PSALM 15

✠ This psalm is written in the form of a Lament.

⁜ See the note about "lament" in the Introduction to Psalm 3.

✠ This psalm is also identified as a Psalm of Trust.

⁜ See the note about "psalm of trust" in the Introduction to Psalm 10.

✠ This Psalm is used in services to some saints. It is used (verses 3, 8) as the Prokeimenon of the Divine Liturgy of "general" Feast-days of Martyrs. It is used (verses 3, 8) as the Prokeimenon of the Divine Liturgy of "general" Feast-days of (an) Unmercenary Healer(s).

✠ Saint Athanasius explains to us that in Psalm 15 we may see the Resurrection of Christ.

✠ Saint Augustine's explanations generally assume that in this psalm, the Prophet David is writing as though it were with the voice of Christ through the human nature which He assumed.

⁜ Cassiodorus comments similarly that the Person of the Lord is being revealed to us in this psalm. Bishop Theodoret also supports this assertion.

✠ *The Orthodox Study Bible* indicates that, like Psalm 14, this psalm shows the transfigured life that the believer may live.

"*Election of the Church, and Resurrection of Christ*"

"*The vision and presence of God is our joy*"

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1 Inscription on a stele. By David.

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

⁜ According to the NAB, "miktam" occurs six times in the Masoretic Hebrew text of the Psalter : Psalms 16, 55-59 (Masoretic numbering) . "Miktam" is always attributed to David. The meaning of this term is unknown. However, philological research in Hebrew and Babylonian musical vocabulary suggests the possibility of a musical direction either about a percussion instrument (such as a tambourine or cymbal) or perhaps a wind instrument. That is, the psalm would be accompanied by some instrument.

✠ Saint Gregory of Nyssa relates this Inscription to those of Psalms 55 through 59 (Septuagint numbering).

[Φύλαξόν με, Κύριε Conserva me, Domine]

Watch over me, O LORD ;/ for I have hoped on You.

✠ About "*watch over*" : see the note about "*watch over*" on Psalm 11:8.

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

✠ About "*I have hoped*" : Cassiodorus comments that as a Man, Christ asks the Father, in whom He always hopes, to save Him. Cassiodorus assures us all that in no way do these words lessen His divinity, but rather, they reflect the nature of His humanity.

✠ About "*hoped*" : see the note about "*hope*" on Psalm 4:6.

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2 I said to the LORD : "You are my LORD./ You have no need of my good things".

V 2 About "*You have no need of my good things*" : Saint Ambrose cites Romans 11:36 ("*of Him and through Him and to Him are all things*") and he asks who, then, has ever given or could ever give Him anything. All life abides in Him, the Spring of Life (see Psalm 35:10). The Lord has no needs and He does not require anything of anyone. Rather, He lavishes everything on everyone – all good things, all life. What can be greater than to approach Him and to taste the fountain of living water (see John 4:10) and cling to Him ?

✣ Saint Augustine explains that it is Man, not God who benefits from every aspect of worship. When God is teaching how He should be worshipped (in 3 Moses and throughout the Old Testament), it is for our good and for our benefit. Everything that we offer is symbolic. The symbols are the means by which our attention is awakened to comprehend the meaning of what our offering represents.

✣ Saint Jerome reminds us that God has no need of our good things, nor do our virtuous acts contribute towards God's perfection. He is changeless. Whatever we bring in offering of the first-fruits of our labours to Him, He gives back to us, and yet more.

✣ Although Cassiodorus and Bishop Theodoret both use the Masoretic text, the meaning of their interpretation can fit the meaning of the Greek text. They say that King David attributes all things to the Lord who has given all things, and not to himself. Indeed, the Prophet-King recognises that God needs none of our good things. God, who creates all, does not need anything that we have. He wants our love, our heart, because He created us to be in communion with Him.

✣ The Hebrew Masoretic text of this phrase is uncertain. The usual attempt to translate the second part produces : "I have no good apart from You". Another version is "You are my only good". Yet another is "I have no greater gladness than You". The Septuagint follows a rather different textual tradition.

✣ See :12-13.

✠ About "*good things*" : see the note about "*good things*" on Psalm 4:7.

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3 As for the holy ones who are on His earth,/ the LORD has made wonderful all His wishes in them.

