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Psalm 117 (118) in the Roman Missal and in the Liturgy of the Hours

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ABBREVIATIONS

- CCC = *Catechism of the Catholic Church: with modifications from the editio typica*, Image Book Doubleday, New York–London–Toronto–Sydney–Auckland 1995.
- DzP = *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Christiana* (1st Ed.), diretto da A. di BERNARDINO, Marietti, Casale Monferrato 1983.
- GS = *Graduale simplex*, editio typica altera, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1975.
- IGLH = Istitutio Generalis Liturgiae Horarum
- IGMR = Istitutio Generalis Missalis Romani
- LE = *Missale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Œcumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli Pp. VI promulgatum Ioannis Pauli Pp. II cura recognitum. Lectionarium*, 3 volumes, editio iuxta typicam alteram emendatam, Midwest Theological Forum, Italy 2008.
- LH = *Officium Divinum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Œcumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli PP. VI promulgatum. Liturgia Horarum iuxta Ritum Romanum*, 4 volumes, editio typica, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Città del Vaticano 1975.
- MR = *Missale Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Œcumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum auctoritate Pauli Pp. VI promulgatum Ioannis Pauli Pp. II cura recognitum*, editio typica tertia, Typis Vaticanis, 2002.
- NDzL = *Nuovo Dizionario di Liturgia* (3rd Ed.), a cura di D. SARTORE – A. TRIACCA, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo 1988.

INTRODUCTION

The latest document published by the International Theological Commission (*Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, March 8, 2012) recalls the vocation of theologians in their quest of a deeper understanding of the Church's treasury of faith. Once again, the basic element of theology has been pointed out in a clear and orderly manner. Among these elements, the document recalls the two sources of Christian faith, the Sacred Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church. This plurality, however, forms in one reality, since they are in intimate unity. The present study moves in this line of thought, in considering the inherent between the written Tradition and the living and lived-out Tradition realized particularly through the liturgical tradition of the Church. Thus a biblical passage "quoted" from a liturgical book, as the title clearly exemplifies, is a testimony to this inherent unity.

A. Objectives

This research on the use of Psalm 117 in the Eucharistic celebration and in the celebration of the liturgy of the Hours intends to make a deeper study on the relation between Word of God and Liturgy. However, more than a theoretical study, this research intends to unfold the richness of this aspect from the perspective of the celebration itself. Within the variety of choices, this study focuses on a specific part of Sacred Scriptures, i.e. Psalm 117, with the intention of highlighting the wealth of theological meaning contained in this passage of the Scriptures. Being a research in the field of liturgical theology, this study focuses on two dynamic spheres of the theology, the Eucharistic celebration, which is the fount and apex of the Christian life, and the Liturgy of the Hours, where the psalms have a singular role in the celebration of the divine worship. The specificity of this study lies in the fact that it tries to underline the theology contained in a living reality, the liturgy which is being celebrated continually by the Church.

This research uses as its premise the relationship between Scriptures and Liturgy without presuming to be exhaustive in the process, since this is not the main subject of the study. In fact, it also makes use of the exegetical studies on the psalm under examination, yet it does not assume the exegetical method since it has as its starting point the celebration itself. With regards to the liturgical use of Psalm 117, this investigation limits itself to the two liturgical celebrations above mentioned, knowing that it is also present in other liturgical celebrations. Moreover, although it takes into consideration the use of the said psalm in the liturgical tradition of the Church, this study limits itself to the current liturgical practice.

B. Method of Research

The first stage of the research consists of gathering together the different uses of Psalm 117 in the liturgy – in the Missal as antiphon; in the Lectionary as Responsorial psalm; in the Gradual as verses; and finally in the Breviary where it is often used entirely. In the second stage, a research is conducted to identify sources – books, studies, articles – which treat the theme on the relationship between Bible and Liturgy, and in particular on the relationship between the Psalms and the liturgical celebration. Also, a collection of exegetical works on the said psalm is done, in order to take into account the reflections of exegetes on the matter. In the third stage, a research into the different commentaries on this specific psalm by the Fathers of the Church is realized, since very often, these Fathers had commented on the psalm within a liturgical context. And also, a brief survey on the use of Psalm 117 in the liturgical tradition of the Church is done in order to identify the elements which are constantly present in the Church's understanding of the psalm throughout history.

A fundamental principle followed in this research is the ecclesial interpretation of the psalm. The Church in her use of this biblical text applies her own interpretation through the selection of verses or the use of antiphons. And by the same operation, she highlights the different contents in different occasions. The exposition of the research follows another fundamental principle – to work on and starting with the liturgical texts. This means that a careful analysis of the subject includes the ritual context and the liturgical milieu, i.e. considering the text in relation to other elements – antiphons, gestures, other texts, ritual and literary forms.

