PSALM 14

✠ This psalm is written in the form of a Wisdom Psalm.

✣ See the note about "wisdom psalm" in the introduction to Psalm 1.

✠ It is suggested that this psalm may have been part of a service for admission to the temple.

✠ This psalm is used (verse 1) at the Magnification in Matins on the Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ.

✠ *The Orthodox Study Bible* indicates that, as Psalm 15, this psalm demonstrates the transfigured life that the faithful are to live.

✠ Saint Athanasius advises us that if we wish to learn what sort of person is a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, then we ought to sing Psalm 14.

"*Ascension of the holy mountain of the Lord*"

"*Life on the mountain tops*"

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1 A psalm by David.

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

[Κύριε, τίς παροικήσει Domine quis habitabit ?]

O LORD, who shall sojourn in Your tent ?/ or who shall pitch his tent on Your holy mountain ?

✠ About this verse : Cassiodorus comments that this psalm is not as profound as many of the other psalms. However, he points out that the following verses answer this first question by the Prophet David. The answer is that the hall of blessedness is reached through the subsequent series of virtues. Cassiodorus exhorts us all, who cannot ourselves fulfil all the virtuous answers, to pray continually that we may be enabled by the Lord to fulfil what is required.

✣ Father P Reardon reflects that the questions of this verse and its subsequent responses reveal to us that human beings are all born with an innate and haunting eschatological sense that we have a purpose : that with struggle we are to be scaling heights towards a higher and fuller end than where we have begun. He reminds us that it is from stone tablets quarried at the top of the mountain (see Mount Sinai, 2 Moses 24:9-18 ; 31:18) that we are given the directions for fulfilling this purpose. These are amplified by our Saviour's words on the Mount of the Beatitudes (see Matthew 5:3-11) and the mount in Galilee (see Matthew 28:16-20).

✣ See the note on Psalm 23:3 with regard to the poetic identification between the holiness of Mount

Sinai and the holiness of the Tent of Meeting.

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

✠ About "*sojourn*" : this word in Hebrew usually refers to a newcomer, or one without established rights. This would not be the "resident foreigner". The early patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) are referred to as sojourners in Canaan as they moved from place to place. Their descendants were called sojourners throughout the four centuries in which they dwelt in Egypt (see 5 Moses 26:5 ; Psalm 104:23).

✣ See the note about "*sojourn*" on Psalm 5:5. See also the note about "*sojournings*" on Psalm 54:16.

✠ About "*tent*" : this word translates the Greek word σκήνωμα, *skēnoma*.

✣ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) uses "habitation", which is another word for "tent". It refers to the old "tent of testimony"" that was Israel's ambulatory Temple. He shows us that "*Your holy mountain*" refers to Sion, the height of which is the Temple of Jerusalem. The first question is related to dwelling temporarily ; the second question is associated with dwelling permanently. Following Saint Jerome, he says that in the Christian perspective, in the first category are those who are in the Church militant on earth, where constancy is relative and there may be falling ; in the second category are those who come into the Church triumphant in Heaven, where everything becomes permanent and unchanging.

✣ According to the NAB, the Temple in Jerusalem is sometimes referred to as "*tent*" in a poetic manner, even after it had been constructed of stone. See Psalm 26:5 ; Isaiah 33:20. This use of "*tent*" hearkens back to the tent (tabernacle) in the wilderness (see 2 Moses 35-40 ; 3 Moses) after the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and also to the "*tent*" (tabernacle) in which King David still worshipped the Lord. See 2 Kingdoms 6:17 ; 7:2.

✣ The noun "*tent*" might similarly be translated as "tabernacle", which may imply in nomadic societies a longer sojourn in one place ; or it may imply metaphorically the Tabernacle (tent) of the Lord, that preceded the Temple (but it is not always so). Therefore, we use "*tent*" for σκηνή, *skēnē*, and for σκήνωμα, *skēnōma*, and related words throughout the text.

