PSALM 16

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

✣ See the note about "lament" in the introduction to Psalm 3.

✣ The NAB describes this psalm as being a lament of King David who has been unjustly attacked. Confident of being found guiltless, he cries out for God's righteous judgement, and he requests Divine help in the face of enemies.

✠ This psalm is read fully at the Third Hour.

✠ Saint Athanasius recommends that we sing this psalm when it is necessary to pray about enemies and those who hem us in. He also recommends for this Psalms 85, 87 and 139.

✠ Saint Augustine continues the oft-repeated exhortation regarding other psalms that it is important to listen for the voice of the Lord as we read this psalm.

✣ *The Orthodox Study Bible* indicates that this psalm was prayed by our Lord Jesus Christ, to show the Church how to pray righteously.

"*Confident supplication during persecution*"

"*Discipline leads to vision*"

"*The vision of God brings likeness*"

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1 A prayer of David.

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

✠ Saint Gregory of Nyssa reminds us that a prayer is a supplication to God for good things. This psalm is such a prayer by King David.

✣ Cassiodorus explains that whereas other psalms contain brief prayers for help in the midst of various topics, this psalm is one supplication as a whole. Therefore the Inscription describes the contents clearly, since its purpose is wholly directed towards zeal for prayer.

[Εἰσάκουσον, Κύριε Exaudi, Domine]

Hear, O LORD, my righteousness ;/ give heed to my supplication ;/ give ear to my prayer which is not on deceitful lips.

✠ About "*Hear, O Lord*" : Bishop Eusebius of Cæsarea cautions us that the Lord does not hear the words of a liar. Rather, He receives words offered by a cleansed tongue which is accustomed to ruminating on the

Sacred Scriptures. Only the righteous person, through such rumination, cleanses the tongue, voice, and lips from using common or vulgar words, while being mindful of the words of Matthew 12:36.

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

✠ About "*my righteousness*" : see the notes about "*my righteousness*" on Psalms 4:2.

✠ About "*give ear*" : see the note about "*give ear*" on Psalm 5:2.

✠ About "*deceitful lips*" : see the note about "*deceitful lips*" on Psalm 11:3.

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

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2 May my judgement come forth from Your Face ;/ let my eyes see uprightness.

V 2 About "*judgement*" : Saint Augustine summarises these words in personalising the petition. He asks that he be able to judge truthfully since knowing the Lord brings light to the heart. He asks that the judgement he himself gives may be only what he has received from the Lord. He also reminds us that "*eyes*" are the eyes of the heart.

✣ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) explains that the meaning of this verse is : "From You my judgement comes to me".

✣ About "*judgement*" : see the note about "*judgements*" on Psalm 9:17.

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

✠ About "*my eyes*" : Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) notes that in the Hebrew, it is "Your eyes" instead of "*my eyes*".

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

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3 You have proved my heart ;/ You have visited me by night ;/ You have tested me by fire,/ and unrighteousness was not found in me.

V 3 About this verse : Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus comments from the perspective of King David. He shows us that the proving of the king's heart is demonstrated in his compassionate, patient, and more-than-fair treatment of his persecutor, King Saul. He, himself, was visited by Divine Compassion when he spared this king "*by night*" (and many other times). See I Kingdoms 24 ; 26:7-12. He also refers to his many disasters as "*night*", but nights in which he was tested by fire and he was proved to be pure.

✣ Father P Reardon explains from the perspective of Christ that these words express the nature of Christ's supplication to the Father during His Passion, when He was suffering from various tortures. Only He, amongst all human beings of all times, could pray in such complete righteousness, or could express these words in literal truth.

✠ About "*You have proved my heart*" : see Psalm 138:23 ; Jeremiah 11:19 ; 12:3 ; 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

✣ See also the note about "*examining the heart and the reins*" on Psalm 7:10.

✠ About "*proved*" : this verb comes to English from the Latin verb "*probo*", which means "to test", "to try", "to examine", "to approve", "to show to be good or fit", "to prove". As a modern transitive verb, it is used to mean "to put to the test", "to make trial of".

✣ See Psalms 25:2 ; 65:10 ; 67:31 ; 80:8 ; 94:9 ; 138:1, 23 .

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

✠ About "*visited*" : see the note about "*visit*" on Psalm 8:5.

