

**Responsorial Psalm** Second Sunday Lent C

[Ps 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14.](#)

(1a) **The Lord is my light and my salvation.**

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

The LORD is my life's refuge;  
of whom should I be afraid?

**The Lord is my light and my salvation.**

Hear, O LORD, the sound of my call;  
have pity on me, and answer me.

Of you my heart speaks; you my glance seeks.

**The Lord is my light and my salvation.**

Your presence, O LORD, I seek.

Hide not your face from me;  
do not in anger repel your servant.

You are my helper: cast me not off.

**The Lord is my light and my salvation.**

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD  
in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD with courage;  
be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.

Jerome Biblical Commentary

An individual lament. Structure: 1-6, poem of trust in God for protection; 7-14, the complaint, ending with certainty of being heard (13), and oracle of encouragement. Although many scholars (Podechard, Weiser) claim that two Pss have been combined here, a certain unity can be recognized: Trust is a characteristic of the lament, and in both parts there is mention of enemies (2, 12). He could have expressed his confidence and desire for the "shelter of his tent" (5-6) before he succeeded in making his lament in the Temple. **2.** *devour...: Destroy completely.* **3.** The metaphor is taken from military experience; the victorious spirit of confidence is reminiscent of Rom 8:32-39. **4.** This single desire is also expressed in Ps 23:6. **6.** He is confident enough to vow that one day he will offer thanksgiving for his deliverance from his "enemies." **7-10.** The insistent requests for "pity," are still colored by his trust (10). **8.** The [MT](#) is not clear. **12.** The enemies are identified for the first time: "false witnesses." **13.** The [CCD](#) correctly expresses the thought, but in the MT the anacoluthon is striking: "If I were not certain that I should see...!" *land of the living:* The present world, as opposed to Sheol (cf. Ps 52:7). **14.** This is best taken as an oracle of deliverance addressed to the psalmist.

[MT](#) Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)

[CCD](#) Contraternity of Christian Doctrine translation of the Bible

Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

Haydock's Catholic Commentary

David's faith and hope in God

**Ver. 1.** *Anointed.* Hebrew has only, David. The rest of the title occurs only in some copies of the Septuagint, (Eusebius; Calmet) and is not of divine authority. Yet if any attention be paid to it, we must suppose that David composed this psalm before his second anointing, as he speaks of great dangers. But this is all uncertain. (Berthier) -- - For dangers threatened David even after he had been declared king. (Haydock) --- Before Samuel anointed him, he was not endued with the spirit of prophecy. See 1 Kings xvi. 13., and 2 Kings ii. 4., and v. 3. (Calmet) --- Some suppose that he alludes to the entertainment given him by Abimelech[Achimelech?] , (ver. 5 and 12.; Theodoret) or to that night when, fearless of danger, he took away Saul's cup; (Ferrand) while Abenezra and De Muis rather believe, that he composed this psalm when his people dissuaded him from going out to battle, 2 Kings xxi 17. It expresses the sentiments of the Levites in captivity, (Calmet) and most beautifully consoles the just in distress. David did not write this for himself alone, but for all future generations. Hence it is not necessary to discover the particular circumstances of his life, to which this and many other psalms allude; nor is there any difficulty in explaining away the various imprecations, as they are not directed against any individual, but relate to all the enemies of the soul; while they foretell what the wicked shall suffer. (Berthier) --- *Afraid.* "Find one more powerful, and *then* fear." (St. Augustine) --- God both giveth light and strength, so that no enemy can hurt his servants, Luke xxi. 15. (Worthington)

**Ver. 2.** *Flesh.* This expression marks the fury of his enemies. See Job xix. 22., and xxxi. 31. (Calmet) --- *That.* Hebrew and Septuagint, "and my foes." This may denote domestic, and the former word public, enemies. (Haydock) --- *Weakened.* Hebrew also, "have stumbled." Those who came to take Jesus Christ, verified this prediction, John xviii. 6. (Calmet)

**Ver. 3.** *This;* God's protection (Haydock) and light, (Menochius) or in the very heat of battle: *prælium.* Septuagint express the Hebrew feminine pronoun, as they do with the Vulgate, ver. 4, *unam.* There is no neuter in Hebrew, which commonly uses the feminine, *instead.* (Calmet) --- It may be deemed too scrupulous an exactitude, to express this in a version. The word *petition* may be understood. (Berthier) (Menochius) --- The *one* petition of David comprised every blessing; as he had his mind bent on heaven. (Du Hamel)

