

Hope in the Psalms: A Limited Inquiry

聖詠中的希望

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Abstract: This study of hope in the Psalter begins with a short linguistic-semantic analysis of the “hope” vocabulary in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin traditions of Sacred Scripture. This short analysis reveals how the theme of hope pervades the whole of the Psalter. Given such a realization, this study limits itself to the explicit (literal and metaphorical) occurrences of the Hebrew-Greek-Latin “hope” vocabulary in the Psalms. This is done in seven steps, which highlight both the meaningful content of “hope” and the forms of expression of “hope”: 1) Jesus Himself prayed the great Psalms of hope; 2) God Himself is the first object (and even subject) of hope, so that man’s desire for God responds to God’s desire for man; 3) Hoping for God, what does man also hope for? 4) Attention! There are two kinds of hope: true hope and false hope; 5) God unfailingly fulfills the hope of the poor and of the suffering; 6) Hope expressed in beautiful images; 7) Hope is enshrined in the very literary structure of several Psalms. The final result of the study is to confirm the initial impression of

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the all-pervasiveness of the theme of “hope” in the Psalms, where every invocation of God is an expression of hope; every verb in the future tense, in the subjunctive, optative, imperative moods, is an expression of hope; every “How long, O Lord?” and similar phrases are expressions of hope; every mention of eternity is an expression of hope.

Keywords: Psalms, hope in the Bible, hope of the poor

[摘要] 本文研究《聖詠》中的「希望」，首先對希伯來語、希臘語和拉丁語聖經傳統中「希望」詞彙進行簡短的語言語義分析。此分析揭示了希望的主題如何貫穿整部《聖詠》。有鑑於此，本研究將範圍限定在希伯來文－希臘文－拉丁文「希望」詞彙在《聖詠》中的明確出現（包括字面與隱喻用法）。研究分為七個步驟，分別強調「希望」的內涵和表達形式：1) 耶穌本人吟誦了偉大的希望聖詠；2) 天主本身是希望的首要對象（甚至是主體），因此人對天主的渴望回應了天主對人的渴望；3) 當人盼望上主時，他還盼望甚麼？4) 注意，希望有兩種：真正的希望和虛假的希望；5) 上主始終如一地滿足貧窮和受苦者的希望；6) 希望以各種美麗的意象表達；7) 希望蘊含在幾篇聖詠的文學結構中。本研究的最終結果是確認了「希望」主題在聖詠中無處不在的初步印象：每一次祈求上主都是對希望的表達；每一個將來時態的動詞，無論是虛擬語氣、祈願語氣還是祈使語氣，都是對希望的表達；每一個「上主，要到何時？」以及類似的短語，都是對希望的表達；每一次提及永恆，也都是對希望的表達。

關鍵字：聖詠、聖經中的希望、窮人的希望

Introduction

We are celebrating the Jubilee Year of Hope. We all hope to be genuine “pilgrims of hope”. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), the best of “Bible Commentaries”, in no. 2657 encourages us to make good use of the Psalms to let our hope burn brightly. Here is what it says: “The Holy Spirit, who instructs us to celebrate the liturgy in expectation of Christ’s return, teaches us to pray in hope. Conversely, the prayer of the Church and personal prayer nourish hope in us. The psalms especially, with their concrete and varied language, teach us to fix our hope in God: ‘I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry’.”¹

Perhaps “hope” is the most fundamental angle from which we can approach the Psalms. Actually, the Psalms are shot through and through with direct or indirect expressions of hope. In the Psalms, every invocation of God is an expression of hope. Every verb in the future tense, in the subjunctive, optative, and imperative moods, is an expression of hope. Every mention of eternity is an expression of hope. Every “How long, O Lord?” and similar phrases are expressions of hope. This should not surprise us, if we attend to the fact that, on the one hand, as CCC 2657 says, prayer is essentially hope and that, on the other hand, as CCC 2586 says, the Book of Psalms is the book of “prayer of the People of God”, Book of Prayer of the one People of God, both Old Testament People

¹ English translation from: *Catechism of the Catholic Church. With Modifications from the Editio Typica* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).

of God and New Testament People of God².

Consequently, had we to deal adequately with the theme of “hope” in the Psalms, we should practically touch upon every Psalm. Being this too big a task for us today, we will concentrate on the expressions of hope in the Psalms that include the word “hope” or its cognates, symbols, metaphors, or literary structures geared toward hope.

We will make this enquiry taking into consideration the most ancient streams of transmission of the text of the Psalms: the Hebrew, the Greek, and the Latin. In these ancient ways of transmission, we will notice something like a progressive explosion of the vocabulary of “hope”.

Let us begin with the Hebrew text (MT). In this text, if we look for what we usually consider standard Hebrew words

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- 2 There is only one People of God, though there are two Covenants, the Old and the New. Jeremiah’s New Covenant promise is made to the one People of God: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31, quoted in Heb 8:8). Paul, on his part, calls himself and his co-workers “ministers of a new covenant” (2Cor 3:6), not “ministers of a new people of God”. The expression “new people of God” is never found in the New Testament, just as “The New Testament never calls the Church ‘the new Israel’”. In Ga 6:14 ‘the Israel of God’ very likely designates Jews who believe in Christ Jesus.” See Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), p. 146, note 301. The first Jews who believe in the mystery of Jesus (Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul et al.) are the “Israel of God”, on which, as on a rock, Jesus says, I will build “my Church” (cf. Matt 16:18), in which Jews and Greeks become one in Jesus.

