

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Psalm 63 (62)

This psalm is one of the most well known and well loved. The psalmist, identified by the psalm's subtitle as David, speaks of the joy his intimacy with the Lord gives him.

The first two stanzas reflect his desire for God, while the last two express his delight in him. He does not petition God for any favours. This intimate relationship with God is expressed by the way he addresses God directly and without fear. The words 'you' and 'yours' occur twelve times.

'You are my God'.

The psalmist's close relationship with God is not an excuse for escaping from life's reality. He uses very concrete everyday images to describe how he feels: thirst; food (a banquet) – a longing for the most essential necessities for life; a chick seeking protection under its mother's wings. Both of these images are found in the Old and New Testaments (see Psalm 42: 1–2 or Matthew 22: 4).

The psalmist's yearning for God involves his soul and his body, his whole being. Many words refer to the use of his body in prayer in the sanctuary: his thirst, his pining body, vocal praise, lifting hands. It is as if the fulfilment enjoyed in God's intimacy at a deeper level can only be expressed in words of bodily satisfaction (see also Psalm 36: 7–9).



Even when it's hard to pray, our body language remains a sign of our desire to be with the Lord.



Gospel Matthew 16: 21–27

This passage follows on from last week, where Simon acknowledges Jesus as Messiah, and is given the name Peter. Here, for the first time, Jesus speaks of his Passion, death and resurrection.

Jesus must go to Jerusalem

So far, Jesus had been staying in small towns, gathering followers and making himself known through miracles and healings. The following four chapters will relate his journey to Jerusalem, the city where prophets are put to death (Matt 23: 37).

he must ... suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes

These three groups make up the Sanhedrin, an assembly of 23 to 71 men, appointed in every city to act as supreme court. Elders were city or national Jewish leaders. It is interesting to note that Matthew does not mention the Pharisees separately here.

Peter began to rebuke Jesus

Jewish culture could not imagine a Messiah who would suffer and be killed. Their long-awaited new leader would be able to bring them glory and fame. Peter here is voicing the feelings of the other disciples and the people.

'Get behind me, Satan!'

Jesus sees in Peter a continuation of the temptations Satan put in his way in the desert at the beginning of his ministry. (Matthew 4: 10)

'You are an hindrance to me'

The Greek word used here: *skandaloi* (from which the word 'scandal' derives) meant any large block or rock which blocked someone's way. It also had moral overtones. Maybe it is used here ironically since Jesus has just called Peter his rock.

Take up your cross

This is not a specific allusion to Jesus's own crucifixion. Dying on the cross was a common Roman punishment and the cross had come to mean suffering or agony.

'He will repay each person according to what they have done'

Apparently a reference to Psalm 62: 12 'For you will render to a man according to his work.'