

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Psalm 88 (89)

The Psalter is divided into five books, with key psalms placed at the 'seams' between the books. This psalm, one of the longest in the Psalter, is a royal psalm and occurs at the end of Book 3. It starts with a brief introduction (vv. 1–4), followed by three distinct and lengthy sections (vv. 5–18; 19–37; 38–51).

The verses we read this week come from the first section of the psalm. The compilers of the Lectionary have chosen verses 2–3 and 15–18.

It begins with a hymn of praise of God. The first stanza expresses the psalmist's joy in God's steadfast love and faithfulness. These two elements define the way God relates to Israel.

The permanence of that promise is stressed by the use of words expressing that concept: 'for ever' (twice), and 'firmly established'.

Stanzas 2 and 3 express a joyful enactment of the first stanza. They are addressed directly to God, recognising his glory, favour and protection of the person of the King.

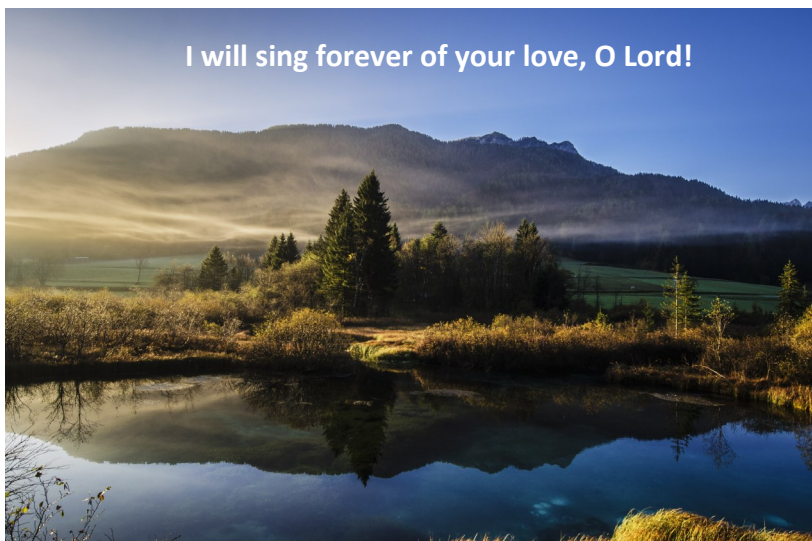


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ST. BEUNO'S OUTREACH
IN THE DIOCESE OF WELSHPOOL

Gospel Matthew 10: 37–42

This week's passage comes at the end of the second substantial teaching section in Matthew's Gospel after the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus continues to encourage and instruct his disciples, while warning them of the difficulties they will face. Their efforts will not go unnoticed.

'Anyone who prefers father or mother to me'

Jesus is not advocating abandoning family life. Indeed the Fourth Commandment makes it clear: 'Honour your father and mother' (Exodus 20: 12), and this is repeated in St Matthew's Gospel (15: 4–6). However, Jesus warns his disciples that they may sometimes have to make difficult choices leading to the break-up of traditional family values, especially in the large extended family units of the time.

'Anyone who does not take up their cross'

This is not an allusion to Jesus's crucifixion, but rather to the everyday cruel punishment which the Romans meted out to slaves. The expression had come to mean suffering or agony.

'Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me'

In Jewish tradition, at a time when there was no postal system, emissaries had the full authority of the one who sent them. So to receive a disciple of Christ was to receive Christ himself.

In today's political scene, it might be compared to an ambassador. A government receiving an country's ambassador shows they accept and welcome the whole country and its peoples.

'Anyone who welcomes a prophet ... a holy man ... little ones'

Much has been written about the identity of these people. Some scholars think they represent the fabric of the society of the time; others that it is a reference to Old Testament prophets and holy men; or again that the 'little ones' were any missionaries, or indeed the disciples themselves. But the main point is the welcome, and the virtue of hospitality.

When strangers were welcomed, they were put under the protection of the host. In a society which had no sense of the individual, where each person represented his or her group, welcoming an individual meant welcoming the group they belonged to.

A cup of cold water

In a Mediterranean hot climate, this would represent meeting someone's essential needs.

'They will ... not lose their reward'

The Greek meaning of the word translated here by 'reward' is slightly different from our own. It meant 'paid in full'. It does not mean obtaining something extra as a result of a good deed. Maybe a better translation might be 'blessing'.