

## 1st Sunday Lent C Psalm

### Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15.](#)

(cf. 15b) **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,  
say to the LORD, "My refuge and fortress,  
my God in whom I trust."

**Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

No evil shall befall you,  
nor shall affliction come near your tent,  
For to his angels he has given command about you,  
that they guard you in all your ways.

**Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

Upon their hands they shall bear you up,  
lest you dash your foot against a stone.  
You shall tread upon the asp and the viper;  
you shall trample down the lion and the dragon.

**Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

Because he clings to me, I will deliver him;  
I will set him on high because he acknowledges my name.  
He shall call upon me, and I will answer him;  
I will be with him in distress;  
I will deliver him and glorify him.

**Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

## Jerome Biblical Commentary

**Ps 91.** A Ps of trust, with markedly didactic intent. Structure: 1-2, an address to one who takes refuge in God, perhaps asylum in the Temple; 3-12, the protection that Yahweh affords; 14-16, a divine oracle, assuring salvation.**2.** The command to "trust" in Yahweh is strengthened by the following examples of the Lord's saving protection (note the metaphors in 4).**5-6.** The hostile powers described here are probably demonic in origin (night demons, sun rays, etc.). The LXX and Vg translation of "plague at noon" gave rise

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LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

Vg Vulgate (common Latin version of the Bible)

to the “noon-day devil” (cf. J. de Fraine in *Bib* 40 [1959] 238-49, and in De Langhe, *op. cit.*, 89-106, esp. 102-4).

The four crises indicated for night, morning, evening (“darkness”), and noon balance against the four animals of 13. Such trials will not affect the man who is protected by God.**7**. The metaphor of pestilence (rather than war) continues in the felling of thousands.**8-10**. An affirmation of the “traditional” theory of retribution.**11**. The work of God’s angels is well illustrated by Gn 24:7; Tb; Mt 4:6. The metaphor in 12 (quoted in Mt 4:6) is derived from the rocky roads in Palestine.**14-16**. This divine oracle confirms the teaching proclaimed in the Ps.

To acknowledge the “name” of the Lord means probably to invoke him by name for help (cf. 15).

## Haydock’s Catholic Commentary

Qui habitat. The just is secure under the protection of God.

1 He that dwelleth in the aid of the most High, shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob. 2 He shall say to the Lord: Thou art my protector, and my refuge: my God, in him will I trust. 3 For he hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters: and from the sharp word. 4 He will overshadow thee with his shoulders: and under his wings thou shalt trust. 5 His truth shall compass thee with a shield: thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night.

6 Of the arrow that flieth in the day, of the business that walketh about in the dark: of invasion, or of the noonday devil. 7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand: but it shall not come nigh thee. 8 But thou shalt consider with thy eyes: and shalt see the reward of the wicked. 9 Because thou, O Lord, art my hope: thou hast made the most High thy refuge. 10 There shall no evil come to thee: nor shall the scourge come near thy dwelling.

11 For he hath given his angels charge over thee; to keep thee in all thy ways. 12 In their hands they shall bear thee up: lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. 13 Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk: and thou shalt trample under foot the lion and the dragon. 14 Because he hoped in me I will deliver him: I will protect him because he hath known my name. 15 He shall cry to me, and I will hear him: I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him, and I will glorify him.

16 I will fill him with length of days; and I will shew him my salvation.

The just is secure under the protection of God.

**Ver. 1.** *David.* Septuagint add, "it has no title in Hebrew," and hence the Jews refer it to the preceding author, with St. Jerome, &c. But this rule is very uncertain. (Calmet) (Berthier) --- Some suppose that Moses composed it when he led the Israelites out of Egypt, or in the wilderness; while others think that it is the work of David under some imminent danger. The Fathers apply it to Jesus Christ. Yet it may be considered simply as a moral instruction, (Calmet) superior in elegance to any Greek or Latin poem. (Muis) --- *Aid.* Hebrew, "secret place." *Of heaven.* Is not in Hebrew *shaddai*, which means, (Haydock) "the almighty self-sufficient, or destroying God." (Calmet) --- We must keep close to God by mental prayer, if we would enjoy the divine protection. (St. Gregory, Mor. vii. 7.) (Berthier)