✣ See Psalms 17:12 ; 18:6 ; 25:8 ; 26:5, 6 ; 28:1 ; 30:21 ; 41:5 ; 42:3 ; 45:5 ; 48:12 ; 51:7 ; 59:8 ; 60:5 ; 68:26 ; 73:7 ; 77:28, 51, 55, 60, 67 ; 82:7 ; 83:2, 11 ; 86:2 ; 90:10 ; 105:25 ; 107:8 ; 117:15 ; 119:5 ; 131:3, 5, 7 ; Habakkuk 3:7 (Matins Canticle 4).

✠ About "*pitch his tent on Your holy mountain*" : Saint Augustine explains that for him this phrase implies taking rest on the holy mountain. He relates the tent to our eternal habitation, and the mountain to the towering greatness of Christ's love in eternal life. From another perspective, he refers to our temporal bodies as tents (see 2 Corinthians 5:4 ; 2 Peter 1:13-14). In that context, he says that the reference is to the military tents of soldiers who do battle. We engage in spiritual struggles with the bodiless attackers while we live in our fleshly tents.

✣ Father P Reardon notes that this second question is a parallel question to "how can I be saved ?" See Luke 10:25 ; 18:18 ; John 6:28 ; Acts 2:37 ; 16:30 ; 22:10.

✣ Living on the mountain expresses a sense of being in God's presence. This may be understood in the light of Resurrection.

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

✠ About "*holy mountain*" : see the note about "*Sion ... holy mountain*" on Psalm 2:6.

2 It is the one walking blamelessly, and working righteousness,/ speaking truth in his heart ;

V 2 About "*walking blamelessly*" : Saint Benedict of Nursia exhorts the monks to hear the Lord's answer to the question in verse one. This answer leads to the Heavenly Tabernacle. We must therefore be able to drive the temper far from our heart ; to defeat the malice of the tempter and to dash the evil thoughts against the Rock, Christ (see Psalm 136:9) ; to fear the Lord without any pride in personal virtue ; humbly to acknowledge that any good proceeds not from the self but from the Lord ; to give God His due ; with the Prophet David to bless the work of God in ourselves (see Psalm 113:9).

- ✣ Cassiodorus calls our attention to the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ alone entered blamelessly into the Jerusalem Temple, whereas everyone else entered in order to be purified. He was the only One to be able without blemish (see 2 Moses 12:5 ; 1 Peter 1:19) to stand before the Face of the Father. The Law did not give anything to Him ; however, as the perfect Legislator, He fulfilled the Law. See Matthew 5:17-20.
- ✣ See Isaiah 33:15.

✠ About "*walking*" : this can imply deliberate movement, deliberate steps.

- ✣ See the note about "*walked*" on Psalm 1:1.

✠ About "*blamelessly*" : see the note about "*blameless*" on Psalm 17:24.

✠ About "*working righteousness*" : Saint Augustine refers us to Romans 3:21-31 ; 5:1. He then explains to us that righteousness comes before working righteousness. When a person has been justified (made righteous), then the works of righteousness naturally follow.

✠ About "*righteousness*" : Saint Jerome's comments (and those of others) about "*righteousness*" are usually translated using the word "justice". Although this is correct for Latin, it does not carry the larger and deeper meanings which "righteousness" conveys in English. Keeping this in mind, we see Saint Jerome explain this phrase by saying that righteousness is the mother and source of all virtues. Righteousness is the one virtue which benefits the other person (through the exercise of all the other virtues), but it does not gratify the self. Righteousness imitates God.

- ✣ See the note about "*righteousness*" on Psalm 4:2.

✠ About "*speaking truth in his heart*" : Saint Augustine cautions us that some people can verbalise the truth, but they do not have the truth in their heart. He reminds us that unless the origin of the spoken truth is from truth resident in the heart, the words are empty. It can happen that a person, knowing that the way is dangerous, might give factual directions to another, but not tell the whole truth because of malice in his heart. If the way should prove to have been safe despite the danger, it is not to his credit. Saint Augustine reminds us that it is beyond the ability of a beginner yet to have truth both in the heart and in the mouth. However, for those who have, because of the maturity of love, grown into complete unity and harmony between themselves and the Lord, such truth becomes possible, and for the "Yes" indeed to be "Yes" and the "No" indeed to be "No". See Matthew 5:37.