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

✠ About "*tested ... by fire*" : Saint Augustine explains that describing the distress of his trial should not be limited to "*night*". Rather, it should include "*fire*", because it cauterises.

✣ Bishop Eusebius of Cæsarea addresses this phrase and the following phrase from a Christological perspective. He reminds us that there is actually no-one except Christ who, when put to the test can be seen to be truly and wholly pure. Citing the Prophet Isaiah (53:9), he says that "*he committed no lawlessness, nor was deceit found in his mouth*". See Hebrews 4:15.

✣ *The Orthodox Study Bible* note on James 1:13 cautions us that "God tries us, but He never tempts us".

✣ See the note about "*tested by fire*" on Psalm 11:7.

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

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4 That my mouth might not speak of the works of Men,/ because of the words of Your lips, I have kept hard ways.

V 4 About "*my mouth ... Men*" : Saint Augustine summarises the words of the Prophet David who asks the Lord that nothing come out of his mouth except what gives God glory (rather than speak about the rebellious deeds of humans).

✠ About "*works*" : see the note about "*works*" on Psalm 9:17.

✠ About "*words*" : see the note about "*words*" on Psalm 7:1.

✠ About "*kept hard ways*" : Saint Augustine recalls first the Dominical words : "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*" (Matthew 16:24). He observes that these words may suggest that obeying the Lord's commands may seem to be a harsh way. However, nothing can be hard or harsh which is commanded by One who helps us do what He commands. Saint Augustine shows us the paradox that although we follow "*hard ways*", the Saviour has assured us, "*My yoke is easy and My burden is light*" (Matthew 11:30). He supports us with His love, which makes easy what seemed to be hard.

✣ Cassiodorus reminds us that the path of avoiding sin is difficult, and making the ascent is always likewise difficult. However, any movement towards vices is on a "slippery slope" and an easy, downward path. Before the eyes of everyone in the world, our Lord Jesus Christ has demonstrated the ways of complete meekness and self-discipline. Because of the Lord's commands ("*words of*

Your lips"), our Saviour has walked with spotless feet on the hard ways.

✣ Evagrius comments that even though the way may be full of pain and may seem to be joyless, it will later bear the fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained in this way.

✣ Father P Reardon explains that the "*words*" refer to the many prophecies recorded about the "*hard ways*" (from Moses until the later prophets) regarding the Messiah (the Christ). Our Saviour, who grew up daily hearing and reading the Scriptures, recognised Himself in all who suffered before Him for the sake of love for God. He said to His disciples : "'*Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?*'" (Luke 24:26).

✣ See Psalm 59:5 ; Philippians 2:8 ; 2 Timothy 2:3, 12 ; Hebrews 5:8.

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5 Strengthen my foot-steps in Your paths,/ lest my foot-steps slip.

V 5 About this verse : Saint Augustine interprets the first part as a prayer that the love of the Church may become perfect through the narrow path towards God's Rest. Further, he asks that, after having completed the arduous journey and made his steps perfect within God's narrow path, he (and we likewise) may abide steadfastly in eternity. Alternatively, from a Christological perspective, he also interprets that the words mean the petition of Christ that the signs of His journey (which have been impressed like foot-prints on the sacraments and the apostolic writings) not be removed, so that those who will follow Him may see and discern them.

✣ Saint John Cassian cautions us that in every moment of our life, it is important that we unite ourselves with the prayer of King David in this verse. He refers us to Psalm 39:3 ("*He set my feet upon a rock, and He directed my foot-steps*"). When we do this, the invisible Guide of the human spirit will lead our free will back to the love of virtue, of goodness. Because of our general ignorance of the good, and our obsession with passion, our spirit tends to fall headlong into sin unless it receives proper guidance.

✣ Saint Symeon the New Theologian is concerned that we never fall into beguilement and stray away from the path that leads to Heaven. He prays that we always walk in the path of Him who walks before us, for He, Himself, is the Way.

✣ Saint Nicolaj (Velimirović) reminds us that Jesus Christ Himself is the Way to Heaven, and that all the prophets who came before Him pointed out this Way. As it were, these prophets flowed as rivers into a single river. They showed us this way in which we walk with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. He is the only Way.

✠ About "*strengthen*" : see the note about "*become strong*" on Psalm 9:20. See the notes about "*strength*" on Psalm 17:2.