**Ver. 3.** *Delivered me.* Hebrew and Septuagint, "shall deliver thee." Yet the Alexandrian copy has *me*. (Haydock) --- The psalmist addresses his own soul. (Berthier) --- *Word, verbo:* we sometimes find "sword," printed by mistake. Hebrew *dabar*, signifies "word, thing, pestilence, &c." (Haydock) --- The devil employs human respect to draw many into his nets. (St. Augustine) (Berthier) --- Neither subtle craft, nor the cruelty of tyrants will disturb those who trust in Providence. (Worthington)

**Ver. 4.** *With.* Septuagint, "upon." St. Augustine, "between," as the Lord carried Israel, Deuteronomy xxxii. 11. (Calmet) --- Hebrew, "he will cover thee with his feathers," (Haydock) like an eagle. (Menochius)

**Ver. 5.** *Shield.* God's fidelity, or word, affords the best protection, Proverbs xxx. 5. (Calmet) --- Having the spirit of faith, a man is secure. But he whose heart is hardened, (Berthier) is covered with the *buckler* of God's *affliction*, (Lamentations iii. 64.; Haydock) abuses every thing, and seems bewitched with self-love, Galatians i. (Berthier) --- *Night.* Devils, spectres, &c., (Canticle of Canticles iii. 7.; Calmet) and treacherous insinuations, that people are not bound to confess the truth, in time of danger. (Worthington)

**Ver. 6.** *Day.* Neither open attacks, nor unforeseen accidents prevail. (Calmet) --- *Business.* Hebrew *dabar*, "thing," ver. 3., "the pestilence." (St. Jerome) (Haydock) --- The Hebrews suppose, that one angel presides over death in the daytime, and another during the night; or that various demons send maladies at these different times. --- *Invasion.* Septuagint and old Italic, have, "ruin." --- St. Jerome, after Aquila, "from the bite of him who rageth, *Greek: demonizontos*, at noon. *Keteb*, (Haydock) according to the ancient tradition of the Jews, denotes one of the bolder devils, who attacks in open day, and seeks no aid from nocturnal craft. (Genebrard) The psalmist may allude to those popular notions, (Theodoret; St. Jerome) which were prevalent among the pagans. (Theocrit. Idyl. i.; Lucan iii.) (Calmet) --- Thou shalt fear no danger of the day or night, (Bellarmine) nor any which disturbs the life of man. (Scaligers, ep. i. p. 95.) --- This author mistakes, when he supposes that *Keteb* is rendered *devil*. (Amama) --- He might also ask how the Chaldean, Aquila, and Symmachus came to discover, that the *devil* is here mentioned, as well as the Septuagint? (Berthier) --- These seem to have read *ussod*, "and the devil," instead of *issud*, "from destruction *which* ravages," (Amama) *vastabit*. (Montanus) (Haydock) --- But allowing that the Septuagint, &c., are accurate what is meant by this devil? St. Peter seems to explain the idea, when he

exhorts us to *sobriety*, 1 Peter v. 8. (Berthier) --- Violent temptations of sloth, (St. Athanasius) or impurity, (Theodoret) or the persecutions against the faithful, may be meant. Four different sorts of attacks seem to be designated. **1.** Such as assault the ignorant with the *fears of the night*, tempting them to secure their temporal estates, while they think not of eternal woe impending. **2.** Others are attacked with *the arrows in the day*, and threatened with death, which they know they ought rather to endure, than abandon their faith. **3.** *The business, &c.*, imitates some grievous but latent temptation, as when the faithful are persuaded to take some unlawful oath. **4.** But the greatest and most manifest attack, is styled, *invasion, &c.*, when persecutors assail those who adhere to the true faith with a succession of torments, and subtle arguments, which have been the occasion of the fall of many, who had resisted the former attacks. Yet none of these yield, but by their own fault, trusting in themselves, and not in God. (St. Augustine) (Worthington) --- *Noon day*. Grotius explains this of the heat of the sun, which is very dangerous to travellers in Palestine. (Calmet)