V 3 About "*holy ones*" : Saint Augustine says that King David gives thanks that although the holy ones are yet alive on this earth, they have placed their hope on the Land of the Living because they are citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Their spiritual way of life is kept secure and stable by the anchor of hope which is fixed on the Heavenly Kingdom. See Hebrews 6:19. He continues from the perspective of Christ, and he says that the Heavenly Father has fulfilled Christ's wishes in them for their advancement. The saints understand that it was to their advantage that their humanity was assumed by Christ's divinity so that He might die, and that in the divinity of His humanity, He might rise again.

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

✠ About "*made wonderful*" : see the note about "*made wonderful*" on Psalm 4:4.

✠ About "*wishes*" : this translates the Greek word θέλημα, *thelēma* (or its relative , θέλησις, *thelēsis*) meaning "will", "wish", "decree". In the singular in English, "will" is possible ; but in the plural, only "wishes" conveys easily the meaning.

✣ See Psalms 20:3 ; 110:2. See also the note about "*wishes*" on Psalm 33:13.

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4 Their infirmities were multiplied ;/ afterwards they made haste./ I shall not gather together their gatherings of blood,/ nor shall I mention their names with my lips.

V 4 About "*their infirmities were multiplied ... haste*" : Saint Athanasius explains that at first they were in sin ; but then, by hearing the preaching, they hastened to obey this preaching.

✣ Saint Augustine comments that the multiplication of infirmities was not to ruin them, but rather to help them to long for a physician. He continues, in explaining the following phrase, that they therefore make haste to seek healing.

✣ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) writes that this means "their weaknesses", after comparing with the Hebrew text which says "they multiply their vexations, who court other gods".

✣ The unbeliever feels weaker, then comes panic and a rush to disaster.

✠ About "*gather together*" : see the note about "*gathered together*" on Psalm 2:2.

✠ About "*gather ... blood*" : Saint Augustine and others understand that the Prophet is saying that he will not gather together gatherings based on or because of the blood of sacrificial victims.

✣ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) suggests that the libations at the gatherings of blood could indicate that they were practicing idolaters.

✣ See Isaiah 1:11.

✠ About "*gatherings*" : see the note about "*gathering*" on Psalm 7:8.

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

✠ About "*mention their names*" : Saint Augustine explains that Christ addresses such sinners from the perspective of their ultimate repentance. In their spiritual transfiguration, they will forget their former names and their former misbehaviours, and they will become righteous ones who will be known as such by Christ. He will not refer to them as mortals or sinners but as His righteous brothers and sisters –

children of God through His peace.

✣ The NAB demonstrates that to "*mention their names*" would be to use the names of the gods in oaths. To do this would necessarily mean affirming these gods to be one's own gods.

✣ See 2 Moses 23:13 ; Joshua 23:7 ; Hosea 2:17 ; Zechariah 13:2.

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5 The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup :/ it is You, restoring my inheritance to me.

V 5 About this verse : Saint Augustine comments that the share of the saints is the eternal Lord. It is the Lord who restores our Saviour's former glory so that all who have been set free may see and know Him, the Lord, and the glory which Christ previously had (Psalm 22:5 ; John 17:5).

✠ About "*the Lord is the portion*" : in the apportioning of an inheritance, the "*portion*" may be all, some, or none of what is bequeathed to the inheritor. Although there is for very many persons a focus on inheriting land and other things, the strong assertion of the Prophet David is that all that matters is that the Lord Himself is his portion, that is, his inheritance. For him, it is not the kingdom which became his responsibility, but the Lord Himself whom he has personally inherited. These words also indicate clearly the responsibility that we all share in passing on to others the personal encounter with the Lord.

✣ See 4 Moses 18:20 ; 5 Moses 10 :9 ; Psalms 72:26 ; 118:57 ; 141:6 ; see also *The Orthodox Study Bible* note on Wisdom of Sirach 45:22.

✠ About "*portion*" : see the note about "*portion*" on Psalm 10:6.

✠ About "*inheritance*" : Saint Jerome explains that the one who has the Lord for his portion must behave in such a way as both to possess the Lord and to be possessed by Him. If we say that the Lord is our portion, then we cannot possibly cling to anything else. If we do, then we have left the Lord (see Matthew 6:24). This mutual possession must be understood in the context of selfless love.

✣ Evagrius of Pontus comments that the inheritance of Christ is the understanding of God.

✣ Archimandrite Lazarus (Moore) comments that salvation puts us in such a condition that God's eternal life becomes ours, following the normal right of succession to an inheritance. See Romans 8:17.

✣ Christ completely comprehends the Father (see John 17). In Christ, we begin to share this inheritance. See Galatians 4:7 ; Hebrews 1:2.

✣ See verse 6 ; see the note about "*inheritance*" on Psalm 2:8.