C. Contents of the Study

This study is divided into three parts. The first part is aimed to introduce the reader to the theme by expounding on the relationship of Scriptures and Liturgy, with a particular consideration on the psalms, and by presenting a survey on the patristic and liturgical traditions regarding Psalm 117. Having done thus, the second part presents the actual usage of the said psalm in order to highlight the different themes present therein, thus it is arranged in a rather thematic manner. Finally, the third part offers a liturgical-theological analysis of the psalm, of its content, wherein this research attempts to offer its particular contribution to the theological research.

PART I: TOWARDS A COMPREHENSION OF PSALM 117

Before entering into the analysis of Psalm 117 according to its use in the Liturgy of the Eucharist and in the Liturgy of the Hours, it is indispensable to present, no matter how briefly, the relationship Scripture – Liturgy, and Psalm – Liturgy. Then a short presentation of the history of this particular psalm in the liturgical tradition of the Church may help in understanding better its theological nuances.

1.1. Scriptures and Liturgy

An in depth understanding of the richness of meaning acquired by a psalm when it is used within a liturgical celebration cannot do away with the consideration on the intimate connection between sacred Scriptures and the liturgy. What influence has the Scriptures on the liturgical celebration and vice versa? P. Bradshaw proposes four general functions of the Bible in the liturgical celebration.¹ First of all, it is didactical. The Word of God instructs the faithful of the history of God's relationship with his chosen people and of how he continues to accompany them with his blessings. This is very true within the liturgy, for it is in the liturgical celebration that the people of God listens to the proclamation of the Word, and is instructed for a more profound understanding of Scriptures, and is encouraged to the habit of reading the scriptures at home and living it out through life. Second, the Bible is kyregmatic or anamnetical. Therein is contained the profession of faith of those who were faithful to God (from Abraham to the disciples of Jesus). Moreover, it serves as the living memory of the wonders accomplished by God. In the liturgical celebration, the Word of God has the power to move those who listen to it into a close relation with the event being described. This is true for the Easter Sunday celebration in Jerusalem at the tomb of the Lord (the *Anastasis*) during the fourth century. But this is also true in the celebration of the Easter Vigil at a mountain parish in the twenty-first century. Third, the Word of God is paracletic. In the liturgical celebration, the proclamation of Scriptures interrogates the listeners on their present needs and proposes to them figures, which can be easily appropriated to one's personal experience. The numerous treasures of the Word always have something for every reader or listener. Fourth, it is doxological. Sacred Scriptures is full of the praises from the lips of men, of words which bless the Lord. In a most particular way, the book of Psalms is rich with these songs of praise to the Lord. Thus Scriptures not only speak to men

¹ Cf. P. BRADSHAW, *Perspectives Historiques sur l'utilisation della Bible dans la liturgie*, «La Maison-Dieu», 189 (1992), 79-104.

something about God, but also the other way around, they can be used in order to speak to God in praise and thanksgiving.

One can deduce from this that there is a very intrinsic and intimate connection between Scriptures and Liturgy, a connection almost to the point of identification. This connection between Scriptures and Liturgy can be developed in three dimensions. First, there is the fundamental principle which gives origin to these realities, namely the Incarnation. Second, an overview of the history of Israel can show the inherent reciprocal orientation of these two elements. Third, the reality is revealed in its fullness with the coming of the Lord, the Word made flesh, and the history of the Church shows its definitive configuration into a mutual correspondence.

1.1.1. Foundation: the principle of the Incarnation

The basic principle which is at the basis of the intrinsic and inseparable relation between sacred Scriptures and the liturgical celebration is the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The eternal Word was made human flesh. Religions of ancient civilizations arrived to postulate a mysterious divinity, incomprehensible, and unpredictable. However the people of Israel, with the help of revelation, are able to present a God who is both understandable and at the same time ineffable. God has revealed his word to Abraham and the patriarchs, to the prophets, to Israel as a people. But nobody has seen God. At most they only saw his shadow. This progress of knowing the divine has reached a higher level, but not the apex. Only later will it be realized to the full.

«At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the ages».²

Thus, the Church affirms that «Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself».³ Moreover, Jesus makes himself also present in the Scriptures, since he is the fulfillment of the entire Scriptures – an idea particularly frequent in the New Testament. This presence extends far beyond, since he promised also to be present wherever Christians gather together in his name.⁴ Just as the Word of God, the eternal Wisdom which was present in the act of creation, has taken visible form, so also the sacred

² Hb 1: 1-2.

³ *Dei Verbum* 4.

⁴ Cf. Mt 18: 20.

Scriptures, which contains the history of God's plan of salvation, become a real presence of the Son of God when it is proclaimed in a liturgical celebration.

This principle of the Incarnation, acquires clarity and definitiveness through the progress of time, in the rich history of the chosen people of God, attested by the Old Testament writings, and more so in the richer experiences of the sons of God through adoption, as can be observed in the books of the New Testament. This two-fold testimony is best described as a relationship of "promise and fulfillment".

