

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion - Lectionary: 37 and 38

At the Procession with Palms – Gospel - [Matthew 21:1-11](#)

When Jesus and the disciples drew near Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tethered, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them here to me. And if anyone should say anything to you, reply, 'The master has need of them.' Then he will send them at once." This happened so that what had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled: Say to daughter Zion, "Behold, your king comes to you, meek and riding on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden." The disciples went and did as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the ass and the colt and laid their cloaks over them, and he sat upon them. The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest." And when he entered Jerusalem the whole city was shaken and asked, "Who is this?" And the crowds replied, "This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."

At the Mass - Reading I - [Isaiah 50:4-7](#)

The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them. Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24](#) R. (2a) My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Reading II - [Philippians 2:6-11](#)

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel - [Matthew 26:14—27:66](#) or [Matthew 27:11-54](#)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Summary:

The liturgical and scriptural sources for Palm Sunday present a profound narrative of suffering, obedience, and ultimate vindication. Central to this synthesis is **Psalm 22**, which serves as both a prophetic lament and a template for resilience. The documents highlight that Jesus' cry of abandonment on the cross is not an expression of broken faith, but an invocation of the entire Psalm's trajectory—moving from deep physical and spiritual agony to a universal proclamation of God's sovereignty.

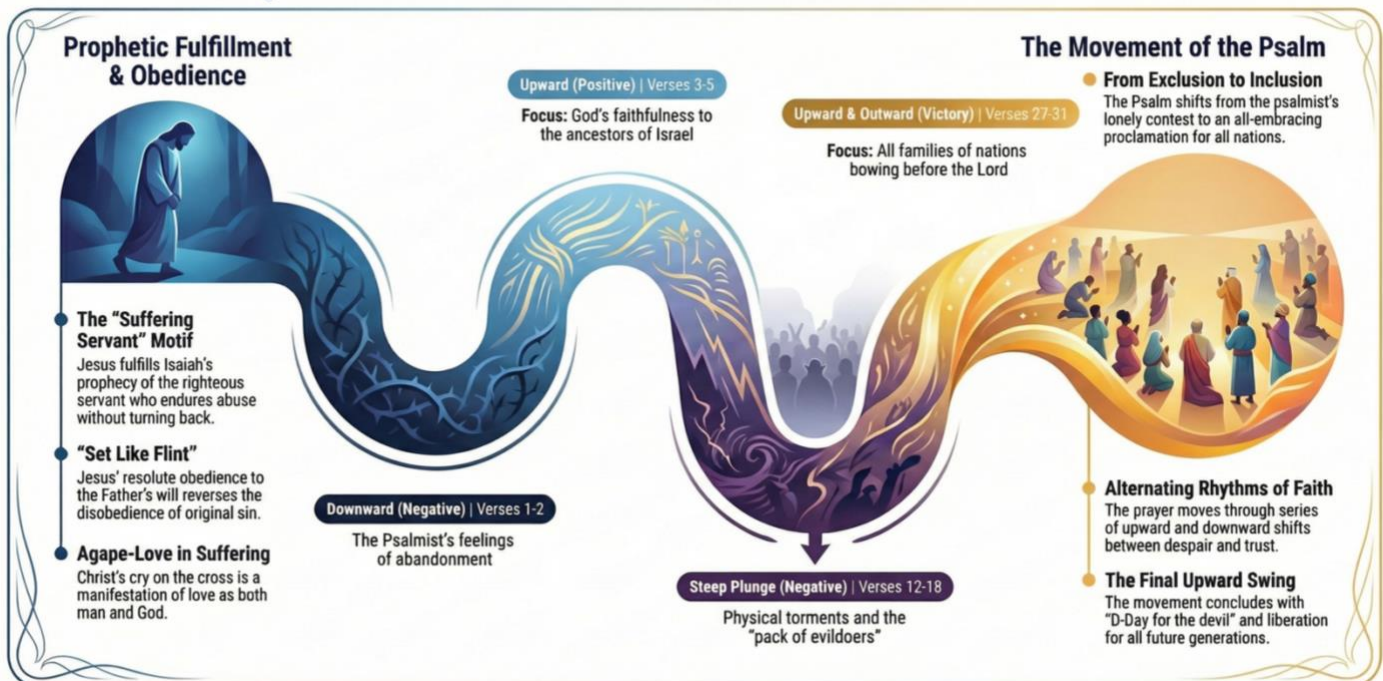
Key takeaways include:

- **The Model of the Suffering Servant:** Both Isaiah and the Christological hymn in Philippians emphasize a "face set like flint"—a resolute, obedient commitment to a mission despite humiliation and physical abuse.
- **The Theological Reversal:** Christ's passion is framed as a "D-Day" for evil, where his "yes" to the Father reverses the "no" of original sin (Adam).
- **Integrity and Servant Leadership:** The scriptural themes translate into practical professional virtues, advocating for leadership grounded in "emptying the self," naming harsh realities without spiraling, and maintaining integrity when unobserved.

The Call to Personal Transformation

Reflecting on the sermon of Saint Andrew of Crete, individuals should not merely offer external symbols (like palm branches) but should "spread themselves" before God. This involves being "clothed in his grace" and presenting the "real rewards of his victory"—souls that take the place of welcoming branches.

The Rhythmic Path: Psalm 22 and the Passion of Christ



These words, ***My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?***, comprise the opening lines of Psalm 22. In its entirety it vividly describes individual suffering and as we heard in the Gospel reading, became the prayer of Jesus in the midst of his suffering on the Cross of our salvation.¹ They, as Pope Benedict XVI said, lean into a “moving prayer with a human density and theological richness that make it one of the most frequently prayed and studied Psalms in the entire Psalter.”² These verses express, not so much a complaint about God’s silence and distance, but the anguish we feel when we have appealed to God and there seems to be no response. So, praying with the psalmist and Jesus on the Cross is to finally declare that our trust in God is not shaken.³ This psalm prayer on the lips and in the heart of Christ is the manifestation in word and spirit of the agape-love so intensely experienced in Jesus as both giver and receiver / man and God. He embodies in himself the experience of the Israelites and their relationship with God. He gives voice to the prayer of every person who has ever suffered, sought mercy, and been saved. He prays as one of us.

Therefore, we should not think that Jesus has lost his way when he cries out to God. Rather, we should recognize that he is invoking the whole context of Psalm 22. He is inviting the bystanders, and all of us today, to understand what is happening on the cross. We are being called to trust God especially in the depths of our suffering. St. Thomas Aquinas clarifies for us that Christ speaks “by way of similitude,” forsaken in passion but not union or grace.⁴ We recall this truth in the institution narrative of Eucharistic Prayer IV which sets the context for the Last Supper and Christ's ultimate sacrifice. It highlights Jesus's devotion to his disciples before the Passion. “*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*”⁵ In so doing, Jesus identified with his Father’s will, namely, that all come to be aware of God’s unconditional love for them. “...*having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end: and while they were at supper he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his disciples...*”. connecting the Passover meal to the ultimate act of love—the crucifixion—which is then made present through the Eucharist.

The first reading reminds us that Jesus was not just a ‘good intentioned’ teacher who suffered harsh treatment, but rather, that this plan proceeded from the Father and the obedient Son. Jesus, his heart, mind, and actions were ‘set like flint’⁶ upon this advent of our salvation. He knows that beyond his death there is victory. There is thus a significant connection between the first reading and Psalm 22, with extended connections throughout Isaiah’s Suffering Servant passages (Isaiah 40–55). Both passages in today’s readings describe the mistreatment of a righteous figure—Psalm 22:6–8 and Isaiah 50:6 depict comparable forms of abuse. More dramatically, the piercing of hands and feet in Psalm 22:16 can be compared with Isaiah 53:5’s description of the suffering servant pierced for transgressions, yet is ultimately vindicated by God, leading to a vision where the entire earth acknowledges God’s sovereignty, and salvation is proclaimed to future generations. Christian interpretation sees in this connection a deepening of the psalm’s significance for understanding Christ’s passion—the suffering servant motif in Isaiah finds its experiential voice in Psalm 22’s cry of abandonment and ultimate triumph, making them natural companions in Holy Week’s liturgy.⁷

¹ James Gavigan, Brian McCarthy, and Thomas McGovern, eds., [Psalms and the Song of Solomon](#), The Navarre Bible (Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers, 2003), 91.

