

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR B

Psalm 146 (147)

Psalm 146 (147) is the last psalm to carry a 'double numbering'. When the Bible was translated into Greek (known as the Septuagint) and Latin (the Vulgate), the divisions of the psalms were altered from the original Hebrew. Roman Catholic practice has generally been to follow the Latin Vulgate, while Protestants have always followed the Hebrew, hence the different numbering in the two traditions. The discrepancy starts at Psalm 9, where the Hebrew psalms 9 and 10 are treated as one (= Psalm 9) in the Vulgate. From that point onwards each psalm carries two numbers (with the Hebrew Psalms 114, 115, 116 and 147 also divided differently). Only at Psalm 148 do the two versions reconverge.

Praise the Lord for he is good ...

Psalm 146 (147), written after the Exile, is filled with praise and gratitude to God. The people thank God for specific events, but essentially they praise God because God is good: their joy knows no bounds. The complete psalm has 20 verses, listing the many things that God has done for the people from the beginning of time to the day he returned the exiles to their homeland.

He fixes the number of the stars ...

The psalmist not only thanks God for rebuilding Jerusalem, but also for all of creation. There are several references to the ordered universe and to the effect the weather has on the earth, all to the good of the people.



Our Lord is great and almighty ...

We are given an extraordinary image of God whose wisdom cannot be measured. This is the God who created the universe and who even names the stars, but who also reaches down to the lowly to comfort and heal.



Gospel Mark 1: 29–39

Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew

Archaeologists have unearthed the probable remains of this house near the synagogue in Capernaum, under the ruins of the ancient church that was built on this site. The house consists of a cluster of small rooms built of basalt rock, surrounding an open courtyard that was probably shared by the extended family.



The fever left her and she waited on them

Simon's mother-in-law was bedridden with fever, which at that time was often caused by malaria and could be life-threatening. There was a particular way of dealing with fever laid down by the Talmud, involving the use of certain objects, selected readings from Exodus and finally a magic formula. Jesus, in contrast, heals with a gesture. The woman's reaction in 'waiting on them' is a model of discipleship: the Greek verb, *diakoneō* later became a standard word for Christian ministry (Acts 6: 2), giving us the word 'deacon'.

The whole town came crowding round the door

Jesus had carried out another exorcism prior to his healing of Simon's mother-in-law, and on both occasions people had seen 'something new'. Rather than using traditional methods, Jesus acted and spoke with the unique authority earlier attributed to him in the synagogue.

In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house.

The time and place chosen by Jesus to find respite from the crowds were especially suited to prayer. 'Long before dawn' recalls the psalmist, as in 'I mean to wake the dawn' (Ps 57 (58): 8); or 'It is good ... to proclaim your love at daybreak (Ps. 92 (93): 2).

'Let us go elsewhere ...'

Jesus includes his disciples in his mission as he sets out to preach in the synagogues of Galilee.

'... because this is why I came'

When Simon and his companions find Jesus in the lonely place, he makes a solemn declaration of the purpose of his mission. He says something similar before his crucifixion, when questioned by Pilate about his Kingdom. 'Yes I am a King, I was born for this: I came into the world for this ...' (John 18: 37). In acknowledging that this is why he has come, Jesus is suggesting more than a mere public appearance. He is also alluding to his being sent into the world by his Father, implying his pre-existence (see Mark 9: 37).