**Ver. 7. Fall.** Or "attack,....but shall not come nigh to thee." (Eusebius) (Calmet) --- How great soever may be the number of thy adversaries, they shall not be able to do thee any harm. They shall at thy feet, and their dart shall not reach thee. (Haydock) --- More forsake God in prosperity, than under adversity. (Worthington)

**Ver. 9. Because.** Saying, *Thou, &c.* (Worthington; ver. 1.) (Calmet) --- *High.* Hebrew *helyon* is a title of God, (Calmet) not the adjective to refuge, (Berthier) as Chaldean, Aquila, &c., have taken it. "Thou hast placed thy dwelling most high." So that *there, &c.*, ver. 10. It is evident that the following promises relate not to the Lord, (Calmet) but to the just man. Protestants, "because thou hast made the Lord, *which* is my refuge, *even* the most high thy habitation." This transposition is not authorized by the text. (Haydock)

**Ver. 10. Scourge.** Aquila has *Greek: Aphe*, "the leprosy," (Calmet) or any stroke of distress. (Haydock) --- What the saints have suffered were not real *evils*, and they will be amply rewarded in heaven. They never complain, having God with them, (Calmet; ver. 15.; Haydock) and his holy angels. (Menochius)

**Ver. 11. Angels.** Many seem to be assigned to the just, to whom St. Hilary, &c., would restrain this privilege. But it is more generally believed, that each person has an angel guardian. This was the opinion even of the pagans. (Porphyrius, Ap. ii.; St. Clement of Alexandria, Strom. v.) (Calmet) --- *To keep.* Instead of this, the tempter substituted *and*, (Matthew iv. 6.) finding it would not answer his purpose, (Haydock) and shed that the question was about walking, and not about precipitating oneself. (St. Bernard, ser. xv. p. 90.) --- To attempt such unusual courses, is the way of Lucifer, (Worthington) and tempting God, as our Saviour replied. (Berthier) --- From the father of lies, heretics have learnt how to curtail and misapply the holy Scriptures. (Haydock) --- God has highly favoured man, by intrusting him to the care of these sublime ministers of his court, (St. Bernard) and surely it is lawful for us to implore their assistance, as we may apply to our fellow-creatures for redress in our temporal necessities. To refuse to do so, on the plea that we expect all immediately from God, would be going contrary to his appointment. Else why has God given them for our guardians, since He could have done all without

them? In vain is it objected, that this invocation is a religious worship. It may be so styled, because they are blessed, and help us to obtain salvation. But we only honour in the the gifts of God. (Berthier) --- They protect us by his ordinance, (Worthington) and the very form of *praying*, shews in what light we regard them. Who durst say to God, *pray for us?* (Menochius)

**Ver. 12. Stone.** He alludes to nurses. (Calmet) --- All these expressions are metaphorical, to shew the assistance given by angels, to remove the obstacles which impede our progress towards heaven.

**Ver. 13. Asp.** Which kills in eight hours time at farthest, making the blood congeal.--- *Basilisk.* "The little king" of serpents. What is related of it seems fabulous. (Pliny, [Natural History?] viii. 21.; Solin xxx.) (Calmet) --- Yet there might be some species known by this name, possessing fascinating qualities like the rattle-snake. (Berthier) --- The sight of it alone could not destroy a man; otherwise how could any account o it have been given? Hebrew *ssel* means a lion in Job, (Berthier) and *phethen*, "an asp," (Calmet) or *basilisk.* (Bochart) --- *Dragon.* Crocodile. (Calmet) --- The most noxious animals, both of sea and land, shall prove quite harmless to the true servants of God, when he intends to prove the truth of his religion, as he did in the cases of Daniel, and of the disciples of Christ, Mark xvi. If they be suffered to kill the saints here, it is in order that they may be *glorified* in heaven, ver. 15. (Haydock) --- The devil is styled an asp, &c. (Berthier) --- He sometimes attacks the Church, by craft, and at other times by open violence. But she [the Church] remains secure, (St. Augustine) and her children can only be preserved by continuing in her bosom. To know which is the true Church; "see, says St. Gregory, (Mor. xx. 29.) which are the most recent sects." (Berthier) --- Methodists may now wrest this honour from the rest of Protestants. (Haydock)