1.1.2. Development: the promise in the Old Testament

The history of the election of Israel during the period of the patriarchs presents the choice of God for Israel among the nations to make it a nation for himself. During the time of the patriarchs, God has established an alliance with the tribe of Abraham, and continually renews it through various generations with the use of sacrifices or offerings.

At the time of Moses, God not only showed his faithfulness with marvelous works in the land of Egypt, but also – and more importantly – He established a priestly order, which in fact consisted of an entire tribe. This time, the renewal of the alliance is not through animal sacrifices, but principally through the proclamation of God's Word. And the priesthood being established is meant to receive the Word of God.⁵ The Tent, being prescribed in the Book of Leviticus is not a place for sacrifices but a place where the Ark of the Covenant is to be kept, which in turn contains God's Words. Moreover, it was part of God's plan of salvation that his people Israel should pass forty years in the desert, a place of silence which favors the listening to God's Words.

When Israel got into the Promised Land the people wanted to constitute a kingdom, the instauration of the monarchy, and later on the erection of the Temple in Jerusalem. God gave in to their request, but at the same time continued to show his faithfulness to the alliance through the prophets. These are ambassadors of God, who delivered his words to Israel. Many times, their testimony was in contrast with the priesthood developed around the liturgy of the temple, the offering of sacrifices. Thus, with the prophets as his instruments, God continually reminded his people that the real priesthood and the real sacrifice is the assimilation of his Word, by

⁵ Cf. Ex 19: 4-6.

listening and by putting it to practice. The real meaning of priesthood and sacrifice is manifested in its fullness through the person of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was accused and put to death by the priests of the temple, thus assuming in himself the prophecy of the suffering servant and the supreme sacrifice in reparation for men's sins.

1.1.3. Reality: the fulfilment in the New Testament

The suffering undergone by the Son of God, in his effort to reconcile obedience to God's word and the cult as sacrifice, not only resolved the apparent contradiction between the two, but also united them into one perfect act of worship, that of "spirit and truth".⁶ Fulfilling in himself the prophecies, assuming the role of a servant of Yahweh (himself a prophet despised and condemned), and offering himself on the cross as a perfect oblation to God for the sins of mankind, Jesus on Calvary was the Word spoken by the Father to all humanity, the perfect witness to his unending mercy and his faithfulness to his alliance with Israel. At the same time he is the one and only sacrifice which reconciled the whole of mankind to God.

After his resurrection, with which he transcends the limits of human mortality, Jesus ordered his disciples to go out into the world to preach the good news and to baptize.⁷ This passage highlights two important aspects of the new people of God and their intrinsic unity. The work of evangelization, with which the Good News is being announced to the ends of the earth until the return of the Master, is the new and full reality of the prophets of the Old Testament. The command to baptize in the name of the Trinity is the new priestly order, for by baptism one becomes member of the Church, a nation of priests.⁸ The apparent contradiction present in the Old Testament is not applicable any more in this new order. Not only that, most importantly, the original harmony of the Exodus – where priesthood was above all acceptance of God's word while sacrifice is the personal adhesion to God's will – has been restored once again.

But it should also be noted that in the course of the history of the Church, the tendency towards imbalance is also present. The medieval tendency to prefer the sacramental celebration over the proclamation of the word (this is very obvious when one notes the almost total absence of homilies in contrast to their abundance during the patristic period) culminated in the protestant

⁶ Cf. Jn 4: 23.

⁷ Cf. Mt 28: 19-20.

⁸ Cf. 1Pt 2: 9.

reformation, which went to the other extreme (*sola scriptura*). Aware of these facts, the actual liturgical discipline tries once again to restore the equilibrium, since both elements are never absent in liturgical celebrations, for the better reception and the greater profit of the faithful. Thus one can affirm that the Bible is a “liturgical book”.⁹

To conclude this section, it must be noted that the Word of God, made actual and perfected through the course of history of the two testaments, continues in its process of actualization. At a certain point the Word of God was put into writing, thus the origin of the Scriptures. This written tradition is preserved most especially through the liturgy, which makes abundant reference as well as interprets it. Therefore, in the liturgy, the Scriptures once again become words spoken by God to men and vice versa.¹⁰

1.2. Psalms and Liturgy

The Book of Psalms, despite its popularity as a poetic text of great human relevance, is first of all Word of God. Though it may not belong to the Torah, the books of the alliance and the law, it contains a beautiful remembrance of the things wrought by God’s hands and the praise for the eternal mercies of the Lord. It may not belong to the prophetic writings; yet from the very first psalm, it exhorts man to follow the way of goodness and continually denounces the way of sin that leads to perdition. Structurally speaking, it cannot be a book on the History of the chosen people, but it has “historical psalms”.¹¹ It rightly belongs to the wisdom literature, wherein the love of God’s command, the faithfulness of the Lord, and the praise for God’s mighty deeds become one rich prayer. Moreover, the psalms have a special characteristic which is uncommon to the Old Testament, its poetic nature. There are a few canticles inserted into the different books,¹² but they do not characterize the book to which they belong. The psalms however, are songs by definition. Therefore everything in it is poetry.¹³

⁹ Cf. C. FLORISTAN SAMANES, *La Biblia y la liturgia. Fuentes de Espiritualidad cristiana*, «Studies in Spirituality», 2 (1992), 52.

