

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C

Psalm 102 (103)

This psalm is a song of thanksgiving for God's love and forgiveness for us all. It helps to negate the old division sometimes made between the Old and the New Testaments: the first supposedly being centred on fear; the second on love.

As is usual in this type of psalm, the author starts with an introduction of thanks to the Lord and then gives reasons for his gratitude. For this he uses a series of verbs in close succession: *forgives, heals, redeems, crowns*.

When the psalmist addresses his 'soul', he means his 'inner being': what keeps him alive.



At first the psalmist speaks in his own name (*My soul*), then addresses the rest of the people present who pray with him (*he crowns you with love and compassion*). Through him, the whole people of Israel give thanks.

God's greatest expression of his love for us all is his mercy and forgiveness despite our faults (*he forgives all our guilt*).

The psalmist goes beyond thanksgiving for the blessings he has personally received and also includes the whole of creation '*as far as the east is from the west*'.

God loves all who '*fear him*'. The Hebrew word translated here by '*fear*' does not have the modern implication of anxiety, apprehension, and alarm at possible punishment. Rather it denotes awe, reverent respect, honour and obedience to the Lord's will.

The phrase '*The Lord is compassion and love*', often repeated throughout the Psalter, and today forming the response to the psalm, echoes the words of the Lord on Mount Sinai in the presence of Moses (Exodus 34:6). It describes the psalmist's understanding of the nature of God.



Gospel Luke 6: 27–38

In Luke's Gospel, this week's passage follows on directly from last week.

Love your enemies

The Greek word here is *agape*, which is not to do with romantic love, but with an unconditional desire for the well-being of others, whether we like them or not. Indeed, Jesus describes that love as *doing good, blessing* – that is speaking well of them; and *praying* – that is holding them up to the Lord. It is a persistent theme in Luke's Gospel, as for example in the story of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10: 29–37)

Turn the other cheek

Here Jesus is not advocating accepting abuse, but offering non-violent resistance. For a master to slap a slave on the right cheek was, at the time, simply asserting his authority. A slap on the left cheek would show anger and loss of control, and so be shameful. The result of turning the other cheek was to bring shame on the master.

To the one who takes your cloak ...

This would likely be the act of a soldier. As the man would only have a cloak and a tunic as garments, giving both would leave him naked, thus bringing shame on the perpetrator.

Treat others as you would like them to treat you

Scholars have called this the 'Golden Rule'. It should be applied universally, not just to family and friends. All the above precepts are embodied in the way Jesus lived his life on earth.

Grant pardon, and you will be pardoned

This is the first time the notion of pardon appears in Luke's Gospel. It is a major attribute of God and seen many times in Jesus' deeds.

A full measure, pressed down ...

This is an image taken from the distribution of grain in prosperous times. The grain would be pressed down to separate the grain from the kernel, and shaken to make sure it filled every little space available; then the person would make a pocket-like shape with his cloak to receive the measure of grain.

