

# THIRST FOR GOD

(PSALMS 41 AND 42)

by DOM ROMANUS RIOS, O.S.B.

**T**HIS psalm of surpassing beauty has echoed down the ages in the Christian Liturgy. Part of it is still employed to introduce the celebration of the highest act of worship of the Christian Church. This is the new Latin text recently authorized by the Holy See, with an English translation.

## PSALM 41

THE SOUL ATHIRST FOR GOD

QUEMADMODUM DESIDERAT CERVA RIVOS AQUARUM

### First Part

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| Magistro chori. Maskil. <sup>1</sup> Filiorum<br>Core.  | 1. For the Choir master. Maskil<br>of the Sons of Korah.  |
| Quemadmodum desiderat cerva<br>rivos aquarum,<br>ita desiderat anima mea te, Deus.  | 2. As the hind panteth after the<br>water brooks,<br>so thirsteth my soul after Thee,<br>O God.   |
| Sitit anima mea Deum, Deum<br>vivum:<br>quando veniam et videbo faciem<br>Dei?  | 3. My soul thirsteth for God, for<br>the living God:<br>when shall I come and appear<br>before God?   |
| Factae sunt mihi lacrimae meae<br>panis die ac nocte,<br>dum dicunt mihi cotidie: "Ubi<br>est Deus tuus?"   | 4. My tears have become my bread<br>day and night<br>while they say unto me all the<br>day: "Where is thy God?"   |
| Illud recordor et effundo animum<br>meum intra me:<br>quomodo incessem in turba,<br>praecesserim eos ad Domum Dei,<br>inter voces exultationis et laudis<br>in coetu festivo. | 5. I recall these things, and pour out<br>my soul within me:<br>how I passed on with the throng<br>and led them to God's house,<br>amid the shouts of joy and praise,<br>a multitude keeping holyday. |
| Quare deprimeris, anima mea,<br>et tumultuaris in me?   | 6. Why are thou cast down, O my<br>soul? and why art thou restless<br>within me?  |
| Spera in Deum: quia rursus<br>celebrabo eum,<br>salutem vultus mei et Deum<br>meum.   | 7. Hope in God: for I will again<br>praise Him,<br>the salvation of my countenance,<br>and my God.  |

<sup>1</sup> "Maskil has usually been explained as meaning a didactic or sapiential poem . . . but it is difficult to find a single formula which will describe them all. Possibly we should be right in saying that *Maskil* is a name for all poems which aim at teaching that wisdom of which the fear of God is the beginning—for all poems which inculcate the need of faith in God, and of the sort of conduct which is based on that faith." Boylan, *The Psalms*, in loc.

*Second Part*

In me ipso anima mea deprimitur :  
ideo recordor tui ex terra Jordanis  
et Hermon, ex Monte Misar.

Gurges gurgitem vocat cum  
fragore cataractarum tuarum :  
omnes fluctus et undae tuae super  
me transierunt.

Per diem largiatur Dominus  
gratiam suam, et nocte canam ei,  
laudabo Deum vitae meae.

Dico Deo : Petra mea, cur oblivis-  
ceris mei ? quare tristis incedo ab  
inimico oppressus ?

Ossa mea franguntur, dum insult-  
ant mihi adversarii mei,  
dum dicunt mihi cotidie : " Ubi  
est Deus tuus ? "

Quare deprimeris, anima mea, et  
tumultuaris in me ?

Spera in Deum : quia rursus  
celebrabo eum,  
salutem vultus mei et Deum  
meum.

My soul is heavy within me,  
for I remember thee from the land  
of the Jordan and Hermon, from  
Mount Mizar.

8. Deep calleth deep at the sound  
of Thy cataracts ;  
all thy waves and thy billows  
are gone over me.

9. May the Lord by day command  
His grace and in the night I will  
sing to Him : I will praise the God  
of my life.

10. I will say to God : O my Rock,  
why dost Thou forget me ? why  
go I sad, oppressed by the enemy ?

11. I feel as if my bones were  
crushed when my enemies taunt me,  
while they say unto me all the  
day : " Where is thy God ? "

12. Why art thou cast down, O my  
soul, and why art thou restless  
within me ?

Hope thou in God : for I shall  
yet praise Him,  
the salvation of my countenance,  
and my God.

