

A Song of Ascents.

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”
Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!
Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together,
to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
“May they be secure who love you!
Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers!”
For my brothers and companions' sake
I will say, “Peace be within you!”
For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek your good.

This is perhaps the clearest of all of the Psalms of Ascent that show the connection to the Jerusalem Temple. We see in the middle of the Psalm the statement that all the tribes of the Lord, that is the 12 tribes of Israel, were decreed to go up to Jerusalem to give thanks to the Lord (see Deut 16). Written by David, this Psalm was sung before the temple was built, when the ark still stood in the tent of the Tabernacle built by Moses some 400 years earlier. It continued to be the song of God's people journeying to worship through the years of Solomon's temple, and restored to that use with the return from exile. It is likely then, that our Lord sang this Psalm on His way to Jerusalem for the Passover. These very words were on His lips on Palm Sunday, this is what He prayed as the people shouted Hosanna and as the priests of the temple and the Pharisees plotted against Him. This shows us clearly what is true of all the Psalms: they are Christ's own words. They are inspired by Him, He is the eternal Word. And so they are prayed by Him. He speaks what His Father has said.

On His way to die as the sacrifice for the sins of the world, Jesus says, “**I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’**” He is glad to go to the House of Prayer for all people, not simply to the Temple, but to the cross, to the throne where He as the Son of David will be glorified by dying and making Himself a ransom for the sins of the world, where David and all sinners will be declared righteous and the devil's skull will be crushed. He is glad to go there, to do that which was foreshadowed in the Temple sacrifices and services.

He goes up into Jerusalem yet again on Thursday night, bound as the festal sacrifice, the true Passover Lamb. He is presented to the High Priest. He is spotless, without sin or defect. He can only confess the truth under oath, that He *is* the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed. He *is* the one whom Daniel saw in his prophetic vision; the Son of Man presented to the Ancient of Days and given all dominion and honor, worshiped by all people. Yet for this confession of the truth He is marked by the priests as deserving of death. And so the final blood sacrifice is appointed by the priests of Israel, their office now fulfilled. And He is glad to accomplish that which Daniel, Jeremiah, and all the prophets foretold.

In so doing He wins peace for mankind and He breathes peace onto His disciples on Easter evening as He establishes the preaching of the Holy Absolution (Jn 20:22–23)). Remember how on Palm Sunday, as He drew near to the city, mounted on the foal, He said, “**Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things make for peace**” (Lk 19:41). That statement could very well have been prompted the Psalm which bids us: “**Pray for the peace of Jerusalem**” and gives to us the blessing that “**they who love** (Jerusalem, the city of peace)” shall “**be secure.**” He

pronounced peace upon the city in accord with the Psalm's bid: "**Peace be within your walls,**" in His self-giving outside the city gates, but, sadly, Jerusalem rejected Him and refused His peace.

Nonetheless, the Lord was not stopped. He says in the Psalm: "**For my brothers' and companions' sake, I will say, 'Peace be within you!' For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.**" He endures, goes on to die for them and all the world despite their rejection. He prays for those who hate and kill Him. It is for His brothers' and companions' sake that He willfully and knowingly goes into the city that will choose Barabbas the murderer and Caesar the pagan over Him. It is for His brothers' and companions' sake that He goes to the cross to make Himself the true Temple, the house of the Lord, rebuilt on the third day which does not determine access to Him on the basis of whether you are Jew or Gentile, man or woman, priest or laity. For His brothers' and companions' sake, all of them, He goes as true God and true Man to be the Peace Offering.

Because it is first prayed by Jesus, Psalm 122 is also our prayer. Just as we can only pray the words of the Lord's Prayer because Jesus prays them first. We also are glad go into the house of the LORD – not the house of the Lord built by the hands of men, that House with its sacrifices of blood has come to an end. We come to the House destroyed in Jerusalem and rebuilt on the third day, to the Stone the builders rejected now become the cornerstone. The Lord Himself is our Temple. He is, as St. Paul says, our Passover (1 Cor 5:7), for us to eat His risen Body and Blood, bestowing His peace, at which and for which we offer our own sacrifices of faith, praise, and thanksgiving, our eucharist.

We also, in our joy, pray for the city of God, for the brothers and companions of Jesus, who are our brothers and companions, who are with us here and all around the world, with whom we are bound firmly together. We pray in these dark days for those who are sick, those who attend to the ill, for those who are out of work, and those who are simply afraid. We all bear our own crosses. We now endure the cross of being unable to gather together in the way we have been accustomed. And in this respect we pray for relief for ourselves. But we go through these day in peace, confident that with Jesus as our Messiah we have nothing to fear and much to gain. This Psalm is the great psalm of joy in communion, of Christ's loving communion with us, bearing our sins and misery; of our joy in communion with Him who is our Head; of our joy in communion with one another.