

Prayer 1

Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart

A

The voice of a sighing heart, its sobs and mournful cries,¹

I offer up to you, O Seer of Secrets,²

placing the fruits of my wavering mind³

as a savory sacrifice on the fire of my grieving soul⁴

to be delivered to you in the censer of my will.

Compassionate Lord, breathe in this offering and look more favorably on it than upon a more sumptuous sacrifice⁵ offered with rich smoke. Please find this simple string of words acceptable. Do not turn in disdain.

May this unsolicited gift reach you, this sacrifice of words⁶ from the deep mystery-filled chamber of my feelings, consumed in flames fueled by whatever grace I may have within me.⁷

As I pray, do not let these pleas annoy you, Almighty, like the raised hands of Jacob, whose irreverence was rebuked by Isaiah,⁸ nor let them seem like the impudence of Babylon criticized in the 72nd Psalm.

But let these words be acceptable as were the fragrant offerings in the tabernacle at Shiloh⁹ raised again by David on his return from captivity as the resting place for the ark of the covenant, a symbol for the restoration of my lost soul.

Notes

1 Cf. Ps. 6:7; See, also, Ps. 38:9-10, ("For my soul is filled with torment, and there is no cure for my body. I am tortured and laid low in the extreme, and I groan with the sighs of my heart."); Rom. 8:26 ("Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words, and he who searches the hearts of men knows what is in the mind of Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."). But See Is. 6:10.

2 Ps. 44:21.

3 Ps. 42:6 ("Why are you cast down, my soul?"); also incanted by the deacon during the Ascension to the Altar at the beginning of the Armenian Divine Liturgy.

4 Ps. 39:3.

5 Ps. 51:15-20, Am. 5:22.

6 Cf. Divine Liturgy, Hymn of the Angels "Hreshtakayin" ("myriads of angels worship you, yet it was pleasing to you to receive praise in a mysterious voice from human beings.").

7 Ps. 92:14 ("They [the righteous] shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing."); Cf. Pr. 11:25 ("The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."); See Lev. 1:8-13; For "fat as a choice offering," See, Lev. 4:8-9 ("and the fat that is upon them"); Philip. 4:18 ("I have all and abound: I am full . . . an odor of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God."); Lk. 6:46 ("For the good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good . . . for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."); But see, Is. 6:10.

8 Is. 1:15.

9 2 Sam. 6:17.

B

Because your stern judgment
echoes mightily in the valley of retribution,¹⁰
contradictory impulses in my soul
brace for battle like clashing mobs.
Crowds of thoughts strike each other, sword
against armor, evil against good,
ensnaring me for death, as in other times,
when your grace had not rescued me -
that grace of Christ, which Paul,
chosen among the apostles,
taught was greater than the law of Moses.¹¹

10 Jl. 3:14.

11 Acts 13:39, Rom. 8:2-3.

For as the Scripture says, "The day
of the Lord is upon us,"¹²
and in the narrow valley of Jehoshaphat¹³
on the banks of the Kidron,¹⁴
those small battle grounds
foreshadow on earth
victory in the life to come.
Thus, the kingdom of God in a visible form
has come already, charging me
on truthful testimony with wrongs
graver than those of the Edomites,¹⁵
Philistines and other barbarians -
wrongs that brought down the hand of God.
And whereas their sentences were measured in
years,
my transgressions will be punished without term.
As the prophet and the parable-teller warned,
the dungeon and shackles¹⁶
are already at my threshold to show me
here and now my eternal disgrace.

12 Jl. 2:1, 3:14.

13 2 Chr. 20:16, 20:26-27.

14 2 Chr. 15:16.

15 Is. 14:26-29, Jer. 47:1, 49:7-18.

16 Is. 24:17, Jer. 48:43.

Only you can work the miracle
to make life possible for a soul
so imperiled by doubt,
O Atoner for all, exalted beyond saying
in your boundless glory on high
forever and ever.
Amen.