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6 Lines have fallen for me in the most excellent places ;/ indeed, my inheritance is most excellent to me.

V 6 About this verse : Evagrius of Pontus explains that although something measured seems to have fallen on us, we understand that God does not give the Spirit by measure. God gives in abundance and

beyond measure (see Joel 1:1-2 ; John 3:34). We, however, are limited in our capacity to receive, although that capacity can increase.

- Cassiodorus informs us that in ancient times an inheritance was distributed by means of lines on the earth. A person could obtain an amount of land by measurement in accordance with the amount bequeathed. Moses ordered Joshua to distribute the promised inheritance by means of lines (see Joshua 11:23). Thus, King David used "*lines*", because he was speaking about the abundance and beauty of his inheritance. From the Christological point of view, in this verse the inheritance of Christ is the multitude of saints. [Cassiodorus probably uses "saints" in the same way as in the New Testament, meaning faithful Christians (see Ephesians 1:1 ; Philippians 1:1 ; Colossians 1:2).]

✠ "*Lines*" means "ropes", "portions" or "boundaries". The word alone and in its context conveys the sense of inheriting property. In French, the word "*cordeau*" refers to the standard string used to measure property.

- See the note about "*measuring-line*" on Psalm 77:55.
- See also the note about "*lots*" on Psalm 30:16.

✠ In the Greek, "*places*" is lacking, as it is in the Hebrew. In both cases, it would be "understood" in the context, and all translators seem to provide "*places*" for the sake of clarity.

✠ About "*inheritance*" : see verse 5.

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7 I shall bless the LORD, who is making me understand ;/ even until night my reins have instructed me.

V 7 About "*bless*" : Saint Augustine mentions that the Prophet David expresses his gratitude as he blesses the Lord that he understands the nature of his inheritance.

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

✠ About "*understand*" : see the note about "*understand*" on Psalm 2:10.

✠ About "*night*" : see the note about "*night*" on Psalm 6:7.

✠ About "*reins*" : from Latin and French, this word refers to the kidneys, which (especially in Biblical use) refers to the seat of the feelings or affections, formerly identified with the kidneys. By extension, the kidneys refer to the heart, and thus the unconscious mind and the emotions.

- See the note about "*reins*" on Psalm 7:10.

✠ About "*instructed*" : see the note about "*instructed*" on Psalm 2:10.

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8 I was seeing the LORD before my face continually ;/ for He is at my right-hand, so that I may not be shaken.

V 8 About this verse : Saint Theophan the Recluse explains to us that there is a sort of prayer called "standing before God" (meaning a periodic deep and focussed concentration on the Lord, with the experience of the accompanying feelings of worshipful adoration, faith, hope, love, obedience, contrition) which can lead to a permanent state of communion with the Lord which may be called "walking before God". This state is one of unceasing prayer, and it is this to which the Prophet David here refers.

✠ About "*was seeing ... face*" : the Greek verb is in the imperfect middle voice, which gives this meaning. It is not in the active voice, which would mean "I foresaw". The following commentators reflect their understanding of the translation used here.

⁜ Saint Augustine stresses that the Prophet David shows us that in the midst of everything which is transient about life, we must keep our focus on the Lord who abides always. Thus, with the Prophet, we shall speed to the Lord when this tempest of our life has passed. Thus also, it is the Lord who keeps us on a steady course.

⁜ Cassiodorus shows us that these words give us the unique remedy against sin : always to keep the Lord before us. If we are able to do so, we will not be able to turn towards sin nor to be distracted away by it. When truth abides in the mind, it forbids the entry of falsehood.

✠ About "*my right-hand*" : Saint Jerome comments that the one who is like our Saviour in integrity has God at his right-hand, and he "*may not be shaken*". The Lord is at this righteous person's right-hand, because he keeps his eyes ever on the Lord whom he follows. The sinner tosses the word of the Lord behind him, and there are consequences. Indeed, the righteous person has no "left side", because "*an angel of the Lord shall encamp round about those fearing Him, and He will rescue them*" (see Psalm 33:8).

⁜ The right hand was regarded by many ancient peoples (and until recent times) as a sign of what was favourable or propitious. Thus, in modern protocol, to be situated immediately to the right of a leader in the Church, or a head of government, or any other authority, is considered to be the next most important place.

⁜ See Psalms 44:10 ; 90:7 ; 108:6, 31 ; 120:5. See the note about "*Your right-hand*" on verse 11.

✠ About "*shaken*" : see the note about "*shaken*" on Psalm 14:5.

✠ Acts 2:25.