- ✣ See the note about "*double heart*" on Psalm 11:3.

✣ See Ephesians 4:15, 25.

✠ About "*truth*" : see the note about "*truth*" on Psalm 5:10.

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

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3 the one who has not deceived with his tongue,/ nor done ill to his neighbour,/ nor taken up a reproach against his kinsfolk.

V 3 About "*deceived with his tongue*" : Saint Augustine explains that deceit is practiced with the tongue when our mouths express one thing, but quite another is hidden in the heart.

✣ Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus comments that a person must keep free of falsehood, not only with the tongue, but also with the mind. One must be completely free of double deceit so that no harm can come from him to his neighbour. The word order is logical : heart, then tongue, then deed. The thought always comes first, followed by the words, followed by the actions. One must be without guile.

✣ Cassiodorus expands on his words regarding the previous verse as he applies the words of this verse to our Saviour. Our Lord harmed no-one. That there is no guile in Him is demonstrated in His words : "*all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you*" (John 15:15). Truth is passed on to us without any change whatsoever. Such communication can only be good and have good effect.

✣ See the note about "*with their ... deceived*" on Psalm 5:10 ; see also Psalm 38:2 ; Proverbs 21:22 ; Wisdom of Sirach 5:14.

✠ About "*deceived*" : see the note about "*deceived*" on Psalm 5:10.

✠ About "*nor done ... neighbour*" : Saint Ambrose stresses the importance of this phrase. He states emphatically that, amongst Christians in particular and humans in general, there should be no fraud, deceit nor falsehood. In our mutual relationships about all matters, it is more than greatly important that we behave in a truthful, honest, open manner.

✠ About "*neighbour*" : Saint Augustine mentions that it is clearly well-known that by this word, we are to understand "everyone".

✣ See verse 4. See the note about "*neighbour*" on Psalm 11:3.

✠ About "*reproach*" : this word translates the Greek word ὀνειδισμός, *oneidismos*, which means "a reproach, disgrace, insult, imposed by someone".

✣ See Psalms 68:8, 10, 11, 20, 21 ; 73:22 ; 78:12 ; 88:51 ; 118:39. See also the note about "*object of reproach*" on Psalm 21:7 (a different but related Greek word).

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4 The one doing evil is reckoned as nothing before his face,/ but he glorifies those fearing the LORD :/ the one swearing an oath to his neighbour and not setting it at nought.

V 4 About "*evil is ... his face*" : Saint Jerome comments that whoever the reprobate may be, and of whatever state in life (whether an emperor, a governor, a priest), this person is considered to be as nothing in the perception of a holy person. In the case of this virtuous person, because of his righteousness, the neighbour has not been able to find any occasion to disparage him nor to murmur against him. Saint Jerome adds that such righteousness is beyond human ability alone.

✣ See the note about "*accept ... sinners*" on Psalm 81:2.

✠ About "*glorifies*" : see 2 Moses 15: Inscription 1, 2, 6, 11 (Matins Canticle 1) ; Psalms 21:24 ; 36:20 ; 49:15, 23 ; 85:9, 12 ; 88:8 ; 90:15 ; Daniel 3:26, 51 (Matins Canticle 7).

✠ About "*fearing the Lord*" : see Psalms 21:24, 26 ; 24:12, 14 ; 30:20 ; 32:18 ; 33:8, 10 ; 59:6 ; 65:16 ; 84:10 ; 85:11 ; 101:16 ; 102:11, 13, 17 ; 110:5 ; 111:1 ; 113:19, 21 ; 117:4 ; 118:38, 63, 74, 79 ; 127:1, 4 ; 134:20 ; 144:19 ; 146:11 ; Proverbs 3:7 ; Luke 1:50 (Matins Canticle 9, Part 1). See the note about "*fear*" (of the Lord) on Psalms 2:11 ; 111:1.