✠ About "*foot-steps*" : see the note about "*foot-steps*" on Psalm 17:37 ; see Psalms 36:23, 31 ; 39:3 ; 72:2 ; 84:14 ; 118:133 ; 139:5 ; Proverbs 4:28.

✠ About "*paths*" : see the note about "*paths*" on Psalm 8:9.

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6 I cried out, for You have listened to me, O God ;/ incline Your ear to me, and hear my utterances.

V 6 About "*cried out ... listened*" : see the note about "*cried out*" and "*listened*" on Psalm 3:5.

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

✠ About "*incline Your ear*" : see Psalms 30:3 ; 48:5 ; 70:2 ; 85:1 ; 87:3 ; 101:3 ; 114:2 ; Daniel 9:19. See also the note about "*incline ... ear*" on Psalm 44:11.

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7 Show the wonders of Your mercies,/ O You, saving those hoping on You/ from those standing against Your right hand.

V 7 About "*Show the wonders of Your mercies*" : Saint Augustine interprets that King David prays that the Lord's mercies be perceivable by us, so that we may adequately love them, be grateful for them, and not under-appreciate them.

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

✠ About "*saving those hoping on You*" : Saint Ambrose encourages us Christians to pray for peace and quiet, and not to abandon steadfast faith and truth, even at the peril of death [as do confessors and martyrs]. Our Lord is our leader, who saves us who hope on Him.

✠ About "*saving*" : see the note about "*save*" on Psalm 3:8.

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

✠ About "*Your right hand*" : see 2 Moses 15:6, 12 (Matins Canticle 1) ; 5 Moses 32:40 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Psalms 17:36 ; 19:7 ; 20:9 ; 43:4 ; 47:11 ; 59:7 ; 62:9 ; 73:11 ; 76:11 ; 77:54 : 79:15, 18 ; 88:14 ; 89:12 ; 97:1 ; 107:7 ; 117:15, 16 ; 137:7 ; 138:10 ; Isaiah 48:13. See also the note about "*right hand*" on Psalm 25:10.

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8 Watch over me, as the apple of the eye ;/ in the shelter of Your wings will You shelter me,

V 8 About "*this verse*" : Saint Leo the Great reminds us that wise persons are constantly aware that our lives are short and that death is always to be expected at any time. Therefore, we are always in need of Divine help. Being aware that we do have such a Protector without whom we cannot be brave, we ask that He keep vigil over us.

✣ Father P Reardon explains that these words express the complete trust and confidence which our Saviour had for the Father during the time of His Passion. Being the God-Man, as a human being, he was suffering greatly from the dread of what was to come, yet with full confidence in the Father. He assumed all that we are, including fear, so that we might partake in Who He Is.

✣ See the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 26:39, 42 ; Mark 14:34-36 ; Luke 22:42 ; John 12:27. See also Psalm 54:5-6.

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

✠ About "*the apple of the eye*" : this is a metaphor for the pupil of the eye. Thus, it means a cherished person or thing, or special favour and affection. Therefore, we are asking that the Lord care for us and cherish us in the manner which He already does. The RSV points out that the pupil of the eye is the most precious part thereof.

✣ Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus shows us that the Prophet David's prayer is that he (and we with him) be given such protection as is given to the "*apple of the eye*". He expands on his understanding of protection, pointing out that we are so designed that eyelids serve as a rampart ; eyelashes serve as palisade ; eyebrows serve as burms which divert sweat away towards the temples, and which prevent harm from the salty water.

✣ See 5 Moses 32:10 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Proverbs 7:3 ; Wisdom of Sirach 17:17 ; Zechariah 2:12.

✠ About "*the shelter of Your wings*" : Saint John Chrysostom comments that these "*wings*" are God's help, security, shelter, defence, and unconquerable assistance for us.

✣ Cassidorus reminds us that "*wings*" are a metaphor for God's mercy and love, by which the Lord protects us. He helps us to recall that the image comes from the protective behaviour of birds towards their broods.

✣ The image of being sheltered under the wings of the Lord may be related to the image of a hen sheltering her chicks. It is said that in the case of a fire, a hen will shelter her chicks under her wings and body, protecting them. She may die from the fire, but the chicks are likely to survive.

✣ See Psalms 35:8 ; 60:5 ; 62:8 ; Matthew 23:37.