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9 Because of this, my heart was glad and my tongue exulted./ Moreover, on hope shall my flesh pitch its tent ;

V 9

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

✠ About "*was glad*" : see the note about "*may they be glad*" on Psalm 5:12.

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

✠ About "*hope*" : see the note about "*hope*" on Psalm 13:6.

✠ About "*flesh*" : this translates the Greek word σάρξ, *sarks*, meaning "flesh". This refers explicitly to all that material which constitutes the human body. The word may be used to refer to animal bodies. Its

Hebrew equivalent is used to distinguish the material component of a human being from the spiritual component.

✣ See Psalms 26:2 ; 27:7 ; 37:4 ; 55:5 ; 62:2 ; 64:3 ; 72:26 ; 77:27, 39 ; 78:2 ; 83:3 ; 101:6 ; 108:24 ; 118:120 ; 135:25 ; 144:21 ; a multitude of references in the New Testament.

✣ See the note about "*flesh*" on :13.

✠ About "*pitch its tent*" : see the note about "*pitch ... tent*" on Psalm 5:12.

✠ Acts 2:26.

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10 for You will not abandon my soul to Hadēs,/ nor will You give Your holy one to see corruption.

V 10 About this verse : Saint Athanasius explains to us that in this verse and in the whole psalm, our Saviour's Resurrection from the dead is revealed to us. See Acts 2:27, 31 ; 13:35. We die by necessity of our fallen nature, not by our own choice. However, our Saviour (Himself immortal) has the power to separate Himself from this flesh, and to take it up again when He wills [John 10:18]. Therefore, the Lord has granted to us that our corruptible flesh should no longer remain mortal, but should now be able to continue into incorruptibility, since the Word Himself has put on our flesh, and since we are members of Him. As He conformed Himself to our condition, so we who receive Him partake of His immortality. Saint Athanasius says in his *Discourse Against the Arians* : "the Son of God became Man so that we might become God".

✣ Saint Irenæus of Lyon, in his *Against Heresies*, effectively says the same thing as does Saint Athanasius, but in a fuller manner.

✣ Saint Jerome addresses verses 9 to 11 from the Christological perspective. He says that some mistaken persons believe that when our Resurrected Saviour entered through closed doors (see John 20:19), He had a different sort of body than that in which He suffered. However, Saint Jerome asserts that our Saviour's human body was glorified and incorruptible, and that it will be the same for us in Him in the Resurrection. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 explains this in detail. Saint Jerome further says that this glorified body was foreshadowed at the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (see Luke 9:28-36).

✣ Saint Gregory of Nyssa also writes about the God-Man-hood of Jesus Christ in the context of this verse. He explains to us that His Divinity is immutably the same before the Incarnation, during the Incarnation, and after His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. His Divinity remains always what it is by nature from the beginning, and remaining the same unto the ages of ages. For our benefit, in the suffering of His human nature, our Saviour fulfilled the Father's will. The Divinity separated the soul from the body for a time ; yet, the Divinity was never separated either element, to which the Divinity is eternally united. By reuniting the soul and body, He shows to us all what will happen for us in the Resurrection from the Dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:53).

✣ Cassiodorus cites this verse in order to contradict the error of the Apollinarians (who say that the Christ did not have a rational soul). Our Saviour gives thanks that He was not abandoned in

Hadēs, but rather raised. Thus, He was able to take those held captive there into the Kingdom of Heaven.

✣ Saint Nikolaj Velimirović reminds us that this verse is truly an inspired prophetic statement which cannot refer to the Prophet David himself (since his body did "*see corruption*") , but to his only descendent according to the flesh fitting these words, Jesus the Christ, and particularly what was human in Him. He explains that these words refer to the Risen Christ, as shown by the Apostle Peter in verses 27 and 31 of his homily in Acts 2:25-39. These words could not be understood properly before the Resurrection ; but when the seal fell from the Tomb of Christ, then the light of the Resurrection shone on many obscure prophecies. When He descended into Hadēs, and rose from the dead, He led the souls of our righteous ancestors and prophets into the light of Heaven, and their words into the Light of true understanding. In the Resurrection of Christ, the words of prophecy also rise. All that is good, righteous and true before and after the Resurrection rises with Christ.

✣ See the note on Psalm 29:4 ; see Psalms 29:2, 3 ; 85:13 ; Hosea 13:14 ; Luke 24:34-35 ; John 2:22 ; 20:9 ; 1 Corinthians 15:4.

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

✠ About "*Hadēs*" : see the note about "*Hadēs*" on Psalm 6:6.