² General Audience of 14 September 2011, Pope Benedict XVI

³ James Gavigan, Brian McCarthy, and Thomas McGovern, eds., [Psalms and the Song of Solomon](#), The Navarre Bible (Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers, 2003), 92.

⁴ Commentary on Matthew Thomas Aquinas 1272

⁵ John 15:13

⁶ Isaiah 50:7; Luke 9:51

⁷ Henry L. Novello, [Setting Our Hearts upon the Deep: Acknowledging Lament in Christian Life, Worship, and Thought](#) (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2022).

After his death, Christians interpreted in messianic fashion, Psalm 22, Psalm 69, and the ‘Servant Songs’ found in Isaiah, traditionally identified as being found in chapters 42, 49, 50, and 52–53.⁸ All four Gospel passion narratives contain quotations of or allusions to Psalm 22.⁹ They believed that Christ died in prayer, citing these suffering servant scriptures. Psalm 22 and Psalm 69 are intimately connected as two key “Passion Psalms” in the Catholic tradition, expressing the lament of an innocent sufferer amid profound physical and spiritual agony, yet culminating in trust, vindication, and praise. The Jews, for their part, saw themselves corporately as the nation of God to which these suffering Servant scriptures referred. Jesus, takes this identity to himself, representing Israel and all the nations gathered. Christians therefore see these passages as applying to Jesus’ prophetic fulfillment in his passion and death on the cross, achieving salvation. “Jesus, retaining the Beatific Vision, prays these psalms to reveal his identity as the suffering Messiah, drawing Israel’s drama into eschatological fulfillment.”¹⁰ St. Paul, in the second reading affirms this understanding.

The second reading is an early Christian hymn filled with Old Testament echoes, and the movement of verses 6–8 reflects the Servant of God passage in Isaiah 53—the same suffering servant tradition that connects to Psalm 22. Jesus emerges in this hymn as the Servant who willingly humbled himself and obediently walked the pain filled path to death on the cross. It also adds a crucial dimension absent from the lament itself. While Psalm 22 moves from abandonment to vindication, Philippians explicitly frames this as exaltation and universal acknowledgment. God’s exaltation of Jesus and his unique honor connect to Isaiah 53, while the concluding statements invoke the kingship of God, drawing especially on Isaiah 45:23, which Second Isaiah combines with God’s kingship—a motif indicating that all nations acknowledge God’s rule and share in salvation. The use of Psalm 22 in Philippians parallels its function in the Synoptic Gospels’ passion narratives, suggesting that these three texts form a unified theological witness to Christ’s suffering, vindication, and universal lordship—moving from the psalmist’s cry of abandonment through the servant’s obedience to the exalted reign of the Lord over all creation.¹¹

The prayerful rhythmic movement of the Psalm “is characterized by two types of poetic movement: a series of alternating shifts downward and upward (negative and positive feelings), and a sustained shift from exclusion to inclusion in the final upward swing.”¹² The sentiment of the final upward swing of the prayer foresees fulfillment in Christ’s victory over death, over original sin. Jesus, through his passion, death, and resurrection, reversed the disobedience of original sin by obeying his Father’s will in spite of all the devil’s attempts to thwart him: The betrayal of Judas, the abandonment of his apostles, the false accusations, the condemnation, the humiliation, the scourging and crowing with thorns, the torture of crucifixion - all of these sufferings were the devil’s attempts to get Jesus to say “no” to his Father, just as he had gotten Adam and Eve to say “no”. But Jesus is victorious. He continued to love, forgive, and obey through it all. Unlike Adam, unlike virtually every other person in history, Jesus can say, “I have not rebelled”. His obedience establishes a beachhead in this world: Jesus’ Passion is D-Day for the devil, and liberation for us. This is the victory we celebrate.

The victory is salvific, but there remains the constant necessity of decision to live the freedom for which we were made or to reject it. Those who choose to remain in him will love as he loves us, not prioritizing their own good over the good of others. They will speak the eternal truths and live their Christian vocation

⁸ The Suffering Servant and the Passion of Jesus Communio: International Catholic Review Vol. 30 Christoph Dohmen

⁹ Gregory Vall, *Ecclesial Exegesis: A Synthesis of Ancient and Modern Approaches to Scripture*, ed. Pablo T. Gadenz, Gregory Y. Glazov, and Jeffrey L. Morrow, Verbum Domini (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 26, 37.