for “hope”, we find the noun *tiqvāh* (“hope”)³ and the verb *qāvāh* (“to hope”, which more properly, however, means “to wait for”)⁴. These two words appear in 13 Psalms of the Psalter with a total of 23 occurrences (sometimes the same word is repeated in the same Psalm). If we check how the Septuagint (LXX) translates these two words, we are surprised to find that not even once does the LXX translate the Hebrew *tiqvāh* and *qāvāh* with what we would consider the standard Greek verb and noun for “hope”, namely: *elpís*⁵ and *elpízein*⁶. So how does the LXX translate Hebrew *tiqvāh* and *qāvāh*? Usually, it uses the noun *hupomonē*⁷ and the verb *hupomoneîn*⁸, Greek words that, to the LXX translators, must have looked closer to the meaning of the Hebrew *tiqvāh* and *qāvāh*, meaning “tarrying, waiting, expecting, enduring, persevering, hoping”. Again we may ask, then the Septuagintal *elpís* and *elpízein*, what Hebrew words do they translate? In the LXX *elpís* and *elpízein* usually translate the Hebrew *bāṭāḥ*, which

3 Francis Brown et al., *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 876: “hope”.

4 Brown, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 875: “wait for”.

5 J. Lust, E. Eynikel, K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1992), p. 145: “hope, expectation”.

6 Lust, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 145: “to hope for, to look for, to expect”.

7 Lust, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 494: “staying, tarrying, endurance, perseverance, hope, expectation”.

8 Lust et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, pp. 493-494: “to remain, to stand firm, to tarry, to wait, to wait patiently, to wait upon, to hope, to endure patiently, to forbear”.

we normally translate in English as “to trust”⁹. This Hebrew term is often present in the context where Hebrew *tiqvāh* and *qāvāh* appear. This Septuagintal treatment of the Hebrew invites us to pay attention to this curious linguistic situation: while the Hebrew noun *tiqvāh* clearly means “hope” (and yet it is never translated as such with *elpís* by the LXX), the Hebrew verb *qāvāh* (from which the noun derives) means, as we have seen, something very concrete: “to wait, waiting”¹⁰.

This straightforward comparison of 13 Psalms in the MT and in the LXX allows us, perhaps, to draw the following conclusion: what we now call “hope” comes a) from the original Hebrew’s “waiting, expecting”, b) from the LXX translation of the original Hebrew as “patience, endurance”, and c) from the LXX translation of the Hebrew “trust” (present in the context of Hebrew “waiting, expecting”) with what are now the standard terms for “hope” (*elpís* and *elpízein*). Going through this process, we come to realize that “trust” is the secret inner propeller or trigger of both the “waiting and expecting” and “the patience and the endurance”.

If the above analysis is correct, then we can describe, even define, “hope” as “trustful waiting”, “trustful expecting”, “trustful patience”, “trustful endurance”. Moreover, we have obtained a minimal cluster of terms that ought to be considered together, if we want to appreciate adequately the presence of “hope” in the Psalms. When these terms appear in

9 Brown, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 105: “trust”.

10 Brown, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 875: “wait for”.

the Psalms, we will reproduce them in **bold type**, so that the reader may not miss their occurrence.

Thanks to this Septuagintal expansion, if we now ask: How many times does the theme of hope (*elpís* and *elpízein*, *hupomoné* and *hupomoneîn*) occur in the LXX Psalter? The number of Psalms is no longer 13, but 66 Psalms with a total of 89 occurrences of the theme. If we also give a look at the Latin Psalter of the Vulgate (Vg), we find that the terms translating *elpís*/ *elpízein*, *hupomoné*/ *hupomoneîn* (terms like: *spes*/ *spero*, *sustinentia*/ *sustineo*, *expectatio*/ *expecto*) appear in 105 Psalms!

Were we to expand further the minimal cluster of related terms, we may guess that the theme of hope would cover the whole of the Psalter. However, to ascertain the truth of this guess is not the purpose of this article. Let us return to our self-imposed limitation to enquire in the Psalms a) the expressions of hope that include the word “hope” and cognates in the three main streams of transmission of the Psalms: the Hebrew, the Greek, and the Latin; b) clear images of hope, even in the absence of words connoting “hope”; and c) hope expressed in the very literary structure of several Psalms, even though the word “hope” may not appear.

Even with this self-limitation, we find the Psalms to be very rich in expressions of hope. We shall try to appreciate this hopeful richness by gleaning through, in Seven Steps, this bountiful harvest:

1. Jesus Himself prayed the great Psalms of hope;
2. God Himself is the first object (and even subject) of hope, so that man's desire for God responds to God's desire for man;
3. Hoping for God, what does man also hope for?
4. Attention! There are two kinds of hope: true hope and false hope;
5. God unfailingly fulfills the hope of the poor and of the suffering;
6. Hope expressed in beautiful images;
7. Hope is enshrined in the very literary structure of several Psalms.

1. Jesus' Psalms of Hope¹¹

Jesus went through the terrible torture of the crucifixion praying the Psalms. This is told us by the Evangelists. Jesus probably knew all the Psalms by heart (as many faithful Jews before and after him and many faithful Christians after him did). Reciting the Psalms was the standard way of praying for faithful Israel. Many Old Testament and New Testament Canticles bear witness to this, since they are full of explicit or

¹¹ For Scripture quotations we use the RSV according to this edition: *The Holy Bible. Revised Standard Version. Second Catholic Edition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006).

implicit references to the Psalms. The Evangelists report Jesus reciting only this or that verse of the Psalms. To understand the import of this single verse, however, good hermeneutics demands that each such single verse be put into its context¹² and the proximate context of each of these single verses is the whole Psalm to which it belongs. Actually, it is possible that Jesus recited not only the verse reported by the Evangelists, but the whole Psalm. Be that as it may, let us just note where the Evangelists tell us that Jesus prayed the Psalms on the cross: According to Matt 27:46 and Mark 15:34 Jesus prayed the introductory words of Ps 21(22):2; according to Luke 23:46 Jesus prayed verse 6 of Ps 30(31); according to John 19:30 Jesus said: “I thirst” which, according to some¹³, is a reference to Ps 62(63):2 or to Ps 68(69):21. It is possible that, according to the Evangelist himself, this is also a reference to Ps 21(22):15. In fact, the Evangelist notes that Jesus said this “to fulfill the Scripture” (Jn 19:30a)¹⁴. These four Psalms are all great Psalms of hope.

