

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES
THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR A

Psalm 15 (16)

In the Book of Psalms, more than any other in the Bible, we have an example of the continuity of prayer over many centuries.

They were first sung in the pre-Christian era in the Jewish Temple through the problems and triumphs of the Monarchy, the exile, and as the Jews returned to their homeland. They continued to be used in Jesus's time, and indeed by the Lord himself, as we see so clearly from the number of phrases quoted from the psalms by the Gospel writers.

From the early post-Christian centuries, they were also used by the Church, sung in Latin in monastic communities. Nowadays, they are part of our weekly liturgy and some lines have become so familiar that they easily spring to mind in times of difficulty: *Preserve me God, I take refuge in you.*

Psalms can often give us an insight into the history of Israel. In this week's psalm, it helps to understand the line *'it is you who are my portion and cup'* if we remember the sharing out of Palestine territory among the tribes of Israel by drawing lots (see Joshua 14: 1–4). The Levites were not given any land; rather, their 'portion' was God himself (Numbers 18: 20). This explains why they were the Jewish group looking after the Temple, and also gives us a clue as to the possible identity of the psalmist.



'Show me, Lord,
the path of life.'



Gospel Luke 24: 13–35

This story of the disciples meeting the Lord on the road to Emmaus is only to be found in Luke's gospel.

That very same day

This is the day the Jews termed 'the first day of the week'. This story happens on the same day as the discovery of the empty tomb. That same evening, Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem and then a week later to Thomas. The disciples continued to meet and break bread together on that same day. By the first century it was called 'the Lord's day', and was commonly kept among Christians in the mid second century instead of the traditional Jewish Sabbath (Saturday). In 321, Emperor Constantine decreed that workers should rest on that day.

Cleopas

According to Eusebius, the first great Church historian (c. 300 AD), Cleopas might have been Jesus's uncle, the brother of Joseph. If so, this would indicate that his close relatives had not rejected him. Yet it also shows that a belief in Jesus's resurrection was not self-evident to his earliest followers.

The other disciple is not named. It is sometimes suggested that it might have been a woman, Mary the wife of Cleopas, mentioned by John as one of the women present at the death of Jesus (John 19:26). It could be that Cleopas and Cleopas are different spellings of the same name.

Moses, the prophets and the Scriptures

We have here a reference to the whole of the Jewish Bible, which is divided into three sections, the Torah, the Prophets and Writings.

They pressed him to stay with them

The custom of hospitality was much more developed than it is now. It involved welcoming strangers and travellers and giving them provisions and protection. Early Christians equated lack of hospitality with a lack of love of God and neighbour. It was common to refrain from asking a guest's identity until they had been fed.

He took, he blessed, he broke, he gave

Although he was the guest, Jesus acts as the head of the household, using words almost identical to those at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19), and at the feeding of the 5000 (Luke 9:16). Eucharistic liturgies, to this day, retain the same sequence of actions after reading and explaining Scripture.

Their eyes were opened

'To open' is a key verb in this story. To enable us to experience the Resurrection, Jesus opens our minds to the Scriptures and our hearts and eyes to his presence.