¹⁰ Cf. M. ROBERT, *La liturgie, voix de l’Ecriture*, «Le Vie Spirituelle», 149 (1995), 265-268.

¹¹ G. RAVASI, *Il Libro dei Salmi*, vol.1, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna (1999), 63-64.

¹² For example: Ex 15: 1-8; Nm 21: 17-18; Jg 5: 1-31; Dt 32: 1-43; 1Sam 18: 6-7.

¹³ There are various classifications of Hebrew poetry. Since it is not the main argument of this research, it suffices to refer to other Bibliographies for further details: L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Manual de poética Hebrea*, Ediciones Cristianidad, Madrid 1987; W. G. E. WATSON, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (4th Ed.), Sheffield Academic Press, London 2001.

While all of the Old Testament speaks of God's revelation to Israel – that which can be called the “descending element” – the psalms has a particular characteristic which may not be that evident in other books. This particularity lies in what can be called the “ascending element” of this alliance, which is man's addressing God in prayer. In fact, the book of Psalms is not only the Word of God; it is also the Word of the People of God. In this sense, the classification of the psalms into different families is very indicative of the four-fold nature of prayer: praise, supplication, forgiveness, and thanksgiving. The family of psalms called “hymns” as well as those called “liturgies” highlight the doxological aspect of man's prayer to God. Some psalms belong to the family of “supplication”, which is two fold: the supplication to the Lord in times of grave necessity (sickness, persecution, etc.) or the prayer of a sinner who asks for forgiveness. Still other psalms belong to the family of “thanksgiving”, which present a wide variety of motivations, all for the purpose of giving thanks to the Lord for his unending mercy.¹⁴ And it is precisely for this reason that the psalms enjoy ever since great prestige as to be the most cited Old-Testament book.

These aspects of the Psalter are important causes, particularly in its insertion in the liturgy because in the liturgical celebration, the people praise God, ask for mercy and favors, as well as give thanks using divinely-inspired words.

1.2.1. Christifying the psalms

The peculiar characteristic of the psalms is the frequent usage of a dialogical structure, the use of the first person singular “I” and the second person singular “you”. In the majority of cases, the psalmist is the speaker and addresses his words to God. Sometimes, it is God himself who is addressing his words to man. It is very interesting to note that the dialogue is between God and man. Certainly there are some exemptions, wherein the psalmist addresses his words to others, be they persons, animals, or the whole of creation, inviting them to join in the song of praise. This is a basic reason why the book of Psalms didn't have any difficulty whatsoever in being assimilated into Christian liturgy, just as it is well esteemed in the Jewish liturgy.

¹⁴ A more organic exposition of the different families of psalms can be found in G. RAVASI, *Il Libro dei Salmi*, vol.1, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna (1999), 46-65. Also in M. TABET, *Introduzione alla lettura dei Libri Poetici e Sapienziali dell'Antico Testamento* (2nd Ed.), Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, Roma (2000), 68-88.

But perhaps the most important principle for the reception of the psalms into Christian liturgy is the fulfillment of the scriptures in Christ.¹⁵ Jesus himself explains it to his disciples on their way to Emmaus.¹⁶ This process of “*christification* of the psalms” has been developed by the tradition of the Church in a dual direction: the Christological interpretation “from below” and “from above”.¹⁷

Christological interpretation “from below” refers to the identification of the psalmist (or the person in the psalm) to the person of Christ. This means that the Jesus is addressing God the Father in praying the psalms. First and foremost, Jesus as a member of the Jewish people is a constant appropriator of the psalms in his prayers. Perhaps the most notable is the use of Psalm 21 in the story of the passion of the Lord. Later on, the early Fathers of the Church didn’t hesitate to put into the mouths of Jesus those psalms which describe the travails of the servant of Yahweh or the suffering just man. In this context the “I” of the psalm is the Lord Jesus himself while the “You” is God the Father.

