave thanks to God, that he was not like other men," etc. Let us rather hope in the Lord, who will enable us to avoid sin, to produce good works, and arrive at the harbor of eternal salvation. For, as presumption is like a poison destroying the merit of our good works, so humble diffidence in our own strength, and a reliance on God, is like salt, seasoning and preserving all our good actions. "Many say, Who showeth us good things?" This is a common objection of the carnal, who are numerous, hence "many." When we preach to them the contempt of things here below, and exhort them to innocence and justice, many reply: Who will show us what is good, if the things we see and handle be not good? Who has come up from hell? Who has gone up to heaven?