PSALM 20

✠ This psalm is written in the form of a Royal Psalm. It is also identified as a Thanksgiving Psalm for after the king's victory.

- ✣ About "royal psalm" : see the note about "royal psalm" in the introduction to Psalm 2.
- ✣ About "thanksgiving psalm" : see the note about "thanksgiving psalm" in the introduction to Psalm 17.

✠ NAB : The first part of this royal psalm (vv. 2-8) is giving thanks ; the second part (vv. 9-13) is a promise that the king will triumph over his enemies.

✠ This is the second of the "Royal Beginning" Psalms of Matins. It is used (verses 2, 3, 4) as the Third Antiphon, and (verse 14) as the Introit of the Divine Liturgy of Pentecost. It is used (verses 2, 14) as the second Prokeimenon of Friday Vespers Prokeimenon in the First Week of Great Lent. It is used (verse 4, 5) at the vesting of a bishop (at the investiture with the mitre), and at the crowning of a couple at the blessing of their marriage.

✠ This psalm was historically found in the weekly Resurrectional Vigil.

✠ *The Orthodox Study Bible* indicates that this psalm prepares for the Ascension of Christ.

✠ Saint Athanasius explains that this psalm reveals the Kingdom of Christ, the power of His judgement, and His Second Coming in the flesh with the summoning of the nations.

✠ Saint Augustine is of the opinion that this psalm is sung about Christ.

- ✣ According to Father P Reardon : "the voice of the Church herself is the voice of this psalm".

✠ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) points out that this psalm has a "twin-brother" in Psalm 19.

"*Kingship of Christ*"

"*God's presence fires friends and fries enemies*"

"*We will sing and praise Thy power*"

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1 For the End. A psalm by David.

V 1 About the Inscription : in the Masoretic (Hebrew) text, the Inscription is : "To the Choirmaster. A psalm of David".

✠ About "*for the End*" : see the note about "*for the End*" on Psalm 4:1.

[Κύριε, ἐν τῇ δυνάμει σου Domine, in virtute tua]

2 O LORD, in Your power the king shall be glad,/ and in Your salvation he

shall exceedingly exult.

V 2 About "*Lord*" : see the note about "*Lord*" on Psalm 1:2.

✠ About "*power*" : see the note about "*power*" on Psalm 17:33.

✠ About "*shall be glad*" : see verse 7 ; see also the note on Psalm 5:12.

✠ About this verse : Saint Augustine explains that it is the Man, Jesus Christ, who rejoices in God's saving acts.

⁜ Bishop Eusebiusis of the opinion that these words are prophetic words which long pre-date the Prophet David. As the difficult events of his own life fulfilled these words to some extent, so the Prophet looked forward towards the "*salvation*" to come in Christ. He exults not so much in his own salvation sent from God as in that to come in the Saviour.

✠ About "*salvation*" : see verse 6. See the note about "*salvation*" on Psalm 3:9.

✠ About "*exult*" : see the note about "*exult*" on Psalm 2:11.

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3 You gave him the craving of his heart,/ and You did not deprive him of the wish of his lips ;

Pause

V 3 About "*craving of his heart*" : Saint Augustine relates this phrase to the Dominical words : "*with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*" (Luke 22:15) ; and "*I lay down My life that I may take it again*" (John 10:17). God fulfilled this desire.

⁜ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) suggests that there is a double meaning here. God has endowed the human heart with the ability to formulate a desired plan. As a gift of God, the desire of the heart can be filled with prayer.

✠ About "*craving*" : see the note about "*craving*" on Psalm 9:24.

✠ About "*heart*" : see the note about "*heart*" on Psalm 4:3.

✠ See the note about "*in accordance with your heart*" on Psalm 19:5.

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4 for You have been before him with blessings of loving-kindness ;/ You placed on his head a crown of precious stones.

V 4 About "*been before him ...*" : Cassiodorus elaborates that the human race is always blessed by the anticipatory Grace of God. No-one can offer the Lord anything before He offers it to us. [See 1 John 4:19.] Indeed, everything good has been given to us by the Lord. [See James 1:17.] Saint Augustine previously wrote about this interpretation.

✠ About "*blessings*" : see the note about "*blessing*" on Psalm 3:9.

