

Psalm 34

It's rare to speak on a psalm for daily Mass. However, it's nice to hear a little something about the responsorial psalm once in a while. Psalm 34 is a psalm of thanksgiving.

We begin with the opening line: "*I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth.*" The Hebrew word for "bless" (*barak*) is closely related to the word kneel. In blessing the Lord, the psalmist essentially kneels before the Lord. The psalmist will bless the Lord, regardless of the circumstances. Whether he has riches or is poor, sick or in good health, he will bless the Lord.

The psalmist goes on to say, "*Taste and see how good the Lord is; blessed the man who takes refuge in him.*" This is a well-known verse in this psalm. Using the physical sense of taste, the psalmist encourages others to *experience* the goodness of the Lord. In other words, you can intellectually know about God but this is *very* different from experiencing God's goodness with your heart.

Next, we hear about the Lord confronting evildoers and protecting those who love Him. It's helpful to remember that this psalm is attributed to David. David knows firsthand how the Lord protected him from the all-consuming envy of Saul. David often cried out to the Lord for help and the Lord heard him. In this way, David is a great role model for the Lord's care and protection of those who love him.

Additionally, we hear, "*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; and those whose spirit is crushed he saves.*" We have a very comforting line that the Lord is close to those who are suffering. Think of all the various forms of suffering that people experience – physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, or relational. The Lord draws near to those who carry the heavy weight of suffering.

Finally, we learn that the Lord is not only close to those who suffer but also *delivers* them. Again, David knew this firsthand. The Lord delivered David from Saul. For those of you familiar with the story, David refused to lay a hand on Saul as he was the Lord's anointed as Israel's king. Instead, David was patient and let things play out. In time, Saul died in battle and fell on his own sword (1 Sam. 31:1). David's refusal to kill Saul paid huge dividends as he set the precedent for the cultural norm that one never murdered the king. In Judea, no king was murdered while in the northern tribes of Israel, seven of the nineteen kings were killed. David's trust in the Lord brought about blessing for himself and the whole nation. ~St. Thérèse, pray for us!