✠ About "*shelter*" (noun) : see 2 Moses 15:2 (Matins Canticle 1) ; 5 Moses 32:38 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Psalms 70:6 ; 90:1 ; 104:39 ; 120:5.

✠ About "*wings*": see 2 Moses 19:4 ; 5 Moses 32:11 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Ruth 2:12 ; Psalms 56:2 ; 90:4.

✠ About "*shelter*" (verb) : see 5 Moses 32:11 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Psalms 30:21 ; 60:5 ; 63:3 ; 90:14.

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9 away from the face of the impious, who are making me miserable./ My enemies encompassed my soul.

V 9 About "*the impious*" : see also the note about "*the impious*" on Psalm 1:1. See the note about "*impious one*" on verse 13.

✠ About "*making me miserable*" : see Psalm 37:7. See also Psalm 136:8 (adjective).

✠ About "*encompassed*" : see Psalms 17:5, 6 ; 21:13, 17 ; 31:7 ; 39:13 ; 87:18 ; 88:8 ; 114:3 ; Jonah 2:4 (Matins Canticle 6). See also the note about the related word "*encircled*" in verse 11. See also the note about the related word "*surround*" on Psalm 7:8.

✠ About "*soul*" : see verse 13 ; see the note about "*soul*" on Psalm 3:3.

10 They shut up their fat ;/ their mouth spoke with pride.

V 10 About this verse : Saint Augustine treats these words from a Christological perspective. After having been surrounded by His enemies, who choked on their excesses and were buried under their own gross joy after they had sated their greed with evil-doing, they mouthed pride and said, "Hail, King of the Jews". See Matthew 27:29.

✠ About "*pride*" : see Psalms 30:19 ; 35:12 ; 58:13 ; 72:6 ; 73:3, 23.

✣ See also the note about "*great sin*" on Psalm 18:14. See Jude 1:16.

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11 Having thrown me out, they have now encircled me ;/ they set their eyes to be bent down to the earth.

V 11 About "*having ... me*" : Saint Athanasius advises us that when we are in difficulty as enemies encircle us and threaten our life, we ought to sing Psalm 16.

✣ Saint Augustine interprets this verse using a Christological perspective as meaning : "They cast Me out of their city, and they now surround Me on the Cross".

✠ About "*encircled*" : see Psalms 21:13 ; 139:10. See also the note about the related word "*encompassed*" on verse 9. See also the note about the related word "*surround*" on Psalm 7:8.

✠ About "*they set ... earth*" : Saint Athanasius explains that this suggests a determined inclination (or declining) towards earthly things. Saint Augustine supports this interpretation.

✠ About "*earth*" : see the note about "*earth*" on Psalm 11:7.

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12 They pounced upon me, just as a lion ready for its prey,/ and just as a lion's cub inhabiting hiding-places.

V 12 About "*lion*" : Saint Hesychius of Jerusalem cautions us that the demons surround our mind, and they try to devour it as would a wild beast.

✣ See the note about "*lion*" on Psalm 7:3.

✠ About "*lion's cub*" : Saint Augustine (using the Christological perspective) reminds us of the Dominical words to those who rejected Him, in John 8:44 : "*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do*". Saint Augustine then links the rejecters with the "*lion's cub*". He calls them "the devil's cub" because they devise the ambush with which to destroy a just Man.

✠ About "*hiding-places*" : see the note about "*hiding-places*" on Psalm 9:29.

✠ About "*hidden*" : see verse 14. See the note about "*hidden places*" on Psalm 9:29.

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13 Arise, O LORD ; outrun them and trip them up./ Rescue my soul from the impious one,/ and Your sword from the enemies of Your hand.

V 13 About "*arise*" : see the note on Psalm 3:8.

✠ About "*rescue my soul from the impious*" : Saint Augustine interprets these words as a petition of Christ that His soul be delivered by raising Him from the death inflicted on Him by the ungodly.

✠ About "*rescue*" : see the note about "*rescue*" on Psalm 6:5.

✠ About "*soul*" : see verse 9.

✠ About "*the impious one*" : see the note about "*the impious one*" on Psalm 9:6. See also verse 9 (plural).

✠ About "*enemies*" : see the note about "*enemies*" on Psalm 5:9.

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14 O LORD, from the few of the earth,/ divide them during their life./ With Your hidden things their belly was filled./ They were sated with swine-flesh,/ and they left the leftovers for their infants.