✠ About "*loving-kindness*" : see the note on Psalm 13:1.

✠ About "*crown*" : Saint Jerome explains that the "*crown*" of the Lord is the whole Church gathered together from everywhere.

- ✣ See the note about "*crowned*" on Psalm 5:13.

✠ About "*precious stones*" : see Psalm 18:11.

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5 Life did he ask of You,/ and You gave him length of days, unto an age of an age.

V 5 About "*life*" : Saint Irenæus of Lyon comments that "*life*" does not in any way arise from us, but it is a gift through the Grace of the Lord, who is in eternal "*life*".

- ✣ Saint Augustine points out that our Saviour asked for "*life*", and He was given "*life*" : He prayed "*Father, ... glorify Your Son*" (John 17:1), and the answer was given in the Resurrection. Moreover, this request or life resulted through the Resurrection in deathlessness for the Church, and eternal and unending life.
- ✣ These words are to be understood as a preparation for comprehending the Resurrection, and eternal life.
- ✣ See 3 Kingdoms 3:13 ; 4 Kingdoms 20:6 ; Psalm 60:7-8 ; John 5:25-26 ; Acts 17:25.

✠ About "*length of days, unto an age of an age*" : Saint Irenæus of Lyon explains that this gift of "*length of days, unto an age of an age*" is what is given to the person who acknowledges the gift, and gives thanks to the Giver for the gift. Such a one increases the gift. However, whoever does not recognise this precious gift, and who does not recognise the Giver, ignores and rejects what has been given freely as a gift. Such a one deprives himself of the privilege of the unending continuance of life. He cites Luke 16:11 to show us the grave consequences of ingratitude and irresponsibility.

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6 Great is his glory in Your salvation :/ glory and magnificence will You set upon him.

V 6 About "*Great is his...salvation*" : Saint Augustine comments that this means that our Saviour received truly great glory in the saving act of the Resurrection.

✠ About "*salvation*" : see verse 2.

✠ About "*glory and magnificence*" : Saint Augustine continues by saying that the Father will continue to heap great "*glory and magnificence*" upon our Saviour when He will place Him at the right-hand in the Kingdom.

- ✣ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) adds that "*slavă şi mare-cuviinţă*", meaning "great

propriety", is a beautiful old Romanian expression which literally translates the Greek as "greatness", "majesty", "magnificence" [the translated phrase has moved into general usage in Romanian].

✣ About "*glory*" : see the note on Psalm 3:4.

✣ About "*magnificence* : see the note on Psalm 8:2.

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7 Blessing will You give to him, unto an age of an age :/ with Your Face will You gladden him with joy ;

V 7 About "*blessing*" : see the note about "*blessing*" on verse 4.

✠ About "*Face*" : see the note on Psalm 4:7 (this is not the same usage as in verse 10).

✠ About "*gladden*" : see the note on verse 2.

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8 for the king hopes on the LORD,/ and because of the mercy of the Most High, he shall not be shaken.

V 8 About "*hopes*" : see the note on Psalm 4:6.

✠ About "*mercy*" : see the notes on Psalm 5:8.

✠ About "*most high*" : see the note on Psalm 9:3.

✠ About "*not be shaken*" : see the note about "*not be shaken*" on Psalm 14:5. See also the note about "*not be distressed*" on Psalm 12:5.

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9 May Your hand be found by all Your enemies :/ may Your right hand find all those hating You.

V 9 Saint Augustine asks the Lord that, when He comes in judgement, His power be found by all His enemies who did not discern it at His humiliation.

✠ Cassiodorus comments that these "*enemies*" are called this only as long as they are captivated by the Adversary. Converted to the Lord, they are called servants, children, and friends.

✣ Father P Reardon explains that most of the second half of the psalm refers to the "*enemies*". The enemy, sin, was overcome by Christ's shed blood. The enemy, death, was trampled by Christ's death. The enemy, Hadēs, was unable to hold the Author of Life.

✣ It may also be said that some make themselves enemies towards the Lord by rebellion and selfishness. Despite this, the Lord continues to love such persons as His creatures.