Christological interpretation “from above” refers to a higher level of interpretation, in as much as it changes the subjects of the dialogue. Here Christ is not the psalmist anymore, but rather the “you” to whom the psalmist directs his words. The Jewish interpretation identifies this second person singular with YHWH, the Lord. The Christian applies it to Jesus Christ, its Lord. This Christian interpretation is no less than the acclamation of faith in the divinity of the Son of God. This can be clearly made evident in how the Christians amplified the usage of the word Lord (*Kyrios*) from an exclusive appellative for God the Father to its use in referring to Jesus Christ. Thus, every time that Christians address Jesus as Lord, they echo the profound significance of Thomas’ confession of faith before the risen Christ when he said, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20: 28). This is the theological significance of the psalm titles which states *Vox Ecclesiae ad Christum* or *Vox apostoli ad Christum*. The psalmist is being identified with the

¹⁵ On the question whether the psalms are prophecies or not, some tend toward the negative position pointing out that psalms are not by themselves predictions (cf. T. WAHL, *Praying Israel’s Psalms responsibly as Christians: an exercise in Hermeneutic*, «Worship», 54 [1980], 395), while others affirm it on the ground that the author, like David, is a prophet (cf. L. CODDAIRE – L. WEIL, *The use of the Psalter in Worship*, «Worship», 52 [1978], 342).

¹⁶ «Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures» (Lk 24: 27).

¹⁷ This terminology can be found in B. FISCHER, *Christological Interpretation of the psalms seen in the mirror of the liturgy*, «Questions Liturgiques», 70/3 (1990), 227-235; J. M. VERNET, *Lectura cristiana del Antiguo Testamento*, «Phase», 214 (1996), 301-312; J. TRUBLET, *Comment le psautier entra dans l’Office Divin*, «La Maison-Dieu», 248 (2006), 99-133.

disciples of Jesus, be they individual or as a whole. This has a particularly important consequence in the Christian use of the psalms because it establishes immediacy between the Christian and Christ. Moreover it makes the book of Psalms an abundant source of Christian prayer.¹⁸

1.2.2. The liturgical tradition

Scriptures itself testifies to the use of the psalms in the liturgy of Israel. As a matter of fact, some psalms contain indication on the feast being celebrated, and others (as probably in the case of Psalm 117) have traces of a dialogue within a cultural context. Moreover, some psalms also indicate other aspects of the Jewish cult: singing and dancing, the use of instruments, celebrations of thanksgiving, processions, royal services, and many others.

Jesus' familiarity with the psalms is well emphasized in the New Testament. The evangelists didn't hesitate to put into the mouth of Jesus verses of the psalms in the course of his discourses. Yet there is no concrete testimony to their usage by Christ in his prayers, save his prayer on the cross using a verse of Psalm 21. The disciples, influenced by their Jewish roots and inspired by the example of the Master, also made use of the psalms in their community prayers.¹⁹

The early Christians adapted the Jewish liturgy along with the psalms in its practice. There are a few indications from which can be deduced the use of the psalms in the early Christians,²⁰ as part of their gathering together for prayer or in their solitude.²¹ These indications give assurance to the familiarity of the first Christians, despite their ethnic differences (Gentile and Jew), in making their own the prayer used by Israel. The participation of the first Christians of Jewish origin to the cult of the temple and of the synagogue is a further indication of this. After the first century, the flourishing of Christian poetry had not surpassed the important role of the psalms. On the contrary, in an effort to fight of heresies, some of which had been introduced to the faithful through the use of hymns due to its facility in memorization, the early Church opted for the psalms as a sure guide for prayer.²² Thus at the start of the third century, with the extinction of Christian poetry, principally caused by the abusive use of hymns to propagate

¹⁸ Cf. B. FISCHER, *Christological interpretation of the psalms*, cit., 233.

¹⁹ Cf. Mt 26: 30, Mk 14: 26.

²⁰ Cf. Eph 5: 29, Col 3:16, Jm 5: 13, and also maybe Rm 15: 9, 1Cor 14: 15.26.

²¹ Paul and Silas, during their imprisonment at Filippi, spent the night in prayer and sang God's praises, which probably were psalms (cf. Act 16: 25).

²² Cf. J. TRUBLET, *Comment le Psautier entra dans L'Office Divin*, «La Maison-Dieu», 248 (2006), 114 ff.

errors, the psalter has taken a central role in Christian worship, which continued even to the present.

Tradition has distinguished the different manners in which psalms have been used in the celebration. This diversity has marked in a profound way the liturgical use of the psalms. There are two principal ways by which the liturgical tradition made use of the psalms: In the Divine Office and in the Eucharistic Celebration.

The institution of monasteries, centers of prayer, has proved important for the consolidation of the Liturgy enriched with the psalms, particularly with the development of the Divine Office. This liturgical practice puts the psalms at the center for they constitute the principal component of the celebration. The choice of the psalms is generally based on the principle of *lectio continua* or continuous reading. This is most evident in the indication of praying the whole psalter within the period of one day, or one week. The liturgy moreover provides the psalms with other elements which help in understanding them. First of all is the antiphon, which introduces the theme as well as the tune (if the psalm is sung). Then there is the Psalm prayer, said at the end of the psalm, which gathers together the individual prayers of those reciting it. Then comes the psalm titles, found at the beginning of the psalm, which gives the Christian interpretation of the psalm.