The first Psalm opens with what seems to be a cry of despair, but then develops into wonderful words of trust and abandonment into God’s care. “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice” (Matt 27:45; same in Mark 15:34):

12 Meaning arises from the conjunction of text and context!

13 E.g. Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979), p. 313.

14 According to Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft & United Bible Societies, 1998), p. 398, this is first of all a reference to Ps 21(22):15, while what is done in verse 29 finds correspondence in Ps 68(69): 21.

Ps 21(22)¹⁵

- 01 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why
are you so far from helping me, from the words of my
groaning? [...]
- 03 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- 04 In you our fathers **trusted**; they **trusted**, and you
delivered them.
- 05 To you they cried, and they were saved; in you they
trusted, and were not disappointed¹⁶. [...]
- 09 Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you kept me
safe upon my mother's breasts.
- 10 Upon you was I cast from my birth, and since my mother
bore me you have been my God.

15 The double number is the only way to identify with certainty which Psalm we are dealing with. The first number follows the numeration of the LXX; the second number (between brackets) follows the numeration of the MT. I am personally convinced that the LXX numeration is more original than the MT numeration. That is why I put it first. If only one number is given, this means that the LXX and MT numerations are the same.

16 The *Bulla* of Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year of Hope begins quoting Rom 5:5 “Hope does not disappoint us”. Now Rom 5:5 is a free quotation of Ps 21(22):5(6), together with Ps 24(25):3.20, Ps 30(31):1, Ps 70(71):1, and Ps 118(119):116 (cf. Isa 49:23: “Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame”). We can say that this is a *leitmotif* of the Psalms, perhaps linked to the great Prophets of Israel, since many Psalms may have been written, not only by David et al., but also by some of the Prophets.

Luke, like Matt and Mark, writes: “Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said...” (Luke 23:46) and then records Jesus praying another great Psalm of hope:

Ps 30(31)

- 01 In you, O Lord, I **seek refuge**; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me!
- 02 Incline your ear to me, rescue me speedily! Be a **rock of refuge** for me, a strong **fortress** to save me!
- 03 Yes, you are **my rock** and my **fortress**; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me,
- 04 take me out of the net which is hidden for me, for you are my **refuge**.
- 05 Into your hands I **commit** my spirit ; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.
- 06 You hate those who pay regard to vain idols; but I **trust** in the Lord. [...]
- 14 But I **trust** in you, O Lord, I say, “You are my God.”
- 15 My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors! [...]
- 19 O how abundant is your goodness, which you have laid up for those who fear you, and wrought for those who **take refuge** in you, in the sight of the sons of men! [...]
- 24 Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who **wait** for the Lord!

John records another word of Jesus that may be the expression of either one of two great Psalms of hope: either Ps 62(63):2 or Ps 68(69):21.

Ps 61(62)

02 O God, you are my God, I **seek** you, my soul **thirsts** for you; my flesh **faints** for you, as in a dry and weary land where no water is.

Ps 68(69)

03 I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with **waiting** for my God. [...]

06 Let not those who **hope** in you be put to shame through me, O Lord God of hosts; let not those who **seek** you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel. [...]

20 Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I **looked** for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.

21 They gave me gall for food, and for my **thirst** they gave me vinegar to drink. [...]

32 Let the humble see it and be glad; you who **seek** God, let your hearts revive.

33 For the Lord hears the needy, and does not despise his own that are in bonds.

The Letter to the Hebrews suggests to us that the whole life of Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, was the living out of

a great Psalm of hope. Heb 10:5-7 says: “Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body¹⁷ have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,’ as it is written of me in the roll of the book.” Hebrews is quoting Ps 39(40):6-8.

Ps 39(40)

- 01 I **waited** patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. [...]
- 03 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their **trust** in the Lord.
- 04 Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his **trust**, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods! [...]
- 06 Sacrifice and offering you do not **desire**; but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

17 Even if LXX and Vg, like MT, have “ear” in the Psalm, Greek NT and Vg have “body” in Hebrews. This may be “an interpretative paraphrase for the obscure Hebrew phrase” (thus Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 274, who, however, attributes this paraphrasing not to Hebrews, but to the LXX, notwithstanding Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum, Psalmi cum Odis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), p. 143 which shows that “ear” must be the original reading of the LXX.

07 Then I said, “Behold, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me;

08 I **delight** to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart”.[...]

16 But may all who **seek** you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, “Great is the Lord!”

Rightly, then, can Letter to the Hebrews 12:1-2 prompt us to hope by looking at Jesus, the champion of hope: “Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”. In these words of the Letter to the Hebrews, we can see the indissoluble connection that links hope to faith. Here, at the beginning of Chapter 12, Hebrews appears to define hope in terms of faith. At the beginning of Chapter 11, Hebrews had defined faith in terms of hope: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”. As Pope Benedict XVI says at the beginning of his encyclical *Spe salvi*: “Faith is hope”.¹⁸

The fact that Jesus prayed the Psalms of hope is a great encouragement for us to pray them in communion with him.

18 Pope Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Spe Salvi on Christian Hope* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), pp. 3-5. See also his commentary on Hebrews’ definition of faith in *Spe salvi* nos. 7-9.

As *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II, tells us: “Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. [...] He is present, finally, when the Church prays and sings Psalms¹⁹, for He has promised: ‘Where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them’ (Mt. 18:20)”.