*Third Part*

(Psalm 42)

Jus redde mihi, Deus, et age  
causam meam adversus gentem non  
sanctam :

ab homine doloso et iniquo libera  
me.

Quia tu es Deus fortitudo mea :  
quare me reppulisti ?

Quare tristis incedo, ab inimico  
oppressus ?

Emitte lucem tuam et fidelitatem  
tuam : ipsae me ducant,  
adducant me in montem sanctum  
tuum et in tabernacula tua.

Et introibo ad altare Dei, ad  
Deum laetitiae et exultationis meae.

Et laudabo Te cum cithara,  
Deus, Deus, meus.

1. See Thou to my right, O God,  
and plead my cause against an  
ungodly nation :

deliver me from the deceitful  
and unjust man.

2. For Thou, O God, art my  
strength : why hast Thou cast me  
off ?

Why go I mourning, being  
oppressed by the enemy ?

3. O send out thy light and thy  
fidelity : let them lead me  
and bring me unto thy holy hill  
and to thy dwelling-places.

4. Then will I go unto the altar of  
God, the God of my joy and my  
rejoicing.

And I will praise Thee upon the  
harp, O God, my God.

Quare deprimeris, anima mea, et  
tumultuaris in me ?

Spera in Deum : quia rursus  
celebrabo eum,  
salutem vultus mei et Deum  
meum.

5. Why art thou cast down, O my  
soul, and why art thou disquieted  
within me ?

Hope in God : for I shall yet  
praise Him,  
the health of my countenance  
and my God.

From the literary structure of their stanzas, as well as from the refrain which terminates each of them, it is obvious that Psalms 41 and 42 were originally composed as one. The division, however, must have been made at a very early date, since it is already found in the original Hebrew text. But curiously enough, although all the psalms of this Second Book of the psalter have a title, Psalm 42 is without one. The psalm is a soul-stirring lament of an exiled Levite, away from the Temple service and persecuted by anti-religious foes. The title of Psalm 41 attributes it to the sons of Korah, a group of Levitical choristers in the Temple, mentioned in II Paral. xx, 19 : " And the Levites of the sons of Caath and of the sons of Korah, praised the Lord, the God of Israel with a loud voice on high."<sup>1</sup> Many other psalms are attributed to the same family, all of which are distinguished by their high poetical inspiration and exquisite piety.

It is not easy to determine the time of its composition ; some modern writers are in favour of the period of the Maccabees, but indeed without very cogent reasons.

The opening of the psalm could hardly be more poetically inspired : *As the hart (rather the hind) panteth after the water brooks, so thirsteth my soul for Thee, O God.* The thirst for God—*Sitis Dei*—is one of the deepest desires of the human soul, and poets of many nations, ancient and modern, have endeavoured to describe it in fitting lines. The South American poet, Rubén Dario, penned that beautiful sentence

*El alma es un vaso que solo se  
llena con la eternidad.*

The soul is a glass that  
eternity alone can fill.

This first verse of Psalm 41 has played an important part in the Liturgy of the Church. It has been, and is still, employed with elaborate music at the solemn procession which precedes the blessing of the baptismal font. The choir, on behalf of the neophytes, sing : "*As the hind panteth after the water brooks, etc.*" The catechumens are longing for those water brooks in which they are going to find the streams of living water springing forth unto life everlasting. This same verse has also been the means of consolation in other sorrowful circumstances : part of it seems to have been inscribed in Latin upon the walls of one of the dungeons of the Tower. One of our English Martyrs left it there as an eternal monument of his hope and trust in God.

<sup>1</sup> See also Numbers xxxvi, 9-11.

Verse 3 now reads: *Sitit anima mea Deum, Deum vivum*, thus omitting the epithet *Fortis*—*ad Deum fortem, vivum*, of the former translation. The present rendering is, of course, more faithful to the original; but the former version is worth mentioning, because it inspired the Trisagion of Good Friday: *Sanctus Deus, sanctus Fortis, sanctus Immortalis (vivus)*.

*When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?*—Gentle St. Francis of Sales was often heard to repeat these words on his death-bed.

Verse 4 is a poignant description of the anguish of soul of the poor exile, listening to his foes around him, taunting him with the question: "Where is thy God?" To a sensitive religious soul this pagan taunt is indeed sheer misery. Many of us have experienced it during these past years of war, when even educated people would start their conversation with the question: If there is a God, why does He allow all this evil?