**Ver. 4.** *House;* the tabernacle, (Haydock) or temple, (Calmet) unless he may rather allude to God's presence and union, or his enjoyment in heaven. (Berthier) --- He had already expressed a similar wish, Psalm xxv. 8. (Calmet) --- "When we love what God approves, he will surely grant our request. (St. Augustine) --- David esteemed it as a special benefit to be in the Catholic Church, which is the only true house of God. (Worthington) --- *Delight;* beauty and sweetness, as the Hebrew implies. Many of the ancients read, "the will," *voluntatem,* with Sixtus V, &c. But the edition of Clement VIII agrees with the Hebrew and Oriental versions. (Calmet) --- To comply with

God's will, is the only means of arriving at his beatific vision. (Haydock) --- David was more grieved at being kept at a distance from the tabernacle, than from his own family. He envied the happiness of those who could attend the divine worship. (Menochius)

**Ver. 5.** *Tabernacle*; in the Catholic Church, so that the enemy can either not find, or at least cannot hurt, my soul. (Worthington) --- I hope one day to enjoy rest in the temple. (Calmet) --- The verbs are in the future, in Hebrew both here and in the following verse. But they may be as well explained in the sense of the Vulgate. Those who find themselves in danger, must still have recourse to God's presence, (Berthier) where, as (Haydock) in the asylum of the tabernacle, (Menochius) or of the temple, they will be protected. (Calmet) --- God rewards those with glory in death, who have suffered for his name. (Worthington)

**Ver. 6.** *Round*. Hebrew, "my enemies around." But the Septuagint understand it of David, (Berthier) or of the priest, who poured the blood of the victims on different sides of the altar. (Haydock) --- *Jubilation*: singing and music, which are styled the *fruit*, or *calves of the lips*, Isaias lvii. 19., and Osee xiv. 3. (Calmet) --- David diligently recounted God's benefits, with all his heart and voice. (Worthington) --- He offered sacrifices by ministry of the priests, on the altar of holocausts, which was not in, but before, the tabernacle. (Menochius)

**Ver. 7.** *To thee*, is understood in Hebrew and the Roman Septuagint. (Haydock)

**Ver. 8.** *Face hath*. Hebrew pointed, "faces seek ye." But Septuagint, St. Jerome, Chaldean, &c., take no notice of these points; and even Protestants' marginal note has, "My heart said unto thee, Let my face seek thy face;" (Berthier) though in the text they derange the words, and add, "*When thou saidst*, Seek ye my face, my heart said," &c. (Haydock) --- *Seek*. "I have sought for no reward besides thee." (St. Augustine) --- I have earnestly desired to see thee face to face, 1 Corinthians xiii. 12. (Worthington)

**Ver. 9.** *Decline not*. Hebrew, "put not away." (Protestants) But the Vulgate seems preferable. --- *Forsake*. Septuagint (Compl. and Ald.) *Greek*: *me aposkorakises*, "send me not to the crows," an expression borrowed from profane authors, who said, "to the crows," when they held a person in sovereign contempt. (Theodoret; Berthier) --- Grabe substitutes this word, though the Alexandrian and Vatican manuscripts agree with us. (Haydock) --- There seems to be a gradation in the condition of the reprobate here observed. God hides his countenance, withdraws, abandons, and despises them; and they only perceive their misery, when it is too late. (Berthier) --- David implores aid in this life, and deprecates the divine anger, looking upon himself as an orphan, whom God takes under his special protection. (Worthington)

**Ver. 10.** *For*. Hebrew, "Though." David's parents fled to him, 1 Kings xxii. 1. Yet they had made small account of him, till Samuel called him forth, 1 Kings xvi. 10. The father-in-law and mother-in-law may be also designated. When a saint is deprived of every human advantage, he may still say with St. Augustine, "They have

taken from me what God gave, but they have not taken God from me, who gave those things." (Berthier) --- Though I am like an orphan, I hope for all good from God, my father, Isaias lxiii. 16. (Calmet)

**Ver. 11.** *Enemies*, who strive to pervert me. Keep me in the right path, which thou hast already made known to me. (Worthington)

**Ver. 12.** *Will.* Literally, "souls." (Haydock) --- Some ancient copies have, "the hands." --- *Unjust.* Hebrew, "false." (Haydock) --- *To itself,* ought not to be urged no more than *eat sibi, vade tibi,* Genesis xii. 1., and Cantic of Canticles i. 7. (Calmet) -