2. God Himself is The First Object of Hope

Throughout the Psalms the most frequently expressed object of hope is God himself. Inspired by this fact, CCC 2657 that we quoted in the opening of this article says: “The psalms teach us [...] to fix our hope in God”. In no. 2086, CCC had already said: “[God] is almighty, merciful, and infinitely beneficent.... Who could not place all hope in him?”. Let us glean just some golden words of hope in God from the abundant harvest of the Psalms. Let us be sensitive to the powerful metaphorical images used by the psalmists to express their hope in God: images like refuge, rock, fortress, pinions, wings, shield, buckler etc., expressive of realities that, in this valley of tears, ensure a safe future for one’s life in the loving care of God’s Providence.

19 The original Latin has “psallit”, not rendered in either of the two popular English translations of the Documents of Vatican II: Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, America Press, Association Press, 1966), pp. 140-141 (which we are using here, except for this clause) and Austin P. Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II*, New Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 4-5. Both translations give only “when the Church prays and sings”.

The last Psalm we will quote in this section shows that, before human beings place their hope in God, God has his own “hope”, his own “desire”, for human beings²⁰. How much of Sacred Scripture is expressive of these divine desires about the people He has chosen, about the humanity He has created! All the promises made by God, all the oaths taken by God (how many promises and oaths of God in the Psalter!) are expressions of God’s “hope” for humankind. Therefore, we can say that human hope in God is essentially a response to God’s “hope” for humans.

Ps 5

- 11 But let all who **take refuge** in you rejoice, let them ever sing for joy; and do defend them, that those who love your name, may exult in you.
- 12 For you bless the righteous, O Lord; you cover him with favor **as with a shield**.

Ps 7

- 01 O Lord, my God, in you I **take refuge**, save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me,
- 02 lest like a lion they rend me, dragging me away, with none to rescue. [...]
- 10 **My shield** is with God, who saves the upright of heart.

20 Obviously, when referring to God, “hope” and “desire” must be taken in an analogical sense, i.e., in a sense that respects God’s infinite perfection and absolute immutability.

Ps 17(18)

01 I love you, O Lord, my strength.

02 The Lord is my **rock**, and my **fortress**, and my deliverer,
my God, my **rock**, in whom I **take refuge**, my shield, and
the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. [...]

30 This God - his way is perfect; the promise of the Lord
proves true; he is a shield for all those who **take refuge** in
him.

Ps 32(33)

18 Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on
those who **hope** in his merciful love,

19 that he may deliver their soul from death, and keep them
alive in famine.

20 Our soul **waits** for the Lord; he is our help and **shield**.

21 Yes, our heart is glad in him, because we **trust** in his holy
name.

22 Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, even as we **hope** in
you.

Ps 70(71)

01 In you, O Lord, I **take refuge**; let me never be put to
shame!²¹

21 This is the second time that this verse appears in the Psalter. The first time was in Ps 30(31), the Psalm of hope prayed by Jesus on the cross. When I was a novice as a young Salesian, I wrote to my father Joseph,

- 02 In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me, and save me!
- 03 Be to me a **rock of refuge**, a strong **fortress** to save me, for you are **my rock** and my **fortress**. [...]
- 05 For you, O Lord, are my **hope**, my **trust**, O Lord, from my youth.
- 06 Upon you I have leaned from my birth, from my mother's womb, you have been my strength. My praise is continually of you
- 07 I have been as a portent to many; but you are my strong **refuge**. [...]
- 14 But I will **hope** continually and will praise you yet more and more.

the Abraham of our peasant family in a mountain village of the Alps. I asked him to share with me, in a nutshell, his experience of faith. He answered me simply by quoting this repeated verse in Latin: "*In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum*". My father studied no Latin. But every Sunday he would join the singing of Vespers in the parish church. This is how he became familiar with this verse, understanding it very well, even if it was in Latin. Moreover, Holy Mother Church uses this same verse to conclude the great hymn of thanksgiving *Te Deum laudamus*. One more occasion, at least once a year, for my father to meet this verse and memorize it, when on the last day of the year the *Te Deum laudamus* was sung in the parish church to conclude the year in gratitude to God. How can a word from the Psalter of Hope fill one whole life!

Ps 72(73)

25 Who have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I **desire** besides you.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the **rock** of my heart and my portion for ever. [...]

28 But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord **my refuge**, that I may tell of all his works.

Ps 90(91)

01 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,

02 will say to the Lord, “**My refuge** and my **fortress**, my God, in whom I **trust**.” [...]

04 he will cover you with his **pinions**, and under his **wings** you will find **refuge**; his faithfulness is a shield and a buckler. [...]

09 Because you have made the Lord your **refuge**, the most High your habitation,

10 no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

Ps 131(132)

13 For the Lord has chosen Zion; **he has desired it** for his habitation;

14 “This is my resting place for ever; here I will dwell, for **I have desired it**”.

3. In Their Hope for God, What Do the Psalmists Also Hope for?

On the foundation of the basic hope for God, human beings express a great variety of hopes for things needed that can be granted by God. Somehow, these lesser hopes are a concretization of the great hope for God. Now let us scroll through the Psalter and give a look (certainly not exhaustive) at the things that the psalmists expect from God.

Ps 144(145) Hope for daily bread

15 The eyes of all **look to** you, and you give them their food in due season.

16 You open your hand, you satisfy the **desire** of every living thing.

Ps 4 Hope for a good night's sleep

06 There are many who say, “O that we might see some good! Light up the light of your countenance upon us, O Lord!”

07 You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

08 In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in **hope**.

Ps 111(112) Hope for victory over evil

07 [The righteous] is not afraid of evil tidings; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.