**Ver. 14. Because.** God speaks the rest. (Worthington) --- *Known.* In practice. (Calmet)

**Ver. 15. Tribulation.** The just are not exempt from it. --- *Glorify him,* with eternal salvation.

**Ver. 16. Days.** Eternity alone can satisfy the heart. --- *Salvation.* Or Jesus, who promised to manifest himself, John xiv. 21, 25. (Berthier) --- Abraham saw him afar off; Simeon at hand, John viii. 56., and Luke ii. 30. God insures the just a long life in this world, and an eternal one in the next. (Calmet) --- That life is long enough which ends in happiness. (Haydock)

**THE DAILY STUDY BIBLE SERIES, PSALMS, VOLUME 1 by  
G. A. F. KNIGHT (non-Catholic)**

<sup>1</sup>He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,

<sup>2</sup>will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust."

<sup>3</sup>For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence;

<sup>4</sup>he will cover you with his pinions,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

<sup>5</sup>You will not fear the terror of the night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,

<sup>6</sup>nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

<sup>7</sup>A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand;  
but it will not come near you.

<sup>8</sup>You will only look with your eyes  
and see the recompense of the wicked.

<sup>9</sup>Because you have made the Lord your refuge,  
the Most High your habitation,

<sup>10</sup>no evil shall befall you,  
no scourge come near your tent.

<sup>11</sup>For he will give his angels charge of you  
to guard you in all your ways.

<sup>12</sup>On their hands they will bear you up,

lest you dash your foot against a stone.

<sup>13</sup>You will tread on the lion and the adder,

the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

<sup>14</sup>Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him;

I will protect him, because he knows my name.

<sup>15</sup>When he calls to me, I will answer him;

I will be with him in trouble,

I will rescue him and honour him.

<sup>16</sup>With long life I will satisfy him,

and show him my salvation.

Verses 1–8. The rendering of verse 1 in the AV is most attractive: “He that dwelleth in the ‘secret place’ of the Most High”. Ps. 90, as we have seen, had been about the awesomeness and the greatness and the everlastingness of the Most High God over against man’s smallness and the brevity of his life. Yet, says the psalmist, this mighty God invites even such little persons as we are to share the secret of his love with him.

The Jewish Prayer Book suggests that this psalm be read “before retiring to rest”. Yet it is not so much a prayer as a sermon in verse. It appears to be the voice of a Temple minister assuring a private enquirer (for this idea see Ps. 27:4) that God can and will protect him or her from all, even the most sinister, threats of evil, the evil that leads to the death of the human spirit. In his talk with this ordinary person he explains that the opposite of fear is not courage, but faith.

The word *abides* in verse 1 means “to spend the night” as in a room in an inn. As Jesus put it, “In my Father’s house are many rooms” (John 14:2). “Keep on coming back into the care of the Almighty each evening,” this minister is recommending his enquirer, then you will find yourself saying to the Lord, “*My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.*” For you will have discovered that God has delivered you from what is threatening your life. *His faithfulness*, his unshakeability, is impregnable, it is *a shield and buckler*.

The subsequent poetic descriptions of the attacks of evil from outside of us are far more telling than any mention of wild dogs, or of thugs, or of “things that go bump in the night”, or, to be up to date, of bombs, flying-saucers, bacteria, or even the secret police. That eastern man did live in terror of evil powers outside of himself, even when he had

locked his doors against them, is evidenced by an Assyrian bronze statuette now to be seen in the Louvre in Paris. It is of a demon with wings, naked, and with a malicious face. In contrast, the Lord too has wings (poetically speaking!, verse 4). Then the LXX, the Greek version of the OT, translates verse 6*b* as “the demon of midday”, possibly suggesting sunstroke. In a word, what our Temple minister is saying is “This is a risky world. You may quite possibly be hit by one of the arrows of the powers of evil (faith is not an insurance policy against sickness and death), but don’t *fear* these things when they come.” As Paul puts it at Rom. 8:28, “We know that in *everything* God works for good”, through nakedness, peril and all the rest. Consequently the language of this psalm is far removed from the silly self-centred cry of the person saved from the shipwreck when all others perished—“Now I have received proof of the existence of God, for he answered my prayer when I was struggling in the water.”