-- It is a Hebrew idiom. (Haydock) --- Many find fault with the Septuagint and Vulgate in this place, but without reason; and they do not agree in their versions. Symmachus and St. Jerome come near to us. *Puach* means to breathe, or entangle; and our version intimates, that "iniquity has entangled itself:" *vipheach chamas*, "and open lying." (St. Jerome) (Berthier) --- The accusers of Susanna, and of our Saviour, could not agree in their testimony. The Chaldeans continually calumniated the captives, Isaias lii. 4., and Jeremias l. 33. (Calmet) --- Worldlings still do the same, (Matthew v.) delighting in lies, which will prove their own ruin. (Worthington)

**Ver. 13.** *I.* Hebrew, "But I believe that I shall see." (St. Jerome) --- "*I had fainted, unless,*" &c. (Protestants) (Haydock) --- *Living,* or of promise, as this country is often designated, (Muis; Tirinus; Du Pin; Calmet) or rather in heaven, (Berthier; Menochius) where death shall be no more. (Haydock) --- The Fathers explain it in this more elevated sense. (Calmet) --- The just are comforted by God, and by the hope of heavenly rewards. (Worthington) --- The land of the living may be opposed to the grave, where none can worship God. (Haydock)

**Ver. 14.** *And let.* Hebrew, "and he will strengthen my heart, and wait" (instead of *and*, Protestants put, without reason, "Wait I say) on the Lord." We must do our utmost: yet all our strength must come from God. (Haydock) --- The prophet encourageth his own soul to exercise patience, fortitude, and longanimity (Psalm xxx.; Worthington) unto the end. (Worthington)



*A statement of confidence* (27:1–6). The first part of the statement of confidence (vv 1–3) expresses the absolute certainty that banishes fear, regardless of the dimensions of the threat. The confidence is based upon the Lord, who is described by three terms: *light, salvation and refuge*. (1) The first metaphor, **לְהַגִּיל**, implies a force that automatically dispels darkness (here representing the psalmist's enemies); the language is reminiscent of Ps 23:4, in which fearlessness is expressed despite death's dark shadow. But the metaphor may also be associated specifically with military dangers, as is implied by the same kind of language in Ps 18:29. Thus the psalmist is affirming that even in the darkness of the terrible threat of war, he has no fear, for God is the light that can dispel such darkness. (2) The Lord is also *salvation* (or "victory," or "deliverance"); again, the metaphorical language emphasizes God's ability to give victory, regardless of the military odds against success. (3)

The third term is ambiguous. It may mean "refuge" (from the root **נָצַח**) or it may mean "stronghold" (from the root **צָרַח**). But, in either case, the term carries connotations of a place of safety in a military context. The military associations of all three terms, together with the substance of v 3, are part of the basis for associating this psalm with the king, who was commander-in-chief of Israel's armies.

Both v 2 and v 3 refer to enemies; if the tenses implied by the forms of the Hebrew verbs have been rendered correctly, v 2 refers to past victories (one of the sources of confidence) and v 3 expresses confidence in the future, regardless of the scale of the military crisis. The precise sense of the idiom "to devour the flesh" is uncertain; it might imply "speech" (*viz.* slanderous speech; *cf. rsv* and see v 12 below) or it might be a metaphorical description likening the enemies to wild beasts, who hope to devour the flesh of the fallen. But these enemies, as opponents of the king, were also opponents of God and hence *fell* (or were defeated) in battle. (*NB*: if the perfect tenses of v 2d were translated as implying the certainty of future action, then the whole verse could be taken with v 3 as expressing the psalmist's confidence in future victories.) The military language emerges most explicitly in the synonymous parallelism of v 3; no military threat can undermine the psalmist's confidence.

In the second part of the statement of confidence (vv 4–6), the focus changes, and the psalmist makes one of the most single-minded statements of purpose to be found anywhere in the *OT*. The expression "one thing I have asked" has no parallels among the biblical numerical sayings; see further W. M. W. Roth, "Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament. A Form-Critical Study," *VTSup* 13 (1965) 70. The central point of this single request is stated in v 4c: "to dwell in the house of the Lord;" the statement should not be taken literally, as if referring to a temple servant who would actually live perpetually within the temple precincts. It refers rather to living permanently in God's presence; such a life was regularly punctuated by actual visits to the temple, such as that in which the psalmist was engaged. This central thrust in vv 4–6 is intimately related to the substance of vv 1–3. It was deliverance from military threats that would make possible the permanent dwelling in God's house; and it was faith in God, renewed in his house, that contributed to fearlessness in the face of military threats.

