**Courage Ministry**

 Article 112 – August 2019

 Brendan Scarce

 **Hope and Praise**

**Introduction**

Recently I was praying psalm 34, (33) one of my favourite psalms and it struck me that this psalm could be a meditation for us as we read it, sing it, and proclaim it at various times. In this article I will go through the first ten verses and indicate how we might praise God by accepting its suggestions, its challenges and its promises in accordance with Goal Two of the Courage Goals. Goal Two says in part that members “dedicate one’s life to Christ through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation …” The Courage Goals were developed by the first group members in New York with the founder of Courage, Father John Harvey in 1980. The members wanted to practice the life of virtue and to live celibate lives with integrity. They declared this charter with the hope that it would be fruitful.

**Psalm 34 (Grail version 33)**

2. *I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise always on my lips;*

**Question**: Do you bless the Lord at all times with His praise always on your lips?

 I have for years uttered this verse in my desire to use my mouth to praise God.

3. *In the Lord my soul shall make its boast. The humble shall hear and be glad.*

**Question:** I tell myself that my soul boasts in Christ Jesus. Am I really humble and honest?

4. *Glorify the Lord with me. Together let us praise his name.*

**Comment**: As individuals in personal prayer time and Courage members we praise his name.

5*. I sought the Lord and he answered me; from all my terrors he set me free.*

**Question:** Do we seek the Lord in our trouble and terrors? How does He set us free?

Are my terrors and fears becoming manageable and how do I recognize his internal voice?

6. *Look towards him and be radiant; let your faces not be abashed.*

This is one of my favourite verses in seeking the face of God and as I gaze on Him. I recognize in my heart that Jesus and the Godhead is gazing on me always. I find the Icon of the Pantocrator from the Mt Sinai monastery helpful for it is always looking out and I look out for Him when praying. This particular Icon shows the different facial expressions on either side of the face of Jesus and is said to emphasize Christ’s dual nature as *fully God* and *fully human.* Pope Francis says: that to fix our eyes on Jesus’ face and become familiar with him is the secret of life and brings us out of anonymity. Looking at Jesus purifies our sight and prepares us to look at everything with new eyes… He concludes by saying we will be ‘original’ if our face is the mirror of the face of the Risen Christ.

**Question:** Do we believe that Jesus gazes upon me with eyes of mercy and with peace?

The general editor of the 1966 edition of the Jerusalem Bible, Father Alexander Jones, comments on verse six when introducing this psalm in the Grail version. “John Fisher recited: *Look towards him and be radiant,* when he saw that the Sun shone behind the scaffold. This is a song for martyrs: the Lord sets them free from all their terrors. But it is also a song for the small martyrdoms of every day. One may be discouraged by one’s failure in past trials, weakness in those of the present, uncertainty of one’s resistance in the future: but of course our own weapons are always rusting and loose in our hands, the bright and effective sword is in the hand of God alone. There will be no ultimate defeat, not a bone broken for those who are one with the Lamb of our Passover on the Cross.” And despite our imperfections we can with sincerity look towards our Saviour.

7. *This poor man called; the Lord heard him and rescued him from all his distress.*

**Comment:**

For many years I have prayed this verse, pondered it and respectfully and earnestly called upon the Lord. When I look at my life’s experiences I believe that I have been rescued from serious physical attacks. When I was working in Psychiatry and working with young people involved in drug addiction and for some displaying very disturbed conduct and behaviour I prayed for safety and help. Once, when I was a Staff Counsellor for a Government Department, I visited a man who was dissatisfied with the Department. At the end of my conversation he informed me that he had a loaded gun under the couch we were sitting on. I felt safe enough as we met, but thanked the Lord for my safety when I drove away.

However, I believe that there is a deeper reality and factor in this verse for it is the Word of God and I absolutely believe in the power and divinity of Sacred Scripture. (See Hebrews 4:12). I wait for an answer from the Lord, by an inspiration of the Holy Spirit in my heart, soul, mind and reason. My prayer may not always be answered as I wish, but I am often at peace when I have the confidence to cry out to the Lord as verse seven says.

8. *The Angel of the Lord is encamped around those who revere him, to rescue them*.

**Question:** *Do you believe that you have a guardian angel by your side helping you?*

I believe that I have a guardian angel watching over me. It is not easy to define or describe who or what the Angel is. But since my early years I remember the prayer I would pray to my own guardian angel and ask him to keep me safe. It is great to know according to this verse he is by my side when I revere him. I have often wondered what he is like, what his name might be, and will I meet him in Heaven. I suspect I will. As I write this it might seem fantasy and a proper delusion on my part – but no way, I revere this invisible helper of mine.

9. *Taste and see that the Lord is good. He is happy who seeks refuge in him***.**

**Comment:**

I love this verse which is often the Communion antiphon in the Liturgy of the Mass. After I receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, especially the chalice I notice the taste of the precious blood of Jesus, and feel more connected with Jesus the Lord. It is at this time that I am most earnest in my prayer of petitions for people and situations. But apart from the Communion experience I often utter this verse as a true statement of the Lord being good. So much so that I still pray the Latin translation: *Videte et gustate quam bonum sit Dominum.* My happiness is relevant to my seeking his presence and how happy I have been by practising what this verse recommends. I strongly suggest you taste the Lord often in Communion and in the Sacred Word.

10. *Revere the Lord, you his saints. They lack nothing, those who revere him.*

**Question:** Do you believe that you are a saint?

Saint Paul in Romans 16: 15 sends greetings to “all the saints” who are with his friends. In 1 Corinthians 1:2 he writes: “to the holy people of Jesus Christ, who are called to take their place among all the saints everywhere who pray to our Lord Jesus Christ.” I believe that I am a saint in the Paulian sense but know that I am a sinner too. Nonetheless it is comforting to have the authority of Saint Paul confirming our sainthood. Father Peter Fitzsimons, an Opus Dei priest in Brisbane says, that if you sincerely desire to be a saint you will be. Let us be saints in our daily life and walk as we revere our Blessed Lord.

**The virtue of hope**

In order to practice the virtues of faith hope and love that psalm 34 hints at, we can only do this by willingly accepting the virtue of hope, otherwise our recitation is empty wind. Hope is one of the grace infused virtues with Faith and Love that are given to us by God. We need the virtue of hope if we are to have a relationship with God. Since hope is a theological virtue we cannot attain it by our own power, as we do the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. Hope comes from God and is given to us by grace and the sacraments. We can see hope being practised through virtuous people in our midst and of course through the Saints – Saint Mary MacKillop and Saint John XXIII are prime examples of the hope they showed the world in placing their hope in God.

At the 31st Annual Courage Conference at Mundelein U.S.A. in July 2019, Father Philip Bochanski, Courage Executive Director stated that: Hope is meant to be a challenge. We need it because our vocation is supernatural. If God is real and omnipotent He knows I cannot do his will unless he helps me. Fundamentally the founding Courage group knew and were right that God is calling all of us to a supernatural life, therefore he will help us. The answer to every question is Jesus Christ is our hope – without him we do not get to heaven. See: 1 Peter 3:15: *Account for the hope that is within you, yet do it with gentleness.*

Courage is a ministry of the Brisbane Catholic Archdiocese.

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