08 His heart is steady, he will not be afraid; until he sees his desire on his adversaries.

09 He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever; his horn is exalted in honor.

10 The wicked sees it and is angry; he gnashes his teeth and melts away; the desire of the wicked man comes to naught²².

Ps 129(130) Hope for forgiveness of sins

04 But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared.

05 I **wait** for the Lord, my soul **waits**, and in his word I **hope**;

06 my soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

22 Perhaps here is the place for a common-sense reminder. The Psalms are full of invectives against the wicked, the oppressors, the unjust, the sinners, etc. To understand properly these invectives, we must remember that they are Semitic expressions, always very concrete and refraining from abstractness. So if we detach these invectives from this expressive concreteness, in reality, what the Psalmists attack are not the concrete persons themselves, but the abstract wickedness, oppression, injustice, and sin that these concrete persons carry in themselves. The psalmists' attack on the evil in them is a basic form of love, not only for the oppressed, but also for the oppressors. Once the evil in them is destroyed, delivered are not only the oppressed, but also the oppressors (who are victims of their own evil). With such an understanding, the Psalter could have been spared the censorship it has undergone for use in the Liturgy after Vatican II. The Synod of Bishops on the Word of God and Pope Benedict XVI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* no. 42, warn us: "It would be a mistake to neglect those passages of Scripture that strike us as problematic".

07 O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

08 And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Ps 129(130) Hope for peace of soul

01 O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

02 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul.

03 O Israel, **hope** in the Lord from this time forth and for evermore.

Ps 118(119) Hope (and super-hope)²³ for God's word, promise, will, law, commandments, salvation

20 My soul is consumed with **longing** for your ordinances at all times. [...]

41 Let your mercy come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise;

42 then shall I have an answer for those who taunt me, for I **trust** in your word.

43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my **super-hope** is in your ordinances. [...]

23 Only in this Psalm repeatedly appears this word "super-hope" (*epelpizein* in Greek, *supersperare* in Latin).

74 Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have **super-hoped** in your word. [...]

81 My soul languishes for your salvation; I **super-hope** in your word. [...]

114 You are my hiding place and my shield; I **super-hope** in your word. [...]

123 My eyes fail with **watching** for your salvation, and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise. [...]

147 I rise before dawn and cry for help; I **super-hope** in your words.

148 My eyes are **awake** before the **watches of the night**, that I may meditate on your promise. [...]

166 I **hope** for your salvation, O Lord, and I do your commandments. [...]

174 I **long** for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight.

Ps 21(22) Hope for the Kingship (Kingdom) of God

25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my **vows** I will pay before those who fear him.

26 The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who **seek** him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live for ever!

27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

28 For kingship²⁴ belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

Ps 41(42) Hope to see God's face

01 As **the deer longs** for flowing streams, so **longs** my soul for you, O God.

02 My soul **thirsts** for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? [...]

05 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? **Hope** in God; for I shall again praise him, my savior and my God. [...]

09 I say to God, **my rock**: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”

24 We have changed the RSV's rightly dynamic “dominion” to the equally dynamic “kingship”, which is closer to the original Hebrew *malḵūt*, Greek *basileía*, Latin *regnum*. To translate these Hebrew-Geek-Latin terms dynamically (dominion, kingship) and not statically (kingdom) is the better choice. The primary meaning is dynamic; the static meaning is secondary. The dynamic and static meanings are related as cause and effect. Cf. Brown, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 574: “royalty, royal power, reign, kingdom (chiefly late)”. Given the priority of the dynamic meaning in Hebrew, the LXX Greek and the Christian Greek and Latin continue to give priority to the dynamic meaning. Cf. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 135: “*basileía*: kingship, royal power, royal rule, kingdom”. G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 289: “*basileía*: sovereignty, reign, kingdom”; Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 1551: “*regnum*: kingly government, royal authority, kingship, royalty”.

10 As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, “Where is your God?”

11 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? **Hope** in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Ps 15(16) Hope for eternal life

01 Preserve me, O God, for in you I **take refuge**.

02 I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.” [...]

05 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup, you hold my lot.

06 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage. [...]

09 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure.

10 For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your godly one see the Pit.

11 You show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

From the above, we can see that all particular hopes are still focused on the great hope for God, ever more intensely so. In particular, the last three expressions of hope

(hope for God's kingship, hope to see God's face, and hope for eternal life) are equivalent to the great hope for God. They are rooted in the deepest core of every human being. They are the key to apprehending the mystery of the human being who harbors the desire of the Infinite in his human limitedness. They are the hope for the unknown, because they are the hope for the infinite mystery of God²⁵. We can apply to this deepest of human hopes the beautiful Chinese saying: "When you drink water, think of the source". By existing we are drinking God's water. No wonder we, consciously or unconsciously, think of and thirst for God, the Infinite Subsistent Existent, who is the source of our finite existence.

Knowing that Jesus prayed the Psalms, it will not be a surprise for us to find that the prayer taught us by Jesus, the Our Father, can be said to be just the summary of all the prayers of petition that we find in the Psalms. A good exercise for each one of us would be to check the truth of this statement by ourselves, by paying attention, when reciting the Psalms, to the Seven Petitions of the Lord's Prayer. When doing this exercise, we may ask ourselves: Is it the psalmists who learn to pray from Jesus? Or is it Jesus who learns to pray from the psalmists? The answer to this twofold question is also twofold. On the one hand, as true man, Jesus learns to pray from the psalmists, in the arms of Mary and on the knees of Joseph. On the other hand, as true God, Jesus, the Son of God

25 See the commentary on this in Benedict XVI's *Spe salvi*, nos. 10-12: "Eternal life - what is it?"

Incarnate, inspires all human good from Adam and Eve to the last human beings in history, but the psalmists of Israel, in particular.