In verses 5 to 7 the exile contrasts his early days of joy when joining the throng of worshippers at the Temple, making merry and rejoicing in the Lord, with the present sad conditions of his life. The *Mons Modicus*—the little Hill—of the former Vulgate text now becomes, more accurately, *the Hill of Mizar*, which must have been one belonging to the mountain-range of Hermon, on the East side of the Jordan, where the Levite in question was evidently in exile. The Hebrew, however could also be rendered: *the Hill of Littleness*. The line, *Why art thou cast down, my soul?* is another of those expressions which instinctively come to the lips in hours of distress, or affliction. It is said that Cardinal Manning would often quote it in his Oxford days.

Verse 8 is now translated: *Gurgēs gurgitem vocat*, instead of the old familiar *Abyssus abyssum invocat*. *Deep calleth unto deep*. This thought is suggested to the psalmist by the thundering waterfalls, cascading from the peaks of Mount Hermon, and plunging into the rapids of the Jordan—an apt description of the state of his soul.

As the reader can see at a glance from the division given above, the third part of this psalm is simply its third stanza. It is for us one of the most familiar passages of the whole psalter, since it is recited at the beginning of the celebration of Holy Mass. Originally, it seems, the psalm *Judica me, Deus*, now *Jus redde mihi, Deus*, was sung by the newly baptized on their returning processionally from the Baptismal font to take part for the first time in the Divine Sacrifice of the Mass. This use seems to have been the custom of the Church of Milan, as may be inferred from an allusion of St. Ambrose in the *De Sacramentis*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Veniebas ergo desiderans ad altare, utpote qui tantam gratiam videras; veniebas desiderans ad altare, quo acciperes sacramentum. Dicat anima tua: Et introibo ad altare Dei mei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam. Deposuisti peccatorum senectutem, sumpsisti gratiae juventutem: hoc praestiterunt Sacramenta coelestia.* Migne, P.L., 16, col. 437.

We know that it was sung when St. Augustine was baptized on Easter Sunday, 24th April 387. At a later date, it came to be recited by the priest on his way to the altar. In fact, the rubric of a Roman *Micrologus Missae* says: *Paratus Sacerdos venit ad altare dicens Antiphonam Introibo ad altare Dei et psalmum Judica me Deus*. The modern custom of reciting the *Judica* as part of the priest's public confession before celebrating Mass, seems to have been already general in the ninth century; but it was not definitely fixed until the edition of the Roman Missal by Pope St. Pius V. The custom is certainly most appropriate. The priest too is an exile on this earth, and needs a renewal of his youth and immense trust in God before ascending the altar to celebrate the Divine Sacrifice. It is one of the most solemn moments of the priest's life. It is recorded of St. Andrew Avellino, that he died at the foot of the altar, immediately after the recitation of the psalm *Judica*.

Verses 3 to 5, *Emitte lucem tuam et fidelitatem tuam, etc. Send forth Thy light and Thy fidelity (to thy promise), and let them lead me to Thy holy mountain, to Thy tabernacles*. The psalmist takes God's promise of help for granted, and knows that his exile will end in the renewed service at the altar of God, who will once more become his joy and his delight, and the theme of fresh melodies upon his harp.

The psalm ends with the refrain of the two preceding stanzas. If recited with fervour at Mass, this refrain will haunt the memory and fill one with unspeakable trust in God.

## OLD TESTAMENT LAWS OF INHERITANCE AND ST. LUKE'S GENEALOGY OF CHRIST

by DOM LAMBERT NOLLE, O.S.B.

**W**E see in the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that they observed the legal customs of the Semites regarding inheritance. The normal heirs were the sons of free-born wives; the first-born receiving a double share of the inheritance. There were amongst them two curious exceptions, namely, the customs of Adoption and that of the Levirate marriage. The first of these was practically abolished by the Mosaic law of inheritance, the other one greatly modified. By the law of Moses a third and new kind of heir-at-law was introduced, namely, the heiress. We propose to consider each of these in turn.

1. *Adoption*. The best examples of adoption are to be found in the history of Jacob. He made the two sons of Joseph legally his own in the full sense (Gen. xlviii, 15-22). He also fully adopted his sons born

Note—For a treatment of the Levirate, see the very complete notes by Father Lattey, S.J., in his edition of the Book of Ruth (*The Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures*).