

## “Trusting in God”

Bryn Athyn Cathedral - May 7th, 2023

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*“I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target” (1st Samuel 20:20)*

The topic for today is “Trusting in God.” There are many times in our lives when we might find ourselves worrying about the future. When things don’t go the way we expect them to, or the way we want them to, we can experience anxiety and fear. We can experience worry about school, or work, or the future of our country, our church, or the world. When we experience distance in our relationships, we can worry about whether we can reconnect with family and friends again. When we are confronted with our faults and flaws, we can worry about whether we will ever become the angel the Lord created us to be. When we experience stress, we can wonder if we will ever find peace. We can’t see the future, so I think it’s natural at times to experience some anxiety about it. In those times, we are encouraged to put our faith and trust in the Lord. We can find peace and comfort when we truly believe that the Lord is leading all of us to a happy ending. As it says in this beloved passage from *Secrets of Heaven*: “*Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads towards an end that is good*” (AC 8455).

The word “trust” appears in the Word most often in the *Psalms*. If you do a word-search you will find that about 50% of all the occurrences of the word “trust” in the Bible are in the *Psalms*. David was one of the main authors of the *Psalms*, and trusting in God was clearly an important spiritual practice in his life. Many of the psalms that David wrote about trusting God were written during some of the *hardest* times of his life, such as when he was fleeing from King Saul (see Psalm 4, 7, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 25, 26, 27, 31, 34, 35, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 64, 140, 142). After the story that we heard in the lessons, David was on the run, fearing for his life for years! And it was during this time that he wrote down psalms such as these:

“Put your trust in the Lord. ... I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:5-8)

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol.... You will show me the path of life; in Your presence *is* fullness of joy; at Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:9-11)

“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust.” (Psalm 18:1-2)

“The Lord *is* my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord *is* the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?... Teach me Your way, O Lord, and lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies. Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and such as breathe out violence. *I would have lost heart*, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!” (Psalm 27:1, 11-14)

“As for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, ‘You *are* my God.’ My times *are* in Your hand.”  
(Psalm 31:14-15)

“I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. ... I will wait on Your name, for *it is* good.”  
(Psalm 52:8-9)

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.... In God I have put my trust; I will not fear.”  
(Psalm 56:3-4)

“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until *these* calamities have passed by.” (Psalm 57:1)

“When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path.” (Psalm 142.3)

The story we heard in the lessons today was the beginning of the very difficult time in which David wrote these psalms. He had been *anointed* as the next king, but it was looking like he might never actually *become* king, as King Saul did not want to relinquish the throne. He left behind his best friend Jonathan, and his wife Michal, and he didn’t know if he would ever see them again. He didn’t know if Saul would eventually catch up to him and kill him. *You and I* know that David did in fact survive, and he did in fact become king. But during this story, and the years that followed when he wrote many of these psalms, David did not know for certain if there would *be* a happy ending to his story. And so he put his trust in the Lord.

I was curious about the internal sense of this story about Jonathan and David, and whether it would have anything to do with trusting in God. So it was a little surprising at first to find that most of the passages in the Writings that reference this story simply point out the number “three.” The number three appears several times in this story - three days, three arrows, bowing three times - and *that* is what the Writings focus on in this chapter. At first I couldn’t understand how this was helpful. But the meaning of the number three actually offers a lot of guidance for how we can practice putting our trust in God. As we heard:

“In every work of God there is something first, something intermediate, and something last. ... This series of three can be called the purpose, the means, and the result, as well as being, becoming, and achieving full manifestation. ... Every work of God is complete and perfect in its final stage... The whole, which is a series of three, is in the final stage.... This is why three in the Word spiritually understood means complete, perfect, and all together.”  
(Doctrine of Sacred Scripture 27-29; see also AC 2788.7, 4495.4; AR 505.2; TCR 211)

At first it doesn’t seem to make sense. In this story, everything is *falling apart* for David. His life is *far* from complete, perfect, and all together. So why would the Writings be focusing on the meaning of the number three in *this* story?

It becomes more clear when we remember that this is the *middle* of the story of David. This is only part two of a three part story. We have not reached the end of the story yet. The *beginning* is when David is anointed as the next king. The *middle* is when everything falls apart for David. And the *end* is when he finally becomes king. It is in the *end* of the story that we find completion and perfection. But the *middle* of the story is still an important component in reaching that end.

And this is why it is important to put our trust in the Lord. Because only the Lord can see the end of our stories. We spend much of our lives in the middle stage, in which we can't see the outcomes and end results of our spiritual growth. But if we put our trust in the Lord, put our trust in the One who can not only *see* the end, but is called "*the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last*" (*Revelation 22:13*), then we can find some comfort. The Lord can see the bigger pictures of our lives in ways that we cannot. And if we can put our trust in the Lord, that He is leading us towards an end that is good, then that can help us to get through the middle parts when our lives sometimes feel like they are falling apart.