Before proceeding, just for fun, let us try to begin here the suggested exercise²⁶, by checking how the word “Father” for God, explicitly or implicitly, appears in the Psalter:

Ps 26(27):9-10 “Cast me not off, forsake me not, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up”;

Ps 67(78):5 “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation”;

Ps 88(89):26 “He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation’”;

Ps 102(103):13 “As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him”²⁷.

We can see that neither Jesus nor the psalmists commits the mistake of treasuring the gifts more than the

26 Before us, this exercise was done by St. Augustine in his *Epistola ad Probam* (= *Epistola* 130, 12, 22 - 13, 24 CSEL 44, 65-68; also in *The Divine Office. The Liturgy of the Hours according to the Roman Rite*, III, Weeks of the Year 6-34, (London-Glasgow: Collins, Sydney: Dwyer, Dublin: Talbot, 1974), pp. 668-670: The Office of Readings, The Second Reading, Tuesday of Week 29 of the Year).

27 As we noted above, in all these verses there also appears to be an echo of the great Prophets of Israel, e.g., Isa 63:16, 64:8; Jer 3:4.19, 31(38):9 (cf. Deut 32:6).

Giver. As CCC 2740 reminds us: “The prayer of Jesus makes Christian prayer an efficacious petition. He is the model, he prays in us and with us. Since the heart of the Son seeks only what pleases the Father, how could the prayer of the children of adoption be centered on the gifts rather than the Giver?”

4. Attention! Two Kinds of Hope: True Hope and False Hope

In the previous section, we have met the expression of two contradictory hopes: the desire of the righteous (true hope) and the desire of the wicked (false hope). The expression of this contradiction pervades the Psalter. Among the false hopes, we may distinguish foolish hopes and wicked hopes.

Ps 9B(10)

23(03) For the wicked boasts of the **desires** of his heart, and the man greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord.
[...]

38(17) O Lord, you will hear the **desire** of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear

39(18) to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more.

Ps 40(41)

09 Even my bosom friend in whom I **trusted**, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

10 But you, O Lord, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them!

11 By this I know that you are pleased with me, in that my enemy has not triumphed over me.

12 But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence for ever.

Ps 43(44)

06 For not in my bow do I **trust**, nor can my sword save me.

07 But you have saved us from our foes, and have put to confusion those who hate us.

08 In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name for ever.

Ps 51(52)

07 See the man who would not make God **his refuge**, but **trusted** in the abundance of his riches and **sought refuge** in his wealth.

08 But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I **trust** in the mercy of God for ever and ever.

Ps 61(62)

01 For God alone my soul **waits** in silence; from him comes my salvation.

02 He only is my **rock** and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly moved. [...]

05 For God alone my soul **waits** in silence, for my **hope** is from him.

- 06 He only is my **rock** and my salvation, my **fortress**; I shall not be shaken.
- 07 On God rests my deliverance and my honor; **my mighty rock**, my **refuge** is God.
- 08 **Trust** in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a **refuge** for us.
- 09 Men of low estate are but a breath, men of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.
- 10 **Put no confidence** in extortion, set no vain **hopes** on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.

Ps 117(118)

- 08 It is better to **take refuge** in the Lord than to **put confidence** in man.
- 09 It is better to **take refuge** in the Lord than to **put confidence** in princes.

Ps 118(119)

- 94 I am yours, save me; for I **have sought** your precepts.
- 95 The wicked **lie in wait** to destroy me, but I consider your testimony.

It is clear now that foolish hopes are those placed in mere human beings (relatives, friends, etc.) and in mere created things (money, defensive armaments in a just war of self-defense, etc.) The psalmists are always ready to

acknowledge the foolishness of such hopes, because humans “are lighter than a breath”. Wicked hopes are those placed in sinful choices, in the betrayal of one’s conscience, as if these could produce anything good; sinful choices like dishonest use of money, like offensive armaments in an unjust war of aggression, etc. The only wise and good hopes are those placed in God and in his active presence in human history.

5. God unfailingly fulfills the hope of the poor and the suffering

The poor and suffering we have already met several times in the preceding sections. However, the psalmists also repeatedly express their conviction that God will unfailingly fulfill the hope of the poor and the suffering. Let us note that this conviction envisages God’s action not only in this present life, but also in eternity: “the hope of the poor shall not perish forever” (Ps 9:18).

Ps 9

09 The Lord is a **stronghold** for the oppressed, a stronghold in time of trouble.

10 And those who know your name put their **trust** in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who **seek** you. [...]

18 For the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the **hope** of the poor shall not perish for ever.

Ps 9B(10)

35(12) Arise, O Lord; O God lift up your hand; forget not the poor.

36(13) Why does the wicked renounce God, and say in his heart, “You will not call to account”?

37(14) You see; yes, you note trouble and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; the hapless **commits** himself to you; you have been the helper of the fatherless.

Ps 24(25)

15 **My eyes are ever toward** the Lord; for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

16 Turn to me, and be gracious to me; for I am lonely and afflicted.

Ps 33(34)

04 I **sought** the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

05 Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

06 This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

Ps 38(39)

04 Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is!

05 Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely every man stands as a mere breath!

06 Surely man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nought are they in turmoil; man heaps up, and knows not who will gather!

07 And now, Lord, for what do **I wait**? My **hope** is in you. [...]

10 Remove your stroke from me; I am spent by the blows of your hand.

11 When you chasten man with rebukes for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely every man is a mere breath!

12 Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am your passing guest, a sojourner, like all my fathers.

13 Look away from me that I may know gladness, before I depart and be no more.

Ps 39(40)

16 But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the Lord!"

17 As for me, I am poor and needy; but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not

Ps 42(43)

02 For you are the God in whom I take **refuge**, why have you cast me off? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? [...]

05 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? **Hope** in God; for I shall again praise him, my savior and my God.