✣ All those in positions of responsibility shall be tested by enemies : sometimes visible, sometimes invisible. Sin is always waiting. Striking the shepherd can scatter the sheep, hence the need for prayer for protection, and support. See Zechariah 13:7 (Masoretic) ; Matthew 26:31.

✣ See the note on Psalm 5:9.

✠ About "*right hand*" : see the note on Psalm 15:8.

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10 You will put them into a fiery oven, at the time of Your Face ;/ the LORD, in His anger, will throw them into confusion,/ and the fire shall devour them.

V 10 About "*fiery oven*" : Saint Augustine shows that the fire is related to how God's love acts – in this case, as a purifying, refining fire.

✣ See Malachi 3:2, 19 ; James 5:3.

✠ About "*time*" : "*kairos*" time (a specific, apt time), see the note on Psalm 1:3.

✠ About "*Face*" : see the note on Psalm 9:4 (this is not the same usage as in verse 7).

✠ About "*anger*" : see the notes about "*anger*" on Psalm 2:5.

✠ About "*throw them into confusion*" : see Psalm 17:15.

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11 Their fruit You will destroy from the earth,/ and their seed from amongst the sons of Men,

V 11 About this verse : Bishop Eusebius of Cæsarea explains that the "*seed*" and "*fruit*" of the godless are their unrighteous words, teachings and writings which they have proliferated. Of His goodness, God scatters them all so that nothing remains to contaminate His children.

✣ See Isaiah 14:22.

✠ About "*destroy*" : see the note about "*destroy*" on Psalm 5:7.

✠ About "*seed*" (bad) : see Psalms 36:28 ; 105:27.

✠ About "*sons of men*" : see the note about "*sons of men*" on Psalm 4:3.

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12 for they have bent their bad things against You./ They reasoned about counsels, which they shall not be able to confirm,

V 12 About "*counsels*" : Cassiodorus (following Saint Augustine) relates this word and the verse to those who plotted the death of the Saviour. He reminds us that these men were fearful that Jesus the Christ

might raise a rebellion, and they were fearful of the reaction of the Roman Empire against the Jews that could result. Therefore, they considered how to put an end to Him by trying to divert the vengeance of Rome towards Him rather than towards them. He cites the words of the High Priest Caiaphas : "... *consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish*" (John 11:50). They were not able to complete their evil plans because although the words were spoken with evil intent, they did not understand that the words were, in fact, true. In other words, one Man died for the sake of all. [However, He died not merely for the nation, but rather for all Mankind.]

✠ About "*counsels*" : see the note about "*counsel*" on Psalm 1:1.

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13 for You will make them turn their back ;/ in those remaining, You will prepare their face.

V 13 Saint Ambrose of Milan explains that "to turn the back" describes the state of the sinner. Thus, Cain went out from the Face of the Lord (see 1 Moses 4:16). One who is righteous does not turn the back to the Lord, but rather runs to meet Him.

✣ See the note on Psalm 17:41.

✠ About "*in those remaining*" : Saint Athanasius comments that the Lord has left the Gentiles a time for return and for conversion. During this period, He actively calls them.

✣ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) comments that God can defeat the enemies by those that remained the faithful minority.

✠ About "*You will prepare their face*" : Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) mentions that in Hebrew, the words are : "*Your bow will you aim for their faces*". In Hebrew, the focus remains on the king.

✠ About "*face*" : in this case, it may convey both "presence", and "outward appearance".

✣ See verse 7 ; see also the note on Psalm 4:7.

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14 Be exalted, O LORD, in Your power./ We shall sing and we shall chant about Your mighty deeds.

V 14 About "*exalted*" : Saint Augustine comments that this prayer requests that our Saviour, who was misunderstood and rejected in His humility, now be exalted after the Resurrection in His true power at the glorious Ascension. In response, we will celebrate and make known His mighty deeds.

✣ See the note about "*exalted*" on Psalm 7:7.

✠ About "*power*" : see the note on Psalm 17:33.

✠ About "*mighty deeds*" : see the note on Psalm 19:7 ; see *The Orthodox Study Bible* note about this verse.

O Lord, bless us with the blessing of goodness,

and fulfil our petition pleasing to You ;
that, while in sweet song we continually celebrate Your mighty deeds,
we may obtain the length of eternal life. — Roman