The use of the psalms in the celebration of the Eucharist of the Roman rite can be traced back to the first Roman Ordinals, as well as the Antiphonaries, which are collections of songs for the mass. These are testimonies to the different moments when the psalms are sung. In three moments, the singing of the psalm accompanies the procession to the altar: first of all, the entrance song – while the priest and the ministers go to the altar – which is generally taken from the psalter, composed of an antiphon and a psalm; the offertory song, similar in structure to the entrance song, which accompanies the procession of the gifts towards the altar; and the communion song, which accompanies the procession of the faithful. All three moments contain a repertoire of their own, especially in the antiphonaries. Aside from these, there are also songs during the Liturgy of the Word, classified into three groups: the responsorial psalm, also known as the Gradual, which is the song after the biblical reading; the verse for the *Alleluia*, often taken from the psalms which is sung before the Gospel reading; and the *Tractus* or verses sung during Lenten season instead of the *Alleluia*, which consists of psalm verses without the repetition of

antiphons. These psalms were probably executed at length. But perhaps the advancement in musical development, the intricacies of the melody itself, has caused the reduction of the verses to diminish the time of its execution.²³

In these two liturgical celebrations the abundant use of the psalms is made very evident, especially in its use as text for prayer and for singing. Certainly, the use of the psalms is not limited only to these aspects. But since this study aims to expound the richness of the psalm in the context of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours, it suffices to limit itself in the description of both without pretending to be exhaustive on the argument.

1.3. Psalm 117 in the tradition of the Church

The fact that the Book of the Psalms is one of the most cited books of the Old Testament within the New Testament writings²⁴ goes with another affirmation which stresses that the most appropriate Christian interpretation of the Psalter is the Bible itself.²⁵ Later on, this lead will be developed in the context of tradition, which above all else is the liturgical tradition of the Church. Thus a short survey on the Christian interpretation of the Psalm 117 is of utmost importance in the development of its comprehension and the background of the actual practice.

Psalm 117 is the last of the so called Hallel psalms, used by Jewish tradition in the celebration of certain special feasts of the year. In particular, these psalms of praises are closely connected to the Feast of the Passover, as hymns of praise and thanksgiving for the many wonderful work accomplished by God for Israel. Probably it was included in the psalms sung by the apostles after the Passover meal.²⁶ This paschal character will be assumed and enriched by the Church, with the particular emphasis on the novelty brought by Christ. The Paschal feast becomes the figure of the sacrifice of Christ – his passion and death on the cross for the salvation of the world – as well as his resurrection from the dead. The salvific event shall change radically the horizons of this alleluiatic psalm putting at the center not anymore God the Father but Christ, the Son of the Father.

²³ Cf. J. GIBERT TARRUEL, «Salmi», in NDzL 1323-1331.

²⁴ Cf. P. C. CRAIGE, *Psalms 1-50*, «Word Biblical Commentary», 19, Word Books, Waco Texas (1983), 45.

²⁵ Cf. J. TRUBLET, *Comment le Psautier entra dans L'office Divin*, op. cit., 128.

²⁶ «After the psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives» (Mt 26: 30).

1.3.1 New Testament references

In the gospels, there are three pericopi wherein the Psalm 117 is being referred to explicitly. These passages testify to the role, albeit not the most imminent, of this psalm in the theology of the gospels.

In first place, the use of verse 22, «The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone», is present in the gospels of Matthew and of Luke.²⁷ The words are put on the mouth of Jesus Himself, in his dispute with the elders of Jerusalem. In assuming the verse, the Lord not only was confuting his adversaries but also he applied the psalm to himself, being the stone rejected by the builders. Moreover he was teaching his disciples the fulfillment of such a prophecy so much so that later on, Peter himself in front of the elders will repeat the same reference in a more explicit way.²⁸ Also, in his letter he stresses the same truth another time, addressing another audience, explaining that the Lord is a “stone rejected” for those who do not have faith.²⁹

Another gospel passage represents verse 25, «Lord, grant salvation! Lord, grant good fortune!», with a slight variation – instead of translating the Hebrew original, the gospel transliterates it.³⁰ A very important aspect of this citation is the fact that it is present in all four gospels,³¹ in a context which is identical – the entrance of Jesus to Jerusalem, probably a short time before his passion. This verse is put on the mouths of all those who accompany the Lord in procession. The popularity of this passage has led to the accommodation of this phrase into the Liturgy itself, as testified by the angelic hymn, *Sanctus*. The significance of this citation is in the fact that the original context is secondary and not indispensable. Not only does the verse acquire a new meaning or fulfillment in Christ, the Son of David, the new context has enriched the very nature of it – from a prayer to an acclamation. In another passage which follows the above-mentioned verse, Matthew and Luke present Jesus uttering verse 26, «Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord». The evangelists present Jesus in a debate with the Pharisees, some of whom wanted to send the Lord away threatening him that Herod is planning to get rid of him.

