



Monday

Psalm 27:1-3

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

In reading this psalm all I can think about is the people of Ukraine, under attack from the massive forces of Putin's Russian army. An army is literally encamped against them, war rising up all around them. Are they able at this time to pray this prayer? I don't know. It sounds like something a bold commander could say in order to instill courage in the hearts of the troops. One thing is clear, the psalmist's confidence is not in the self, but in God. *The Lord* is my light and my salvation. *The Lord* is the stronghold of my life. And the last line translated as "I will be confident" is more precisely translated, "I am trusting [God]". Yes, the confidence of this one under siege is the Lord. We ought to pray fervently these days for our Ukrainian siblings in the human family across the globe, in Kjiv, Odessa, and elsewhere. We ought to also be reminded by these bold words that *our* trust, *our* stronghold, *our* light and salvation is the Lord. The Lord is the one who can prevail over enemies. The Lord is the one who can bring peace to us and to our troubled world.

Prayer

Gracious and almighty God, bring peace to our troubled world. Give those whose position gives them a place at the table, a will to make peace. Give all those who are under attack, protection and strength. Give healing and help to the injured, comfort to the grieving, peace to the dying, and faith in your eternal love to all who call out to you. In Christ's name, we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Genesis 13:2-9

² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. ³ He journeyed on by stages from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴ to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. ⁵ Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, ⁶ so that the land could not support both of them living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together, ⁷ and there was strife between the herders of Abram's livestock and the herders of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites lived in the land. ⁸ Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

In this story Abram is modeling for us what St. Paul will later call "dying to oneself." Abram has a choice: he can either insist on a certain piece of land, or he can let go of his right to have the first choice of the land. He chooses the latter. He lets Lot go first. He trusts that God will provide without him needing to control the situation. This story illustrates a simple solution to much of the strife in the world. It involves one of the interested parties giving up their right to control the situation. Imagine if we all practiced this, what a difference it would make. If husbands and wives practiced this, if competitors and colleagues practiced this, if family members practiced this, if neighbors and even *nations* practiced this, why, the world would be a much more peaceful place. Our need to have first dibs, to be first in line, to be in control of the spoils that might come our way, rarely give us the result we crave. How much better to live graciously and humbly with all those we encounter.

Prayer

Forgive us, Lord, for our grasping ways. We act so often as though there won't be enough for us, when the truth is, we already have in abundance. Give us faith to release our grip on all that concerns us and to trust that you will provide. In Christ's name we pray. AMEN.

Wednesday

Philippians 3:4b-11

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

What St. Paul says here is really quite amazing. He first names all the reasons he has for having confidence “in the flesh”. By that he means confidence in his own status, in his own place in the world. Then he says that all these advantages and privileges are “rubbish” compared to knowing Christ. In other words, he puts them side by side – all his wealth and power, and his identity in Christ – and he says there is no comparison. It’s like comparing a bag of gold and a bag of trash. What Paul sees clearly is the eternal nature of our relationship with Christ. Yes, fine things are nice for a time, but they fade. Christ never fades away. Yes, it’s nice to be a person of prestige, a celebrity, a person of note, but as we hear on Ash Wednesday, “You are dust and to dust you shall return,” so no matter how famous we become, we will still face death. Christ has already died and will never die again, and as we live in Him, we too have eternal life. Our treasure is Christ. It’s that simple. If our life reflects this, what we gain is peace.

Prayer

Thank you, Gracious God, for all that you give us in Christ. Christ is the pearl of infinite price. He is the treasure which is beyond compare. He is the well that never runs dry. Grant us faith to trust in Him, and to live our lives in this abundance. We pray in Christ’s marvelous name. AMEN.

Thursday

Exodus 33:1-6

The LORD said to Moses, “Go, leave this place, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, and go to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your descendants I will give it.’”² I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.³ Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”⁴ When the people heard these harsh words, they mourned, and no one put on ornaments.⁵ For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, and I will decide what to do to you.’”⁶ Therefore the Israelites stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

What does it mean that the Israelites were “a stiff-necked people”? Perhaps because we Christians have for so long held a stereotype of Jews as those who rejected Jesus as Messiah out of sheer stubbornness, we have often heard this term as something like “proud” or “unyielding.” While it is true that having such a characteristic can be a regrettable trait, some Jewish scholars have lifted up the fact that being stiff-necked is also an attribute that comes in handy when one is under duress. Indeed, they argue that it was *because* of their stiff-necked trait that God chose the Jews in the first place. If you have ever had what we might call “a strong-willed child”, you know what I mean. While that child may be hard to deal with because they have a mind of their own while they are under your care, it is also true that such a child will likely be able to resist temptation which others cannot in their adult years. Because they are “stiff-necked” they will not go along with the crowd, they will not be drawn into foolish and thoughtless behavior, and they will not simply be blown where the current winds blow. So if you find yourself at times frustrated with “stiff-necked” people, remember that it is both a gift and a burden to be so, as are all the attributes God gives us.

Prayer

Grant us ears to hear, and wills to obey you, dear Lord. We are, at times, stiff-necked, foolish, and wayward. Thank you also, Lord for the times when our willfulness is a gift, when we stand up to foolishness and evil, and when we refuse to bend to the whims of those who would lead us away from you. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Friday

I Corinthians 10:1-5, 11-13

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

¹¹ These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³ No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

Verse 13 in this passage has been misused over the years. Somehow this verse has been used to say that God will never give you more than you can handle. That's a fine idea; the only trouble is, it's not true. Lots of times people are given more than they can handle. How about the citizens of Kijiv, Ukraine right now, or the mothers who were in the maternity hospital when it was bombed? How about the young mom diagnosed with cancer or the retired fellow who was just told he has ALS? To say to them that God will never give them more than they can handle could be just about the cruellest thing you could say. The testing that this verse is talking about is not just any test; it is the test to despair or fall into unbelief. The verses surrounding this verse make it clear that what is being tested is one's faith in God, particularly one's faith in God's goodness and mercy. This is the thing that St. Paul says will never be tested without having a way to endure it. The fact is, we have all been or will be in places where our faith is tested. At those times, we can be confident that God will provide a way for us to endure it.

Prayer

Gracious God, we praise you for your faithfulness and love. We thank you for your mercy and compassion. We remember your mighty works of love, shown most clearly in the giving of your Son, Jesus, for the sake of the world. Grant us faith in you, come what may. And give grace to any and all who struggle on this day. In the name of Jesus we pray. AMEN.