V 14 About "*from the few*" : Saint Athanasius says that the Prophet David is praying that the impious be separated "*from the few*".

✣ "*The few*" is another way of expressing "remnant", which indicates a small remaining number. This concept generally refers to the few amongst the Hebrews who remained faithful to the Lord during the incursions of idolatry, and to the few who remained alive after any oppressive slaughter of the faithful people by invading armies and the like. The usual implication is that such a remnant is especially protected and nurtured by the Lord. See, for instance, Isaiah 10:20-22 ; 11:11, 16 ; Jeremiah 23:3 ; Ezekiel 11:17.

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

✠ About "*Your hidden things* : Saint Athanasius explains that they have been enjoying all sorts of precious things, and this is why they have been recalcitrant, and prevaricating. He says that "*Your hidden things*" means "all those hidden punishments that You know of, and that I don't know. Of those, fill their bellies".

✣ See Psalms 45:1 ; 50:8.

✠ About "*sated*" : see verse 15 ; see Psalms 36:19 ; 80:17 ; 103:13, 16 ; 106:9 ; 131:15.

✠ About "*swine-flesh*" : the ecclesiastical Greek text has two variants : υἱός, *hyios* (son) and ὕειος, *hyeios* (swine). Depending upon the Greek text, either word is used, and the translations reflect the difference. However, if "son" were used, it could be perceived as a suggestion of cannibalism.

✣ Saint Augustine encountered these variants. He earlier used "pork". He therefore said that they were filled with uncleanness, and that they trampled the pearls of God's words (see Matthew 7:6).

Later, he preferred "son", and he commented that "*infants*" or "children" can refer to works, whether good, or evil.

✠ About "*leftovers for their infants*" : Saint Hesychius of Jerusalem explains that this statement is not a criticism of the children's food itself. Rather, it is stating that the unwise leave evils for their infants as their heritage.

✣ Saint Augustine, recalling our Saviour's Passion, equates these words with the words shouted at the time of the condemnation : "'*His blood be on us and on our children*'" (Matthew 27:25). After having trampled God's words, they foist the consequences of their deeds upon their progeny.

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15 But as for me, in righteousness I shall appear before Your Face ;/ I shall be sated when Your glory appears to me.

V 15 About this verse : it provides a basis prophetically for a future explanation of the Apostle Paul : "for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known". See 1 Corinthians 13:12.

✠ About "*righteousness*" : see the note about "*righteousness*" on Psalm 4:2.

✠ About "*appear before Your face*" : see Psalm 41:3 ; for related expressions, see 1 John 3:2 ; Apocalypse 22:4.

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

✠ About "*be sated*" : Saint Augustine comments that treasures of wisdom and knowledge and sweetness satisfy, and we shall be completely satisfied when the Lord's salvation and His glory appear in fulness. See Psalm 79:4 ; Colossians 3:4. He further comments that the future glory is beyond our comprehension in every way (see 1 Corinthians 2:9). Because the Lord God is greater than the whole universe, it is impossible for our limited human minds and hearts to comprehend anything but a mere hint of His love, beauty, greatness, delightfulness, splendour, righteousness, strength, and paternal care. We whom He has made cannot equate any of the creatures with their Creator.

✣ Saint Bede of Jarrow explains that although we at present very much need the light of the Sacred Scriptures, and the refreshment of the heavenly Mysteries, in the Kingdom we shall be completely satisfied, being in the midst of the Lord's glory.

✣ Saint John of Kronstadt reflects on his own life, and at the same times he echoes the words of Ecclesiastes (particularly 1:12 and 12:12). Because of his insatiable intellect, has constantly studied and searched for information, wisdom and understanding. Nevertheless, he comprehends that finally he will be satisfied only when he appears before the Lord's Face and beholds His glory.

✣ Father P Reardon shows us that the final line of this psalm is the key to the interpretation of the whole psalm.

✣ Being seen before God's Face, and being more than completely satisfied beholding God's glory, are indications of life in God's Presence, that is, life in the Resurrection.

✠ About "*be sated*" : see verse 14.

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

O Lord, turn the eyes of our hearts
to the discerning of the Truth of Your Judgement ;
that, while being here tested by spiritual fire,
we may there be sated forever in Your presence
with the fruit of righteousness. — Roman