In all of the stories we read, and movies we watch, there is a beginning, a middle, and an end. The middle is usually when things go wrong in a story. But as an outside observer to someone else's story we don't tend to get sucked into the fear that the characters are experiencing during that time, because we *know* things will turn out alright in the end, especially if it is a story we have heard before. Instead, those middle parts of the stories can often be the most exciting. The times when a character is changing and growing and learning, and becoming a better version of themselves through the challenges they face. As it says in *Secrets of Heaven*:

"Before being reduced to order, it is very common for everything to fall into confusion or seeming chaos. This allows things that cling together poorly to separate, and when they have separated, the Lord arranges them in their place." (*Secrets of Heaven* 842.3)

This is the perspective the Lord has on *all* of our lives. And trusting in the Lord is partly about trying to see our life from a little bit of the Lord's perspective. As it says in *Divine Providence*:

"Divine providence is universal because it attends to the slightest details, and it is an infinite and eternal creation that the Lord has provided for himself by creating the universe. We see nothing of this universal providence, and if we did see it, it would look to our sight like the scattered piles and random heaps that passers-by see when a house is being built. The Lord, though, sees a magnificent palace constantly under construction and constantly being enlarged." (*Divine Providence* 203)

There's a saying that describes this concept beautifully, and this saying is: "Everything will be alright in the end, and if it's not alright, then it's not the end." I find that this helps me remember the power of the number three when I'm practicing trusting in God. When it feels like my life is scattered and falling apart, I can try to remember that I'm simply in part two of the trilogy of my spiritual story, and I just need to hang on until the happy ending. As the Lord said in *Matthew*: "*Whoever endures to the end shall be saved*" (*Matthew 24:13*).

Now this doesn't mean that if we are trusting in God then we will *never* feel fear, anxiety, grief, or worry. Those feelings are natural. A story wouldn't be a good story if the main character didn't feel some of those things. Our story from the Word today wouldn't make sense if David didn't feel fear for his life, and sadness about leaving behind his loved ones. The trust in God that we hear about in the *Psalms* is even more powerful when we remember the context in which they were written, and the fear and despair that David was feeling at the time. The Writings say that hitting points of despair is a natural and even useful part of our spiritual story, because it can remind us to turn back to the Lord. As it says in *Secrets of Heaven*:

“The second stage of people who are reforming, [is] a stage...where they despair.” (AC 2682.2) “They are usually kept in this despair in order to convince them eventually that they owe everything to the Lord's mercy.” (AC 2334; see also 2694, 5279, 6144, 8567)

I think part of the spiritual practice of trusting in God involves both our *hearts* needing to feel despair, while at the same time our *minds* needing to attempt to see the Lord's big-picture perspective on us. This blend of heart and mind is the dynamic composition of many of David's psalms.

Just as it was in the story of Jonathan and David, there are many “threes” in our story as well. In some ways, all three stages of our spiritual journey - beginning, middle, and end - are often happening all at once. The end of one thing in our life is often the beginning of another (see AC 4378). And we're always in the middle of some growth opportunity. And I think this is part of the Lord's providence as well. When we can look back on some aspect of our lives that *has* reached a satisfying conclusion, that can give us hope in some *other* area of our lives in which we have *not* yet reached the end or the conclusion. We can see the Lord's providence in retrospect (see DP 187), and then apply that concept to our life in the present moment, giving us hope for the future.

But there are also times when the good ending to our stories might not come in this world. And this is why knowledge about heaven can be so useful here and now. It gives us the ability to know that even if we have to wait many years, and struggle through many challenges, like David did, there is a good end that the Lord is preparing for us in the next life. The teaching that “*everyone is born for heaven*” (HH 329) helps me trust in the Lord. When I feel like I continue to struggle with the same bad habits, or when it feels like my spiritual growth has stalled, I can remember that I have not reached the *end* of my story yet in which I will see *more clearly* the angel I was born to become. In the meantime, I can trust that the Lord still has His eyes on that target, even if at times I might lose sight of it (see DP 333). As Jonathan said, “*is not the arrow beyond you?*” (1st Samuel 20:37). The truth about our futures *is* beyond our comprehension, but it is *not* beyond the Lord's comprehension. And so, as David modeled for us, we can put our trust in the Lord, even during the challenging middle parts of our stories, and we can try to remember that “everything will be alright in the end, and if it's not alright, then it's not the end.” As David said:

“My soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until *these* calamities have passed by.” (Psalm 57:1)

“*I would have lost heart*, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” (Psalm 27:13)

“When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path.” (Psalm 142.3)

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.... In God I have put my trust.” (Psalm 56:3-4)

*Amen.*

**Lessons:** 1st Samuel 20; Doctrine of Sacred Scripture 27-29