¹⁰ Jesus’ Cry on the Cross and His Beatific Vision Vol. 5 No. 3 Thomas Joseph White, OP St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Steubenville, OH 2007 AD; page 7

¹¹ Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation: From the Old Testament to Origen*, ed. Susan Ackerman and Tom Thatcher, trans. Leo G. Perdue, Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009)

¹² Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reayburn, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 212

avoiding the temptations to live their own truth. They will embrace their identity, authentically being his disciple doing what is right when nobody is looking. They will take the moral high road, without inflating themselves in pride, participate in the culture but also seek the necessary changes and when personal setbacks occur due to the inclination to sin, they will cry out to Lord for forgiveness, thereby filled once again with sanctifying grace.

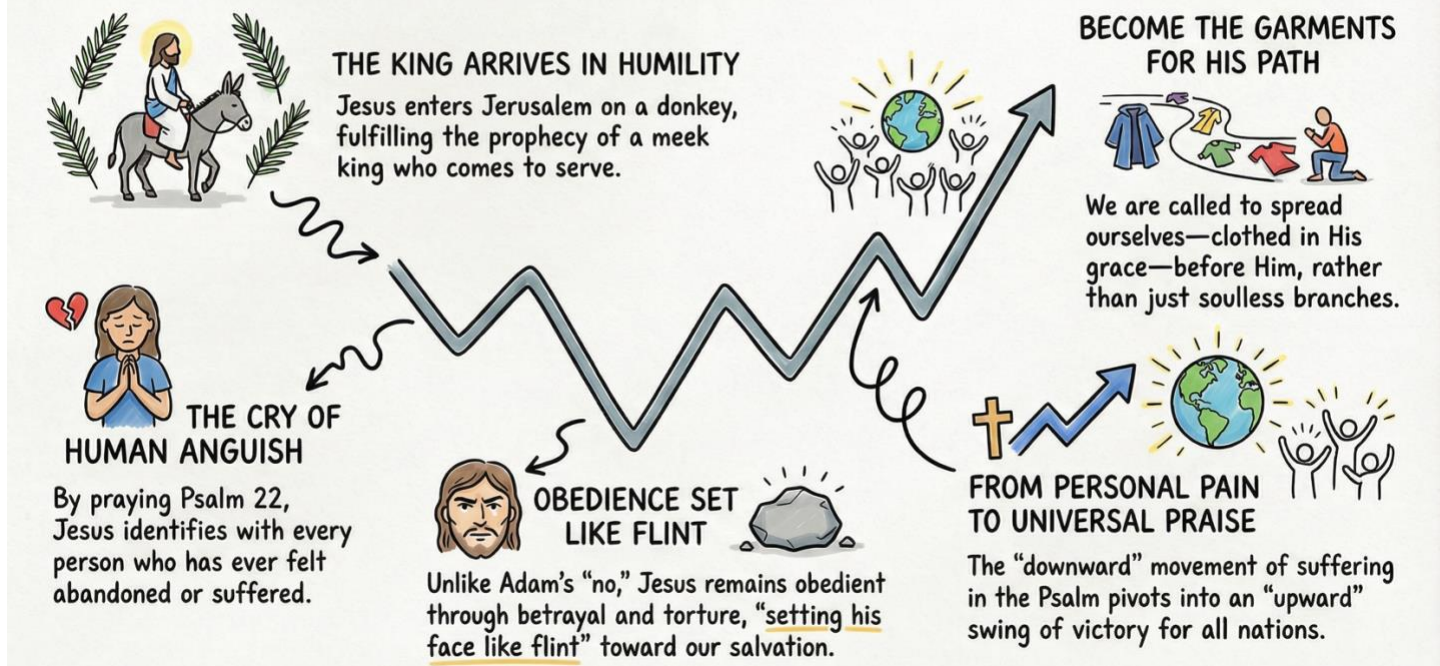
And so, armed with the virtues of faith, hope, and charity with Christ we pray Psalm 22. With more understanding and conviction move on to pray Psalm 23. And with resolute conviction-our hearts set like flint-we can live the truth of Psalm 119. When we can see ourselves and our faith, united with Christ in these Psalms, then we will appropriately celebrate the ritual symbolic actions of Palm Sunday but consider all the essential truth declared by Saint Andrew of Crete, bishop; *So let us spread before his feet, not garments or soulless olive branches, which delight the eye for a few hours and then wither, but ourselves, clothed in his grace, or rather, clothed completely in him. We who have been baptized into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before him. Now that the crimson stains of our sins have been washed away in the saving waters of baptism and we have become white as pure wool, let us present the conqueror of death, not with mere branches of palms but with the real rewards of his victory. Let our souls take the place of the welcoming branches as we join today in the children's holy song: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel.*¹³