The psalmist specifies two consequences that would follow from his permanent residence in God's presence. (1) He would be able "to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord," not to be interpreted literally, but as implying the extraordinary experience of God's beauty and glory as symbolized in the temple, specifically in the Ark. (2) He would be able to "inquire in his temple" (see v 4, note c<sup>\*</sup>). The military context may provide the specific nuance of the expression; the king, prior to departing for war, would be able to enter the temple and to seek an oracle from God pertaining to his military plans. But the expression may have more precise implications with respect to the actual liturgy in which the king was participating; he

was about to sacrifice (v 6) and sought guidance from God, and v 14 (see below) may contain the oracle for which he made inquiry.

The desire to dwell in the Lord's house is elaborated still further in v 5; the house (*booth//temple*) symbolized the divine protection which gave rise to the psalmist's great confidence. The temple was the king's asylum in time of trouble, not in a literal sense, but in the more figurative sense of the word "refuge" (v 1). It was both a refuge in which he could be protected "on the evil day" (presumably the day of danger, when enemies attacked) and a "rock," as stronghold, giving strength in the face of enemy attack. Verse 6 must be interpreted with respect both to the liturgical proceedings and to the implications of those proceedings for the king's reign and military affairs; the word "now" may carry this double nuance. The immediate sense of "now" emerges in the liturgical context; the king was now about to offer sacrifices and praise to God as a part of the liturgical proceedings. But the sacrificial offerings were related to the divine activity; the king's "head will be raised up" (v 6a), referring to the anticipated divine protection and victory in battle (see Ps 3:4 and *Comment*, where the same kind of language is used). The sacrifices about to be offered "in his tent" (a poetic description of the temple, rather than an indication that the psalm was composed prior to the construction of the temple) are linked

with "joy" (תְּרוּעָה), a word which may carry the nuance of "battle cry, victory cry." The sacrifices, in other words, appear to have been associated specifically with the king's role as warrior and they anticipate (with both prayer and joy) the coming victory shout that could only be a consequence of the divine aid.

*A prayer for divine aid* (27:7-13). The prayer is expressed in common language, reflecting no doubt the cultic background to the psalm's composition; but the formulaic language is of such a kind that there must inevitably be uncertainty as to the extent to which the psalm's language may be used for interpreting the specific background and setting of the prayer. The following formulaic expressions should be noted (based on Culley's tables in *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms*, 35-96): (1) v 7 (see 64:2 and 141:1); (2) v 9a (see 102:3 and 143:7); (3) v 9d-e (see 38:22); (4) v 11a (see 86:11 and 119:33); (5) v 11b-c (see 5:9); (6) v 12 (see 41:3); (7) v 14a, c (see 37:34) and (8) v 14b (see 31:25). The movement of the prayer is from the general to the particular; the general opening petitions (vv 7-10) culminate in two particular requests in vv 11-12. The general petitions express the psalmist's determination to seek God's face, as he had done in the past (vv 8-9a); but the determination is modified by the recognition that a divine answer would be an act of graciousness (v 7b) and that the petitioner's qualifications (moral and otherwise) might result in God's turning from him in anger (v 9b-c). It is thus a prayer of determination, modified by humility and a sense of unworthiness. But the psalmist also conveys clearly that there is none other than God to whom he can turn. His parents have forsaken him (v 10a); the expression should not be interpreted literally, but should be understood in terms of the king's role as God's son (see Ps 2:7). Thus, the Lord functions as a parent to the king, and the petition is based in part on the intimacy of that relationship (v 10b).

The first of the two specific petitions (v 11) is to be instructed to walk in God's way. If, as has been suggested above, the specific setting of the liturgy was the celebration of an anniversary of the royal coronation, the words may contain the king's request to be kept firmly to his royal role and task (cf. Deut 17:14-20). To carry out his royal task, however, the king required freedom from the oppression of enemies, and so the second specific petition is closely related to the first; the king prays to be delivered from opponents. It is difficult to be certain whether precise significance should be given to the description of the opponents as "false and violent witnesses," or whether the language simply refers to the clamorous nature of the enemies (cf. Ps 2:1-3). If the language has precise significance, it may be that the background is to be found in a treaty or covenant. As a king in the context of international affairs, the king may have had imposed upon him treaties demanding his subservience to foreign powers; as a king in the covenant tradition of David, he could have

allegiance only to God. The commitment to God in covenant could be perceived as a treacherous act by foreign nations, who sought to control the king as a vassal; thus, in poetic language, they are described as witnesses, giving evidence in court concerning the king's breach of treaty obligations. And their words of witness contain within them the threat of violence; from such violence, the king prayed for protection. On the treaty-covenant tension in the military setting of the Hebrew monarchy, see further Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, 69–70.