²⁷ Cf. Mt 21: 42; Lk 20: 17.

²⁸ «This is the stone which you, the builders, rejected but which has become the cornerstone. Only in him is there salvation» (Act 4:11).

²⁹ Cf. 1Pt 2: 7.

³⁰ Cf. D. A. HAGNER, *Matthew 14-28*, «Word Biblical Commentary», 33B, Word Book, Dallas, Texas (1995), 595.

³¹ Cf. Mt 21: 9; Mk 11: 9; Lk 19: 38; Jn 12: 13.

Jesus said that they will not see him anymore until the day of his solemn return.³² In the Gospel of John, Jesus explicitly identifies himself as the one who comes in the name of the Lord.³³ Thus, the gospels themselves have made clear this Christological interpretation.

Other references of minor significance refer to God's omnipotence and to man's attitude. The psalmist exhorts everyone to praise the Lord for his goodness, for He alone is good.³⁴ It is the Lord who gives strength to his servant,³⁵ and it is himself who does justice of behalf of his servant being oppressed.³⁶ For God does not leave his servant to suffer death, but only chastises.³⁷ Thus the psalmist firmly holds that he has no fear of his enemies. This attitude full of fortitude has been interpreted by tradition, through the example of Christ, as the perfect Christian attitude, as can be seen in the fortitude of the martyrs, those who had given perfect witness to Christ.

From these considerations, one can have a glimpse of some particular interpretations which will later become the main features of Psalm 117. For the new context has favored its use as one of the psalms with a concrete paschal character.

1.3.2 Patristic Commentaries

Testimonies immediately after the apostolic era are very fragmentary. A few examples would serve to highlight the extant tradition. The *Epistle of Barnabas*, during the first half of the second century, take up verses 22 and 24 in explaining the passion of Christ and his glorious victory over death.³⁸ This sporadic reference indicates the continuity of the Christological interpretation present in the New Testament books. St. Irenaeus' work, *Adversus Haereses* (second half of the second century), also takes verses 22, 25, and 26 with clear Christological background,³⁹ but simply repeats previous references. There are still no testimonies of particular relevance in these centuries of Christianity.

³² Cf. Mt 23: 38; Lk 13: 35.

³³ Cf. Jn 5: 43.

³⁴ Cf. Mt 19: 17; Mk 10: 18; Lk 18: 19.

³⁵ Cf. Phl 4: 13.

³⁶ Cf. Rev 19: 2.

³⁷ Cf. 2Cor 6: 9.

³⁸ Cf. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, in K. LAKE (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers vol. I*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge-London (1912), 359.

³⁹ Cf. J.-C. NESMY, *I Padri commentano il Salterio della Tradizione*, Piero Gribuadi Editore, Torino (1983), 619.

Origen (†253)

The first to treat Psalm 117 in his exegetical works was Origen. The context of his work is not well known, but most probably it is one of his homilies on Sacred Scriptures.⁴⁰ The Alexandrian genius, with his facility in interpretation and his capacity for allegorism, runs through the psalm and explains the different verses.⁴¹ The Christological content of the psalm is then well expressed. It is Christ who is being surrounded by enemies (verse 10: «all the nations surrounded me») – here Origen alludes to the event of the Paschal Mystery. He also quotes Christ’s self appropriation of verse 22.⁴² Moreover, Origen identifies that gate through which one enters (verse 19) as Christ Himself. Also, he does not hesitate to connect this psalm with the incarnation of the Word, through whom “God gives his light” (verse 17). For in fact it is in Christ that God, who is invisible, is made visible to man. Origen inserts a new orientation of the psalm by applying it not only to Christ but also to the members of His body, whom he unites from all of mankind, circumcised and uncircumcised. Christians therefore should not fear evil men – Origen interprets these “men” as a figure of the devil – for in testing their faith, their strength and their glory is no other than the Lord Himself. Thus he exhorts Christians to celebrate the feast of the Lord not only with external ornaments but especially with good works and a life of virtue. Here the richness of the psalm can already be seen, not only in discovering their fulfillment in the life of Jesus Christ, but also in its applicability to Christian life. Many posterior works shall take into consideration Origen’s interpretation of Psalm 117 and at the same time will enrich it with new lights.

Hysechius (†4th Century)

There is a great question on the identity and the works of Hysechius. Probably, a monk from Jerusalem, famous for his exegetical work in the line of the Alexandrian thought. The commentary which has arrived to the present is but a fragment of a longer one.

Despite the brevity of this commentary, there are a few observations worth mentioning.⁴³ The author associates with Christ verse 10, which tells of the “name of the Lord”, thus the name of the Lord Jesus. He stresses that the name of Christ is man’s defense against his foes, which

⁴⁰ Cf. J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. II: *The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus*, Christian Classics Inc., Westminster, Maryland (1950), 46-47.