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Agape-love	The intense, sacrificial love experienced by Jesus as both giver and receiver, man and God; a manifestation of unconditional love.
Beatific Vision	The ultimate direct self-communication of God to the individual; the source states Jesus retained this while praying the psalms on the cross.
Daughter Zion	A prophetic term used to refer to Jerusalem or its people, specifically in the context of the king's arrival.
Eschatological	Relating to the final stages of divine history or the ultimate destiny of humanity; the fulfillment of Israel's drama in Christ.
Face Like Flint	A metaphor for resolute, unwavering determination and steady resolve in the face of adversity or suffering.
Hosanna	A shout of praise or adoration, literally meaning "save us," used by the crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem.
Kenosis	(Implicit in "emptied himself") The act of Christ's self-emptying in becoming human and being obedient unto death.
Messianic	Relating to the Messiah; used to describe how Christians interpreted the Psalms and Isaiah after Jesus' death.
Passion Psalms	A group of psalms, including Psalm 22 and Psalm 69, that express the lament of an innocent sufferer and are central to the Catholic Passion tradition.
Servant Songs	Passages found in Isaiah (chapters 42, 49, 50, and 52–53) identifying a righteous figure who suffers for the sake of others and is vindicated by God.
Similitude	A comparison or likeness; used by Thomas Aquinas to explain that Jesus was "forsaken" in appearance/passion but not in actual union with God.
Synoptic Gospels	The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which contain parallel narratives of Christ's passion and use of Psalm 22.

¹³ From a sermon by Saint Andrew of Crete, bishop (Oratio 9 in ramos palmarum: PG 97, 990-994)

FROM ABANDONMENT TO TRIUMPH: THE PATH OF PALM SUNDAY



Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why so far from my call for help, from my cries of anguish? My God, I call by day, but you do not answer; by night, but I have no relief. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the glory of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted and you rescued them. To you they cried out and they escaped; in you they trusted and were not disappointed. But I am a worm, not a man, scorned by men, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they curl their lips and jeer; they shake their heads at me: "He relied on the LORD—let him deliver him; if he loves him, let him rescue him." For you drew me forth from the womb, made me safe at my mother's breasts. Upon you I was thrust from the womb; since my mother bore me you are my God. Do not stay far from me, for trouble is near, and there is no one to help.