The prayer concludes (v 13) with a statement of confidence. Looking to the future, which held in store another year of battle and the problems of ruling a nation, the king is confident that he will survive and continue to see God's goodness. "The land of the living" means no more than the king would survive the attacks of his enemies and still be alive to see God's goodness in this life. It is going beyond the plain meaning of the text to perceive here (as does Dahood, *Psalms I*, 170) a reference to the afterlife; such a view would be anachronistic in the context of Hebrew theology during the monarchy.

*A response* (27:14). The last words were declared to the king by a priest or temple servant. The words are an answer to the prayer, not merely an injunction to wait for an answer. The answer, in other words, is to wait constantly for the Lord, because he would respond in the future as each crisis and need appeared. The intervening words ("be strong ... be bold") are also a part of the answer and recall the words of Moses to Joshua at the time when the leadership in the covenant community was being transferred to Joshua (cf. Deut 31:7). Joshua was to be strong and bold because the Lord was definitely going to give him success in the conquest of the Promised Land. Likewise, the king was to be strong and bold, because he would receive the divine aid in ruling his country and conquering his enemies.

### **Explanation**

If it is correct that background to this liturgical psalm is to be found in a royal event such as the anniversary of a coronation, then the psalm provides considerable insight into the continuity required throughout the reign of a monarch in the tradition of the Davidic Covenant. There was a sense in which that covenant was eternal (2 Sam 7:16), yet it was also renewed in the coronation of every new monarch. And within the reign of each king, the covenant tradition was susceptible to two dangers. From within, there was the danger that the king would forget his covenant obligations and wander from the divinely prescribed path. From without, there was the danger posed by foreign powers; their military threat hung not only over the life of a particular monarch, but also over the continuity of the royal covenant tradition.

Within the kingdom, there were certain structures established to preserve the self-conscious awareness, in the person of the king, of the nature of the covenant tradition. The king would not depart for war without first consulting God and offering sacrifice and prayer. And he would annually renew his coronation commitments, in which the role of his reign was clearly enunciated. It is on this context that the psalm sheds light. It begins with a declaration of confidence, entirely appropriate from the mouth of the king whose throne was established in perpetuity by divine fiat. The statement of confidence is by nature a statement of humility; the words of its proclamation undermined that most dangerous and subtle of attitudes in a person endowed with considerable influence and power, namely the arrogance of self-confidence. The single-minded request of the king, to dwell permanently in God's presence, ensured the proper exercise of his dominion, namely the awareness that he who reigned was also ruled.

But the strength and success of a good monarch in each year of his reign was not rooted only in a conviction about the permanent nature of his dynasty; it was also rooted in a living and constant relationship with the Lord of the royal covenant. Thus the declaration of the opening part of the liturgy moves to the prayer of the second part of the liturgy, and the fitting confidence is transformed into an urgent plea for divine aid in the immediate future. The prayer is answered, partly because it is legitimate within the framework of the covenant, and partly because it is offered humbly in a son's awareness of his need for his father's help.



[viz.](#) videlicet, namely or by alteration

[cf.](#) *confer*, compare

[rsv](#) Revised Standard Version (NT 1946, OT 1952, Apoc 1957)

[NB](#) *New Blackfriars*

[OT](#) Old Testament

[VTSup](#) *Vetus Testamentum, Supplements* (Leiden: Brill)

\*4.c. **לְבַקֵּר** (“to inquire”); the meaning of the term has caused considerable debate, conveniently summarized in Anderson, *Psalms I*, 222–23. Ugaritic *bqr* may have the sense “to divine,” and the parallel Hebrew term used here probably implies “inquire (by seeking a divine oracle)”; cf. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan*, 2, 194 (note).

Craigie, P. C. 2002. *Vol. 19: Word Biblical Commentary : Psalms 1-50*. Word Biblical Commentary . Word, Incorporated: Dallas