✠ About "*holy one*" " see the note about "*holy one*" on Psalm 4:4.

✠ About "*corruption*" : Saint John of Damascus notes that there are two meanings to the word φθορά, *phthora*. He says that the first meaning refers to human suffering, sickness and death. In this sense, we may say that the Lord's Body was destructible, because He freely endured torture and death. This meaning is usually referred to as "destruction". He says then that the second meaning refers to decay, the complete dissolution of the body and its reduction to the elements from which it was constituted. This meaning is usually referred to as "*corruption*" : διαφθορά, *diaphthora*. Our Lord's Body did not experience corruption. His Body is incorruptible, as the Prophet David prepares us to understand, and which Christians have experienced.

✣ "*Corruption*" is a synonym for Hadēs. This is so also for "the pit", and sometimes also "abyss" in other psalms. "*Corruption*" is the fruit of selfishness and self-centredness – of being apart from God.

✣ See Psalms 29:10 ; 54:24 ; 106:20 ; 139:12 ; see also the note about "*corrupted*" on Psalm 13:1 .

✠ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) points out that the text of verses 9 and 10 is very close to the concept of resurrection, and that these prophetic words inevitably lead to it. The dimension of the prophecy is highlighted by the Apostle Peter in his first missionary sermon (Acts 2: 14-36) and it is resumed by the Apostle Paul (Acts 13: 35).

✠ Acts 2:27.

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11 You have made known to me the ways of life./ With Your Face, You will fill me with gladness ;/ there are delights at Your right-hand unto the end.

V 11 About this verse : Cassiodorus addresses another theme in this psalm, in which the Lord Incarnate thanks the Father who has by His Omnipotence overcome the evil of this world. Cassiodorus reminds us that the prophetic words of this psalm prefigure Christ's descent into Hadēs, His Resurrection, His Ascension, and His session at the Right-Hand of the Father. As He said, He has prepared the way for us to share in His eternal glory. This is our hope.

- ✣ Father P Reardon reminds us that with the Prophet David, who was looking forward to the Christ to come, Christians who know the Risen Christ also identify themselves in hope with Him in saying this psalm, because we will rise with Him.
- ✣ This verse describes life in the Presence of God : the Resurrection life. We have the promise of being raised in resurrection in a manner similar to the Resurrection of Christ. It follows that with Christ, as members of His Body, we will live with Him eternally.
- ✣ See Romans 8:11 ; 1 Corinthians 6:14 ; 2 Corinthians 4:14.

✠ About *"ways of life"* : see Proverbs 5:6.

✠ About "*Face*" : see the note about "*Face*" on Psalm 4:7.

✠ About "*ways*" : see the note about "*the way*" on Psalm 1:6.

✠ About "*fill me with gladness*" : Cassiodorus explains that he understands this in terms of adding to a vessel which is already filled to the brim. It is the person who, full of gladness, is now more than filled with gladness. This gladness, this joy is eternal joy and gladness which comes with the Presence of the Lord. Likewise, just as the fulfilling joy flows from Him to us, it also flows from us to Him.

- ✣ Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus comments that Our Lord will be in eternal, ceaseless joy, since He has become immune to suffering, change, and death. This is the result of the Incarnation, in which Christ experienced what we experience (suffering, change, death) in order to free us from the vain power of sin and the tyranny of the devil, to undo the power of death and to provide all people with the basis of a new life. He assumed all this on our behalf so that we may come to incorruption and immortality in Him.

✠ About "*gladness*" : see the note on Psalm 4:8.

✠ About "*delights at Your right-hand*" : Cassiodorus explains the difference between this phrase and that in verse 8. He tells us that whereas during Christ's suffering, it was appropriate to describe the Father as being at Christ's right-hand (as a help, protection and a support), now that the Victory is accomplished, and He is glorified, it is appropriate to state clearly that Christ is Himself at the right-hand of the Father.

✠ About "*delights*" : see the note about "*delight*" on Psalm 1:2.

✠ About "*Your right-hand*" : see Psalm 109:1, 5. See the note about "*my right-hand*" on verse 8.

✠ About "*unto the end*" : Cassiodorus reminds us that this phrase implies perfection and eternity. Christ's glory lives in its perfection and cannot be limited by anything.

- ✣ See the note about "*unto the end*" on Psalm 9:19.

✠ Acts 2:28.

O Lord, preserve those who hope on You,

and accomplish Your will in us ;
that, illumined by the joy of Your Resurrection, we may, with all the saints,
be delighted in being at Your right-hand. — Roman