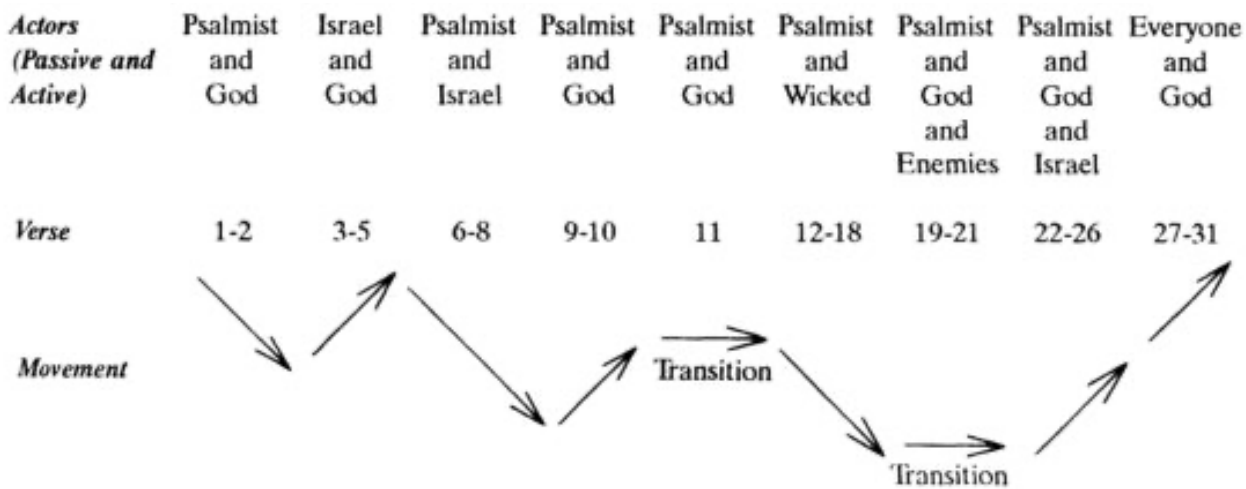
Many bulls surround me; fierce bulls of Bashan encircle me. They open their mouths against me, lions that rend and roar. Like water my life drains away; all my bones are disjointed. My heart has become like wax, it melts away within me. As dry as a potsherd is my throat; my tongue cleaves to my palate; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs surround me; a pack of evildoers closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and my feet I can count all my bones. They stare at me and gloat; they divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots. But you, LORD, do not stay far off; my strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the grip of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth, my poor life from the horns of wild bulls.

Then I will proclaim your name to my brethren; in the assembly I will praise you: "You who fear the LORD, give praise! All descendants of Jacob, give honor; show reverence, all descendants of Israel! For he has not spurned or disdained the misery of this poor wretch, Did not turn away from me, but heard me when I cried out. I will offer praise in the great assembly; my vows I will fulfill before those who fear him. The poor will eat their fill; those who seek the LORD will offer praise. May your hearts enjoy life forever!"

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD; All the families of nations will bow low before him. For kingship belongs to the LORD, the ruler over the nations. All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God; All who have gone down into the dust will kneel in homage. And I will live for the LORD; my descendants will serve you. The generation to come will be told of the Lord, that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn the deliverance you have brought. ¹⁴

¹⁴ *New American Bible*, Revised Edition (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Ps 22:2–32.

Transitions between the movements are well marked. The opening double question (RSV) and verse 2 express the negative feelings, the downwardness of the psalmist in relation to God; for example, “forsaken,” “far from helping,” “not answer,” and “no rest.” In verses 3–5 the feeling goes suddenly upward as it shifts away from the psalmist to Israel and to God. But in verses 6–8 the direction turns downward again, with the psalmist and Israel in focus. In the following two verses the movement turns upward again as the psalmist reflects upon God’s care for him at birth, and in verse 11 his feelings level out as he thinks of the dangers about him. This represents a transition to the steep plunge he takes as he complains of dangers and of his physical torments in verses 12–18, the longest sustained negative section in the poem. Again this sharp movement glides to a halt as he asks God to “help,” “deliver,” and “save” him. From this point the only direction is upward and outward. In verse 22 the psalmist promises to praise God. In verse 23 the subject expands to Israel, in verse 27 it is “all the ends of the earth,” “the family of nations,” and in verse 31 it is “people not yet born” who will know God’s salvation. The psalmist’s depression and hope, which struggled in lonely, uncertain contest, are finally resolved in an all-embracing proclamation. The movement may be diagrammed as follows:¹⁵



Leading When You Feel Forsaken



Professional character is forged in the gap between “doing the right thing” and “receiving the expected reward.”



Name reality without spiraling.

Use honest language for confusion or fatigue to start leading through the hardship.



Don't let popularity dictate your ethics.

Anchor your decisions in mission and human dignity rather than the “crowd.”



Practice steady, “flint-like” resolve.

Maintain calm persistence when your foundations are solid, even if the outcome isn't guaranteed.



Choose servant leadership over self-protection.

Absorb noise without passing it down and prioritize the team's good over your ego.



Let setbacks refine, not define you.

Forgive quickly and return to work with clearer priorities and a steadier heart.

¹⁵ Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reayburn, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Psalms*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 212.