

The Giving of Thanks – Psalm 30

November 2004

*I will extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up,
And have not let my foes rejoice over me.
O Lord my God, I cried out to You,
and You have healed me.
O Lord, You have brought my soul up from the grave;
You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.*

[Ps 30:1-3]

David writes this psalm after becoming established in Jerusalem. From this vantage point of peace and security he can reflect on his years as a fugitive from Saul. How many times he narrowly escaped death! Saul's army just over the hill ... Saul in the very same cave where David was hiding ... David's own people informing against him to the King. Though he was God's anointed, there were many days where the future was dim and the path ahead uncertain. But it was only through such hardship that David came to see his total dependence upon God.

*Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His,
And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.
For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life;
Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy comes in the morning.*

[Ps 30:4-5]

David has come out the other side of tribulation. He has battled not only foes from without, he has struggled with his own mistakes. But he has learned a crucial lesson about the nature of God: though angered at times by our disobedience, He is quick to return to us with loving favor. So many see God the other way around, as an exacting, demanding taskmaster who is only rarely pleased with our paltry efforts. This conception arises more from our guilty conscience than the true revelation of God. Yes, there are times when the night crawls with heaviness. But it is our repeated experience, is it not, that the grief finally gives way to the sunshine of day. Such constant goodness of God evokes praise and thanks from those who have learned to recognize it.

Now in my prosperity I said, "I shall never be moved." Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong; You hid Your face, and I was troubled. I cried out to You, O Lord; And to the Lord I made supplication: "What profit is there in my blood, When I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; Lord, be my helper!"

[Ps 30:6-10]

At times, we must be a source of pitiful amusement to the Lord. **He** gives us victory or prosperity, and we immediately congratulate ourselves of a job well done. We forget how unstable this world is, and from the mountaintop we cannot imagine want or weakness. But all it takes to shatter this illusion is for God to hide His face, to withdraw His hand of bounty or protection. How swiftly we swoop from the lofty heights to the valley of despair! David's life is suddenly in jeopardy, and he begs for deliverance – not so he can return to the joys of selfish indulgence – but that he may do what is proper for man: praise Him and declare His truths to others.

*You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,
To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.*

[Ps 30:11-12]

True thanksgiving is forged in the fires of threat and trouble. If all we know is comfort, thanksgiving tends to evaporate into self-sufficiency. It is only after wearing sackcloth that we luxuriate in the silkiness of joy and gladness. May we give thanks to God, not only for the gifts of family, freedom and faith, but for the times of hardship that make us cherish these blessings more deeply.