

Psalm 50

1. *The Lord, the most mighty God, has spoken
and called the world from the rising of the sun to its setting.*
2. *Out of Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth;
our God comes and will not keep silence.*
3. *Consuming fire goes out before him and a mighty tempest stirs about him.*
4. *He calls the heaven above, and the earth, that he may judge his people.*
5. *'Gather to me, my faithful, who have sealed my covenant with sacrifice.'*
6. *Let the heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge.*
7. *Hear, O my people, and I will speak:
'I will testify against you, O Israel; for I am God, your God.'*
8. *'I will not reprove you for your sacrifices,
for your burnt offerings are always before me.'*
9. *'I will take no bull out of your house, nor he-goat out of your folds,*
10. *'For all the beasts of the forest are mine, the cattle upon a thousand hills.*
11. *'I know every bird of the mountains and the insect of the field is mine.*
12. *'If I were hungry; I would not tell you,
for the whole world is mine and all that fills it.'*
13. *'Do you think I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?*
14. *'Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and fulfil your vows to God Most High.*
15. *'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall honour me.'*
16. *But to the wicked says God:
'Why do you recite my statutes and take my covenant upon your lips,*
17. *'Since you refuse to be disciplined and have cast my words
behind you?*
18. *'When you saw a thief, you made friends with him
and you threw in your lot with adulterers.'*
19. *'You have loosed your lips for evil and harnessed your tongue to deceit.'*

20. *'You sit and speak evil of your brother; you slander your own mother's son.*
21. *'These things have you done, and should I keep silence?
Did you think that I am even such a one as yourself?*
22. *'But no, I must reprove you,
and set before your eyes the things that you have done.*
23. *'You that forget God, consider this well,
lest I tear you apart and there is none to deliver you.*
24. *'Whoever offers me the sacrifice of thanksgiving honours me
and to those who keep my way will I show the salvation of God.'*

Refrain

Let the heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge.

Psalm 50 is a prophetic liturgy, which belongs to the New Year festival. The revelation of God is accompanied by light and storm. A similar description can be seen in Malachi, 'See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all the evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord.' (4,1). The coming of Jesus is described in similar terms by John the Baptist in Luke's Gospel, 'He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.' (3,16). The coming of the Holy Spirit is seen in wind and fire, 'And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.' (Acts 2,2,3)

In Psalm 50, God is seen as judge, coming to test the people before the covenant is renewed. The whole world is called to witness it. (v.1, 'The Lord, the most mighty God, has spoken and called the world from the rising of the sun to its setting.')

The covenant at Sinai was accompanied by sacrifice, but the people have got it wrong. God doesn't need gifts, nor does he feed on animal flesh. They cannot manipulate God. Even if their ceremonies are vital, what they need to do is acknowledge that they depend totally on God and offer thanksgiving. To pay vows (v.14, 'Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and fulfil your vows to God Most High') means to acknowledge one's debt to God.

In the last section, the wicked are denied the right to participate in the covenant renewal, because they have rejected the terms of the covenant by their behaviour. (vv.16,17, 'Why do you recite my statutes and take my covenant on your lips, since you refuse to be disciplined and have cast my words behind you?' and vv.18,20 'When you saw a thief, you made friends with him. You sit and speak evil of your brother; you slander your own mother's son.')

God makes one last attempt to reform them, 'Whoever offers me the sacrifice of thanksgiving honours me and to those who keep my way will I show the salvation of God.' (v.24).

God comes as judge, not to condemn or punish, but to bring people back. This can be seen in the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin and in that of the Prodigal Son. God comes to free us from things, which control us, and to bring us back to follow his way faithfully.

We sometimes have to make judgements, for example, in school reports, in appraisal systems or in references for employment. We have to avoid negative attitudes (eg. 'This boy is bone idle' or 'This lad is a complete skiver. '), even if we feel like writing it!!), as these are meant to help people, rather than to condemn.

In our Church life, which is important to us, we take part in ceremonies, hear readings and sing hymns. Does what we see and hear influence the way we behave towards other people? Is there a match between what we believe and how we behave? Are we welcoming? Do we reveal the love of God in the way we relate to people? Can we open our hearts to God in thanksgiving for our lives and for the world in which we live? After all, we say at the end of the Eucharist, 'Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory.'

It is all summed up in the last verse of the hymn New every morning is the love:
Only, O Lord, in thy dear love
fit us for perfect rest above;
and help us, this and every day,
to live more nearly as we pray.

Prayer

God of our pilgrimage,
you have willed that the gate of mercy
should stand open for those who trust in you:
look upon us with your favour
that we who follow in the path of your will
may never wander from the way of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Post Communion Collect, Trinity 10)