

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

Psalm 32 (33): 1, 12, 18–22

Psalms can be defined as ‘poetic prayer’ or ‘prayerful poems’. This psalm of praise is a good example of one of the most common features of Hebrew poetry: parallelism – particularly suited to texts designed to be read aloud. Its function is not unlike rhyme in conventional European poetry. The text is structured in two-line couplets, where repetition helps the listener to understand more fully what is being said.

The second line echoes and amplifies the first:

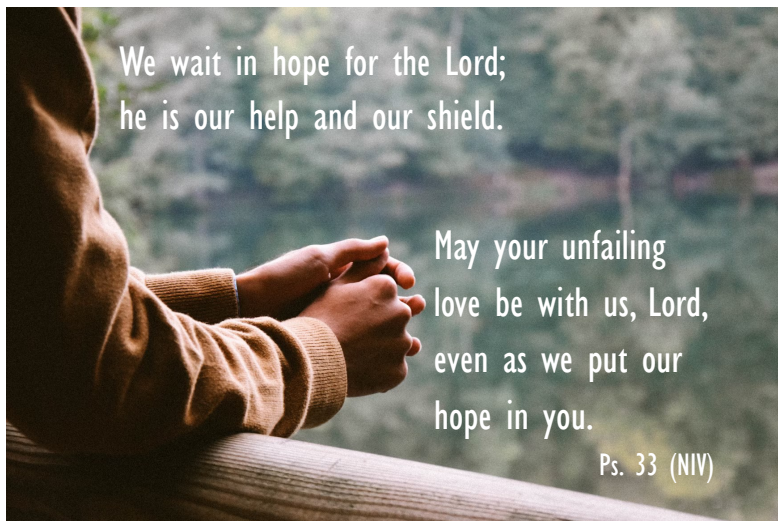
*The Lord’s eyes are on those who fear him,
who hope in his merciful love.*

*To rescue their souls from death
to keep them alive in famine.*

The psalmist also reminds us that worship should be joyful. This joy arises from our happiness in the knowledge that we are ‘*the people he has chosen as his heritage*’.

The Lord keeps an ever-watchful eye on us: he is ‘*our help and our shield*’, and in turn we can be sure of his love as we ‘*hope in [him]*’.

Our waiting for the Lord echoes the patient watchfulness of those waiting for their master in today’s Gospel text.



Gospel: Luke 12: 35–40 (shorter version)

Today’s extract consists of two short parables giving advice to the disciples. They must be prepared, loyal and vigilant until the Lord’s second coming. When Luke was writing his Gospel, people were expecting the Lord to return quite soon – though the time and day were not known. People must therefore be ready.

‘Stay dressed for action’

The literal translation would be ‘Gird your loins’ – i.e. tuck up your long robe into your belt, so that you can move more freely. This expression was also used at the time of the Passover as the Jews prepared for leaving Egypt (Exodus 12: 11). It would also apply to pilgrims on the road to Jerusalem, since it would make walking long distances much easier.

Those waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast

The marriage feast is an analogy to the Messianic banquet. Jews expected a great banquet when the Messiah came.

The joy and celebration of a wedding reflect the typical organisation of households of the time as master and servants, but here the servant represents the Christian follower (see also Romans 1: 1), and the master is Jesus. This parable is similar to Matthew’s story of the ten bridesmaids (Matthew 25: 1–13).



He will dress himself for service.

The role reversal where the master waits on the servant is significant, bringing to mind the way Jesus acts at the Last Supper, when he washes his disciples’ feet (John 13: 1–15). Similarly we read later in Luke’s Gospel: ‘*For who is the greater; one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.*’ (Luke 22: 27)

It he comes in the second watch, or in the third

Jews counted three ‘watches’ (the time a guard was on night duty), whereas Romans counted four. The second watch would be after midnight; the third just before dawn. But the actual time is immaterial; what matters is to be ready.

A burglar breaking through the wall of his house.

Palestinian houses had walls made of several layers of dried mud and so were easy to break into.