Ps 55(56)

01 Have mercy on me, O God, for men trample upon me; all day long foes oppress me;

02 my enemies trample upon me all day long, for many fight against me proudly.

03 When I am afraid, I put my **trust** in you.

04 In God, whose word I praise, in God **I trust** without fear. What can flesh do to me? [...]

08 You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle! Are they not in your book?

09 Then my enemies will be turned back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me.

10 In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise,

11 in God **I trust** without fear. What can man do to me?

Ps 69(70)

- 01 Be pleased, O God, to deliver me! O Lord, **make haste** to help me!
- 02 Let them be put to shame and confusion who seek my life!
[...]
- 04 May all who **seek** you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love you salvation say evermore: “God is great!”
- 05 But I am poor and needy; **hasten** to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, **do not delay**!

Ps 85(86)

- 01 Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.
- 02 Preserve my life, for I am godly; save your servant who **trusts** in you. You are my God,
- 03 have mercy on me, O Lord, for to you I cry all the day.
- 04 Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I **lift up my soul**.
- 05 For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in mercy to all who call on you.
- 06 Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication.
- 07 In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you do answer me.

As we noted at the beginning of this section, the hope of the poor and the suffering breaks through the door of death into eternity. In particular, the existential suffering expressed by the psalmist of Ps 38(39)²⁸ makes him/her aware of the hopelessness of the human condition apart from God, hopelessness which he/she expresses dramatically, if not tragically, at the end of his/her Psalm: “For I am your passing guest, a sojourner, like all my fathers. Look away from me that I may know gladness, before I depart and be no more” (vv. 12b-13). Only hope in God, the Eternal, conquers despair: “And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.” (v. 7). As St Paul says: “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied” (1Cor 15:19). The psalmists certainly cannot be counted among these “men most to be pitied”.

6. Hope Expressed in Beautiful Images

We have already met many beautiful images of hope, showing up in contexts in which the words expressing hope also explicitly appear: images like rock, refuge, fortress, watchmen waiting for the morning, deer longing for flowing streams, dry and weary land without water, etc. There are other images which are meant to forcefully express hope, even if, for some of them, their near context does not contain hope-

28 “A page of that sublime series of lamentations that has traversed the whole of world literature” (Gianfranco Ravasi, *Il Libro dei Salmi. Commento e attualizzazione*, Volume 1 (1-50), Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1981, p. 707, our English translation).

expressing words. Mother Nature, our bodily gestures, and our life experience (like our patience or impatience) may provide us with beautiful images of hope. In this section, we offer a little collection (certainly not exhaustive) of such additional images.

Ps 16(17)

06 I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me, hear my words.

07 Wondrously show your mercies, O savior of those who **seek refuge** from their adversaries at your right hand.

08 Keep me **as the apple of the eye**; hide me **in the shadow of your wings**,

09 from the wicked who despoil me, my deadly enemies who surround me.

Ps 26(27)

03 Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I **will be confident**. [...]

04 One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I **seek after**; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to **inquire** in his temple.

05 For he will hide me **in his shelter** in the day of trouble; he will conceal me **under the cover of his tent**, he will set me **high upon a rock**. [...]

Ps 54(55)

- 04 My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
- 05 Fear and trembling came upon me, and horror overwhelmed me.
- 06 And I say, “**O that I had wings like a dove!** I would fly away and be at rest;
- 07 yes, I would wander afar, I would lodge in the wilderness.
- 08 I would **wait** for him who saves me from the raging wind and tempest.”

Ps 83(84)

- 01 How lovely in your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
- 02 My soul **longs**, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
- 03 **Even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young**, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.
- 04 Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! [...]
- 12 O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who **trusts** in you!

Ps 120(121)

- 01 **I lift up my eyes to the hills.** From where does my help come?
- 02 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Ps 122(123)

- 01 **To you I lift up my eyes,** O you who are enthroned in the heavens!
- 02 Behold, **as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,** so our eyes look to the Lord our God till he has mercy upon us.

Ps 124(125)

- 01 Those who **trust** in the Lord are **like Mount Zion**, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
- 02 **As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,** so the Lord is round about his people, from this time forth and for evermore.

Ps 125(126)

- 05 May **those who sow in tears** reap with shouts of joy!
- 06 **He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,** shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Ps 142(143)

06 I **stretch out my hands** to you; my soul **thirsts for you like a parched land**. [...]

08 Let me hear in the morning of your merciful love, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you **I lift up my soul**.

7. Hope Enshrined in The Very Literary Structure of Several Psalms

There are some Psalms the very literary structure of which expresses an indomitable hope in God, even if, perhaps, words denoting “hope” do not appear in the Psalm.

One such Psalm is Ps 88(89). Its hope is based on God’s unfailing promise. In the whole Psalm words denoting “hope” do not appear (apart from the hope image of the “shield” in v. 18 and the twice-repeated “how long?” of v. 46). However, the substance of hope is present in the overwhelming awareness of God’s promise. The structure of this Psalm can be represented by the three letters A, B, and A’ (the words belonging to A and A’ will be printed in bold type). Section A is a solemn affirmation of God’s promise of protection for his people; Section B is a sorrowful affirmation of national disaster; Section A’ is a pained, and yet trustful, invocation to God that reminds him of his promise.

Ps 88(89)

A

- 01 I will sing of your mercies, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.**
- 02 For your merciful love was established forever, your faithfulness is firm as the heavens.**
- 03 You have said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant:**
- 04 I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.” [...]**

B

- 38 But now you have cast off and rejected, you are full of wrath against your anointed.
- 39 You have renounced your covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.
- 40 You have breached all his walls; you have laid his strongholds in ruins. [...]
- 45 You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame.

