

52. "To praise his glory" (Ep 1:12)

Dear friend, I wonder if you are giving sufficient room to praise in your prayer?

Do you perhaps have doubts about the value that God attributes to praise? In that case, leaf through the Psalter and you will find praise on almost every page. Now, the Psalter is the book which the Lord himself has given us, to teach us how to pray.

But at the same time, you will also come to understand that the source of praise is the knowledge of God. The fervent Jews were men of praise only because they were first of all "seekers after God." We do not sing hymns of praise to something or someone we know nothing about!

They loved to contemplate the wondrous works of the Lord. Listen to their acclamations:

*"O Lord, our Lord,
how glorious is your name over all
the earth!"* (Ps 8:2)

*"For you make me glad O Lord,
by your deeds;
at the works of your hands I rejoice."* (Ps 92:5)

They meditated a long time on what they called the "mighty deeds" of the One who had delivered them "*with his strong hand and outstretched arm*" (Dt 5:15):

*"Give thanks to the Lord, invoke his
name;
make known among the nations his deeds....
Glory in his holy name;
rejoice, O hearts that seek the Lord!"* (Ps 105:1,3)

But they were filled with wonder at the perfections of God even more than at his works. They marveled at God's holiness, glory, power and unfathomable love. This love is the wellspring of all his works and of all his divine interventions:

*"Give thanks to the Lord for he is good,
for his mercy endures forever;...
Who alone does great wonders,
for his mercy endures forever!"*

(Ps 136:1,4)

Even before it becomes words on men's lips, praise is a silent exultation, an ovation to God deep within the heart. Like a spreading fire, it gradually engulfs the whole of man's being. Then it bursts forth in jubilant hymns. Then a King David, laughing at protocol, begins to dance around the Ark. The believer becomes a "living praise."

And this praise is no longer reserved for feast days, but is a basic, never-ceasing prayer:

*"I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth."*

(Ps 34:2)

*"That my soul might sing praise to you
without ceasing;*

*O Lord, my God, forever will I give
you thanks."*

(Ps 30:13)

And when praise is on the verge of growing weary, the believer exhorts himself:

*"Praise the Lord, O my soul;
I will praise the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to my God while I live."*

(Ps 146: 1-2)

But make no mistake about it. The man of praise is neither an individualist nor a dilettante. He cannot admire without joining his brothers to himself, to worthily celebrate the object of his admiration. That is why he cannot refrain from convoking all the members of the People of God to praise:

*“You who fear the Lord, praise him;
all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him!”*
(Ps 22:24)

On a broader scale, forgetting his national particularism, he addresses his invitation to all peoples;

*“Praise the Lord, all you nations;
glorify him, all you peoples!”*
(Ps 117:1)

Even inanimate creatures are necessary for the worship of praise:

*“Let the heavens be glad and the earth
rejoice;
let the sea and what fills it resound;
let the plains be joyful....”*
*“Let the rivers clap their hands,
and the mountains shout with them for joy!”*
(Ps 96:11-12; 98:8)

How can Christians, for whom God has done so much more, and revealed unheard-of secrets of love, fail to be men of praise as well?

The reasons for praise that inspired the Psalmist's hymns are not foreign to Christians, as the considerable place allotted to the ancient Psalms of Israel in the liturgy demonstrates. But Christians have a loftier motive that inspires them to a loftier praise. This is the celebration of the fatherhood of God, the exultant acclamation of his paternal tenderness. For they know what the Jews did not know:

“Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die, but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

And this eternal life is not some ordinary, commonplace grace, but an unimaginable reality:

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us in letting us be called children of God! Yet that is what we are” I (I Jn 3:1).

There are many Christians who, because they do not truly believe that they are sons and heirs of God (cf. Gal 4:7), languish in the mediocrity of anxiety. When they approach their Lord in prayer, more often than not it is to beg for some favor, rather than to give thanks.

When one is with them, one scarcely has the impression of being in the presence of “a people God has made his own, to praise his glory” (Ep 1:14).

Fortunately, there are Christians who understand their vocation of praise. This praise has great value in the eyes of God, for he discerns in it the accents of his Son’s prayer. To make this truth clear, certain Fathers of the Church liked to compare Christ to King David, who celebrated the Lord to the accompaniment of musical instruments. But, they add, the new David shuns the lyre and the zither, instruments devoid of soul. To praise his Father, Christ uses the accompaniment of the intelligent and free instrument that is man, composed of body and soul. Thus, in and through the Christian who praises his God, it is Christ himself who expresses his eternal and joyous thanksgiving to his beloved Father.

The praise of the Christian is Christ’s own praise.

The praise of the Church is the praise of the total Christ, present throughout the world.