

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Psalm 68 (69): vv. 8–10, 14, 17, 33–35

Today's responsorial psalm consists of a few verses from a longer text. It is the lament of an individual.

The structure of the whole psalm is replicated in the three stanzas we pray this Sunday: a supplicant cries out their distress, then turns to prayer and begs for an answer, and finally gives thanks and praise to God. It could be seen as the ideal pattern of our prayer time.

Some phrases in the verses may sound familiar to us. This is because from the outset, early Christians linked events in Jesus's life to this psalm. In today's verses for example, we find a verse used in St John's Gospel when Jesus cleanses the Temple: *'Zeal for your house consumes me'* (Ps 68 (69): 9 and John 2: 17). Similarly St Paul, in his letter to the Romans, quotes verse 10 of the psalm: *'Taunts against you fall on me'* (cf Romans 15: 3). The different evangelists use other verses from this psalm as a backdrop to their account of Jesus's Passion.

The psalm as a whole also echoes the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, and this week's First Reading from Jeremiah.



Photo by Olivia Snow on Unsplash

*'In your great mercy,
answer me, O God'*



Gospel Matthew 10: 26–33

Jesus continues his discourse on Mission and instructs the apostles.

'Have no fear... Do not fear ... Fear not'

This is the central message of this passage. It is repeated three times. Jesus seeks to encourage his disciples. Fear is a powerful motivator, as we see, for example, in Herod's decision to imprison John the Baptist (Matthew 14: 5). However, there is no need to fear if you trust in God.

'Nothing that is covered will not be revealed'

In a society where close-knit communities were the norm, everyone knew everyone else's business. Attempts at secrecy were met with suspicion: Jesus's advice is to be open and public.

'What I tell you in the dark, say in the light'

This should not be understood as a reference to a secret doctrine known only to a few initiates. Jesus's message has so far only reached a few people, but it is precisely the role of the disciples to disseminate it far and wide.

Hell

The Greek word translated here by hell is also sometimes translated as Gehenna, from Ge-Hinnom – a valley south of Jerusalem where child sacrifices used to be performed. At the time of Jesus it was used as a refuse tip where rubbish and corpses were burnt, so it could be a reference to an everlasting fire, where fires were always smouldering.

Two sparrows sold for a penny

Sparrows, or in fact any small bird, were sold in local markets as the cheapest form of meat. In the local currency, a 'penny' was one sixteenth of what a person could expect to earn in a day: a denarius.

Matthew and Luke had the same primary source for their writing, termed Q (from the German *Quelle*, 'source') by scholars, yet where Matthew has two sparrows for a penny, Luke has five sparrows for two pennies (Luke 12:6). Nevertheless, the message is the same.



'Everyone who acknowledges me'

This declaration will probably have been to affirm that Jesus Christ was Messiah and Lord.