✠ About "*swearing an oath*" : Cassiodorus reminds us that "*swearing an oath*" means to make a promise and at the same time to call God to witness the promise. Cassiodorus also reminds us that "to swear" means to speak justly, righteously. A person speaks righteously, justly, when the promise is fulfilled. However, when it is God who makes the promise, the swearing includes both the promise and the fulfilment.

✣ See Psalms 88:4 ; 131:2. See the note about "*oath*" on Psalm 104:9.

✠ About "*neighbour*" : see verse 3.

✠ About "*setting at nought*" : see Psalms 32:10 ; 88:35 ; 131:11.

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5 He has not given his money at interest,/ nor taken bribes against the innocent./ The one doing these things shall not be shaken unto the age.

V 5 About "*interest*" (usury) : the prohibition of "*interest*" has reference especially to charitable loans, made for the relief of distress, rather than to the purely business, or commercial loan. That Saint John Chrysostom can say that people generally become rich on the backs of the poor, is an indication that avoiding excessive interest charges in giving a loan, or avoiding them altogether, is preferable. We have received freely from God, and we should likewise be free in giving.

✣ Saint Basil the Great gives advice to the rich and to the poor on the subject of loans. He encouraged the poor to endure poverty rather than to bear the endless burdens that come with the repayment of a loan. He encouraged the rich (or those who have money) to obey the Lord (see Luke 6:35) and to lend without expecting to be repaid. Such a loan is gift because it is given without expecting repayment ; but it is still a loan because, as in Proverbs 19:17, "*The one who has mercy on the poor lends to God*", it is the Lord who repays the loan with interest in accordance with the gift. On the other hand, if a lender exacts repayment with interest from the poor, the interest is full of extreme inhumanity. Profit is taken from misfortune, money from tears. The naked are strangled, and the starving are beaten. There is no mercy nor thought of any compassion for the sufferer. The profits are even called humane. However, such an attitude is reproved by the Prophet Isaiah (in Isaiah 5:20). Our Saviour addresses this warped attitude also in Matthew 12:24-

37. Further, Saint Basil says that although it is never certain that one may be able to pass on money to one's descendants, it is certain that the evil attitude of greed and condemnation of the poor will be inherited by the progeny because of the evil example.

✣ Saint Ambrose, using simple logic, strongly emphasises the cruelty of lending to the poor and exacting interest. He asks how it can be expected that a person who has no means could ever be expected to repay double the amount borrowed.

✣ Cassiodorus points out that in the Scriptures, money is treated in two senses. There is metal money, which we are forbidden to lend at interest (because of greed), and there is the holy preaching and teaching for which spiritual interest is actively sought in the hearers.

✣ See 2 Moses 22:24 ; 3 Moses 25:36-37 ; 5 Moses 23:20-21 ; Ezekiel 18:8.

✠ About "*bribes*" : see 2 Moses 23:8 ; 5 Moses 27:25 ; 1 Kingdoms 8:3 ; Psalm 25:10.

✠ About "*the innocent*" : see Psalms 25:6 ; 72:13. See the note about "*innocent one*" on Psalm 9:29.

✠ About "*not be shaken*" : Saint Augustine, considering the behaviours in the second part of verse 4 and in verse 5 to be those of beinners, perceives that such beginners will thus be enabled to proceed to greater goodness, and therefore, in the Lord, become unshakeable in goodness, love, and truth.

✣ See the note about "*shaken*" on Psalm 12:5. See also the note about "*not be distressed*" on Psalm 12:5.

O Most Good God, grant that without spot, we may enter Your Church ;
and turn us away from deceiving or usuring our neighbour ;
that, while we take care to follow these, Your precepts,
we may not forever be shaken by the supplications of the Adversary. — Roman

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