What has all this got to do with us today? Jung, the great psychologist, has written: “All one’s neighbours are ruled by an uncontrolled and uncontrollable fear just like oneself. In lunatic asylums it is a well-known fact that patients are far more dangerous when suffering from fear than when moved by wrath or hatred.” Or, as J. B. Priestley writes: “Heads of governments know that a frightened people is easier to govern and will agree to millions and millions being spent on ‘Defence’.” God knows all this about our frightened human nature. If we were but to look in a concordance to the Scriptures under the word “angel”, we would discover that, when the eternal world breaks in upon our human consciousness, the very first words that man hears with his heart and mind are “Do not be afraid”.

We have a picture here of a little child looking up trustingly into his father’s face, knowing that *under his wings* “it will all be all right”. The idea of God’s caring wings is as ancient as the earliest passages in the OT—see Exod. 19:4; 25:20; Deut. 32:12. In fact, the picture is as much that of God’s mother-love as it is that of his father-love.

Verses 9–13, *Because*. Why then should you fear? It works two ways: (1) *Because thou, Lord, art my refuge* (see RSV verse 9 *ftn*). God, in other words, has acted first, for he has invited me to come home to the place he has prepared for me. (2) *Because you have made the Most High your “home”* (compare Deut. 26:15); in other words, you have responded to God’s loving invitation by faith. You may be living in a tent (the “home” of the pilgrim in all ages), but God is in truth your real home. And he has always been so! Here we have the deliberate use of ancient epithets for God. This reminds us of two things: (1) It reminds us of what Ps. 90 has been saying about the “ancientness” of God, and (2) it reminds us that the Church of today is many thousands of years old, and not just a mere two thousand. But (3) he adds: “Don’t imagine that you have been ‘saved’ just in order ‘to be saved’.” God has now turned you into a St. George, as we might put

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LXX The Septuagint or Greek Version of the OT.

OT Old Testament.

RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible.



it, and has enabled you to fight with all the dragons that haunt the life of human beings (verse 13), whatever they be, subtle temptations or powerful forces of communal evil.

Verses 14–16, *Because, once again*. This time God himself speaks: *Because he clings to me in love*, even “hugs” me, as the verb can mean, I will be to him what I promised to be to Abraham a thousand years before this period of the psalmist. “Don’t be afraid, Abraham, I myself am your shield; I myself am your very great reward” (Gen. 15:1). See also Ps. 34:7; Gen. 24:7, 40; Exod. 23:20; Matt. 4:6.

Then God adds: *I will be with him in trouble*, as we hear God say again at Isa. 43:1–3. There God proclaims, “I have called you by name, you are mine”. But here God says, “*Because he knows my name*”. So this very small human person is actually in intimate fellowship with Almighty God! (verse 1). We can say this with confidence, because to know the name in olden days meant to know the very essence of the personality of its owner. Faith then in this psalm is not an act of the intellect. If it were so, then many of us would be excluded, including all the mentally handicapped folk in our society. Faith is a passionate relationship of love that even a child can know.

This section uses powerful language. God promises an eightfold blessing. Perhaps we might count these up for ourselves. One of them is: *With long life I will satisfy him*. The idea of long life was meant to be understood as a sacramental promise of eternal life. God will actually “satisfy” him with life! Jesus said: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10), that is to say, be satiated with life. Another is when in the last line of the psalm we move even beyond faith to revelation: *I will show him*, or rather, “let him see into” my *salvation*, my saving love. That has always been the excited hope of the believer, that beyond death he will see into, see the meaning of, God’s saving love, and see it from within that home which God will give him for all eternity.