A'

- 46 How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? [...]**

**49 Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by
your faithfulness you swore to David?**

**50 Remember, O Lord, how your servant is scorned; how
I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples,**

**51 with which your enemies taunt, O Lord, with which
they mock the footsteps of your anointed.**

52 Blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and Amen²⁹.

The faith and hope of this psalmist is the faith of Abraham, our father in the faith: “In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told. [...] No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.” (Rom 4:18.20-21)

There are other Psalms which are structured, like the one we have just seen, in a three-fold way: A B and A', but with a difference. In Ps 88(89), A and A' correspond to each other as “Promise” and “Hopeful prayer based on the Promise”, with at the centre the description of the actual reality that seems to deny the truth of God's Promise. In these other Psalms, instead, the A B and A' structure develops thus: (A) Petition by the needy person, (B) Description of the need, (A') Thanksgiving by the needy person because God has answered his/her petition”.

29 This last verse functions as the conclusion of the Third Book of the Psalter (Pss 72(73)-88(89)). At the same time, however, it makes this Psalm end on a strikingly positive and trustful note.

The first psalm structured like this is Ps 6: (A) 6:1-4, (B) 5-7, (A') 8-10. We shall take it as representative of a dozen other similar Psalms³⁰. This structure bears witness to the efficacy of the psalmist's prayer, efficacy due to the psalmist's solid faith and sure hope. For easy recognition, as we did with Ps 88(89), we print the A and A' parts in bold type.

Ps 6

A

01 O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor chasten me in your wrath.

02 Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.

03 My soul also is sorely troubled. But you, O Lord, how long?

04 Turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your merciful love.

B

05 For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?³¹

30 Other Psalms structured like this one are: Pss 7 12(13) 21(22) 27(28) 30(31) 34(35) 53(54) 55(56) 58(59) 68(69) 70(71) 108(109).

31 Expressions like this in the Psalms have often been misunderstood as if the psalmist did not believe in eternal life. Expressions like this are part and parcel of Hebrew poetics, characterized, too, by concreteness. These expressions bear witness to Israel's solid appreciation of earthly life. This solid appreciation then speaks words that appear to deny or

06 I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed
with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.

07 My eye wastes away because of grief, it grows weak
because of all my foes.

A'

**08 Depart from me, all you workers of evil; for the Lord
has heard the sound of my weeping.**

**09 The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts
my prayer.**

**10 All my enemies shall be ashamed and sorely troubled;
they shall turn back, and be put to shame in a
moment.**

Now, the production by the psalmist of a text with such ABA' structure can be understood in two different ways. The first way is obvious enough: The psalmist first (A) makes his petition to God to be delivered and (B) describes the trouble from which he/she hopes to be delivered. Then, sometime later, when his/her prayer has been heard by God, he/she concludes the Psalm with (A') the proclamation of God's intervention in his/her favor, giving thanks. The positive outcome of the psalmist's petition is a very concrete witness to the truth of his/her faith and hope in God.

doubt the reality of eternal life. However, this is only an appearance. The whole of the Psalter, like the rest of Sacred Scripture, if called upon to say things in a non-poetic way, bears witness to an equally solid affirmation of eternal life with God.

In the light of a word of Jesus, however, there is another possible explanation of how the text thus structured was produced. This alternative explanation allows for an even more astonishing understanding of the psalmist's solid faith and sure hope. Mark 11:22-24 records this supremely challenging saying of Jesus (in bold the crucial words): "And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and **does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass**, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, **whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it**, and you will."

In the light of what Jesus says in Mark 11:22-24, the other possible explanation of the Psalm's A B A' structure is this: The petitioner has written down all three parts A B A' of his/her petition at the same time. Part A' is written as if the petition had already been answered. Actually, this has not yet happened, but the psalmist is so sure of its happening that he/she can write part A' in the past tense as if it had already happened. Actually, this is the extraordinarily solid faith and sure hope in God's loving care of his people expected of God's chosen people. To this Jesus himself bears witness. As we said above regarding the Psalter as an exemplification of the 7 Petitions of the Lord's Prayer, so also here, if this alternative explanation is valid, we can see that the inspired sacred writers of Psalms were already imbued with the very spirit of the Lord Jesus, the Alpha and Omega of human history.

Conclusion

“All with eyes to see,” says St. Ambrose in his Discourse on the Psalms³², “can discover in [the Psalter] a complete gymnasium for the soul, a stadium for all virtues.” And he adds: “[The Psalter] is a vision of serenity, a promise of peace and harmony.” Today we have strolled through this “stadium” and, hopefully, have seen how the Psalms can exercise us in the virtue of Hope, by opening up to us “a vision of serenity, a promise of peace and harmony”. It is the certainty of faith that generates joy and peace that break out in thanksgiving and praise.

We have begun our study of hope in the Psalms by quoting the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Let us end with another quotation from the same “best of Biblical Commentaries” (bold type ours): “Certain constant characteristics appear throughout the Psalms: simplicity and spontaneity of prayer; the **desire for God himself** through and with all that is good in his creation; the distraught situation of the believer who, in his preferential love for the Lord, is exposed to a host of enemies and temptations, but who **waits upon what the faithful God will do**, in the certitude of his love and in submission to his will. The prayer of the psalms is always sustained by praise; that is why the title of this

32 From the *Discourse of St Ambrose on the Psalms*, Ps. I,4.7-8.9-12 (CSEL 64,4-10; also in *The Divine Office*, pp. 180-181.184-185, *Second Reading of the Office of Readings of Friday and Saturday of 10th Week of the Year*). CCC 2589 also quotes from this *Discourse*.

collection as handed down to us is so fitting: ‘The Praises.’ Collected for the assembly’s worship, the Psalter both sounds the call to prayer and sings the response to the call: Hallelu-Yah! (‘Alleluia’), ‘Praise the Lord!’” (CCC 2589).