

DEVOTION FOR THE FIFTH THURSDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PSALM 129

“Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth” let Israel now say.

Greatly have they afflicted me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me.

The plowers plowed upon my back; they made long their furrows.

The Lord is righteous; He has cut the cords of the wicked.

May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward!

Let them be like the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up,

With which the reaper does not fill his hand nor the binder of sheaves his arms,

Nor do those who pass by say, ‘The blessing of the Lord be upon you! We bless you in the name of the Lord!’

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;

As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen

Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 14:1-29 *Food and Tithing*

New Testament Reading: Acts 26:1-27 *Paul evangelizes King Agrippa*

“WOULD THAT ALL WERE LIKE I AM EXCEPT FOR THESE CHAINS”

An amazing chain of events led Paul to make a defense of the gospel before King Agrippa. Paul began with his conversion and shared the gospel in the hope that even as the Holy Spirit had opened his eyes to see Jesus as the Christ, He would do the same for King Agrippa. Sadly, as the governor Felix had resisted the calling of the Spirit and sent Paul away until he felt like listening, Agrippa also refused the gospel call and instead asked, *“In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”* He was more polite than Governor Festus, who simply told Paul he was out of his mind.

When God speaks directly through His majesty, no one can close her or his ears to His voice, or resist His call. On the day of judgement, God will call the dead to rise and stand at His judgement seat. No one will be able to say, “Don’t call us, we’ll call you!” Yet when God speaks through earthly means such as a human being, His voice can be ignored and His call can be resisted. The same gospel message that brought three thousand in Jerusalem to faith and repentance unto life, left two Roman governors, a king and queen unmoved. Paul stood before them in chains, but they were the ones who were truly chained.

How odd it must have sounded to the assembly to hear a chained man wish that they were like him. Didn’t he realize that he was a prisoner of the state? Didn’t he realize he would wear chains all the way to Rome and that only Caesar would be able to release him? Yet they were bound more firmly in chains than Paul. They were bound in chains of sin and under a condemnation eternal death. Only Jesus could loose those chains and set them free.

Despite his chains, which he would wear for another two years, Paul was free in Christ. He wanted them to believe, so they would be free too. There is nothing more important than faith in Jesus. He sets us free from spiritual chains of sin and eternal death. In Him we have freedom in time and life in eternity. Would that all would receive Jesus, be released from these chains and live in this freedom!

“NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD” (Public Domain)
Now thank we all our God, With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, In whom His world rejoices;
Who from our mother’s arms has blessed us on our way,
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

**O may this bounteous God, through all our life be near us, with ever joyful hearts,
And blessed peace to cheer us; And keep us in his grace, And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills, In this world and the next.**

**All praise and thanks to God, The Father now be given,
The Son and Him who reigns, with them in highest heaven;
The one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was is now, And shall be ever more!**

PRAYAER

Lord Jesus, you have set us free from chains of sin and released us from the condemnation of death. We thank and praise you for your mercy. We pray you to bless us with your Holy Spirit that we may live confidently in your freedom and faithfully proclaim the freedom of the gospel to others, through our words and in the daily living of our lives. We ask this in your Name. Amen

THE LORD’S PRAYER

**Our Father who art in heaven.
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen**

THE CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

BENEDICTION

Isaiah 49:13

“Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted.”