⁴¹ Cf. ORIGEN, *Commentariis in psalmos*: PG 12, 1579-1586.

⁴² Cf. Mt 21: 42.

⁴³ Cf. HYSECHIUS, *Fragmenta in psalmos*, in PG 93, 1335-1338.

Hysechius considers to be the forces of evil. In fact, for him, the evildoers' intention for the psalmist to fall means "to fall into sin". This moralistic interpretation leads him to conclude that the gate of justice for a Christian is faith (in as much as the Law and the prophets are for Israel), which makes one follow the way of goodness. Moreover, in congruence with the Alexandrian thought, like Origen, he interprets verse 27, "the Lord has given us light", as referring to the Incarnation of the Word. The author in this commentary is more interested to a personal interpretation of Psalm 117.

Athanasius (†373)

This great defender of catholic doctrine, in his persistent opposition to Arianism (which earned him the fame as the number-one enemy of the Arians ⁴⁴), has spent the most of his works confuting heresies. But his prolific doctrinal works leaves a little space for exegetical matters. He has two very relevant works regarding the Psalms. The first one is of a general character, *Epistula ad Marcellum*, which is a general introduction to and the interpretation of the psalms (its content, the messianic character and the devotional use of the psalms).⁴⁵ The other work is his *Expositiones in psalmos*, which treats some psalms individually. The version which has arrived to modernity is but a collection of fragments, which includes 117.⁴⁶ Without exaggerating, the exposition reflects the travails undergone by the author himself, who begins with the consideration that thanks to the Incarnation it is possible for man to call out to God in times of persecution (He was persecuted by those who deny the Incarnation). Thus the trials undergone by the psalmist in verses 5-9, are invitations for God's servants to prepare themselves for tribulation, knowing that God alone is their aid. And he sees the joy of the just one in verse 15, «the joyful shout of deliverance is heard», wherein it is the people of God who rejoice in persecutions and not the evil ones. Following the tradition, he sees the cornerstone as a figure of Christ, who has united two people in Himself. Therefore the day of rejoicing is the day of the resurrection, Sunday. «It is evident that Athanasius had predilection for the allegorical and typological interpretation of the psalter in contra distinction to the more jejune exegesis predominant in his dogmatic-polemical writings».⁴⁷ Thus, for example, he interprets the enemies

⁴⁴ Cf. J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. III: *The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon*, Christian Classics Inc., Westminster, Maryland (1950), 20.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁶ Cf. G. C. STEAD, «Atanasio», in *DzP*, 429; text from PG 27, 475-479.

⁴⁷ J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. III, cit., 38.

who surround the just (verse 10-14) as the feelings inspired by the evil one. Or in another place, he interprets the thrice-mentioned “Lord” in verses 25-27 to mean a Trinitarian doxology.

Didymus the blind (†398)

One of the last great teachers of the school of Alexandria, Didymus is another prolific writer despite his supposed handicap. Among his exegetical works, there is a collection of his commentary on the Psalms, including 117.⁴⁸ He stresses the Christian underpinning of the psalm in the most varied of ways. Thus Christ is made salvation for men (verse 14: «the Lord, my strength and might, came to me as savior»), the one who, in fulfilling the law and the prophets, open the gate of justice (verse 19), the cornerstone (verse 22). But also, he stresses the figurative presence of the Church. Thus, for example, he interprets allegorically the figure of the bees in verse 13 in a positive way – as the Church, for honey from the bees is like wisdom that flows from the Church. The marvel in the event of Christ is the fact that it is done by the Lord, and by none other (verse 23), for the cornerstone can come only from God himself. God sent him, the one born of a virgin. «He is convinced that the Old Testament contains everywhere an important Christian message and that every Psalm points to Christ».⁴⁹

Eusebius of Caesarea (†339-340)

Despite cultural diversity, Eusebius is very much influenced by the school of Alexandria. This is very evident in his commentary on the Psalms, where his allegorical interpretation sometimes exceeds the limit of moderation, (for example Jerome criticizes Eusebius for having “allegorized too much”⁵⁰). Regarding his commentary on Psalm 117, which is very fragmentary,⁵¹ the main motif of the argument is religious persecution. Thus he interpreted the enemies presented in verses 5-15 as the impious against the people of God. In commenting verses 16-18, he points that persecution are not useless but rather useful in showing or making known the power of God. And he sees in the concluding verses the image of the people of God, all peoples – as also in present in the opening verses – gathered together in Christ, for they have been freed from tribulation. For him, in his exegetical works, mystagogical interpretation means

⁴⁸ Cf. DIDYMUS THE BLIND, *Expositio in psalmos*, in PG 39, 1556-1564.

⁴⁹ J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. III, cit., 41.

⁵⁰ Cf. C. CURTI, «Eusebio di Cesarea», in DzP, 1292.

⁵¹ Cf. EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Commentaria in psalmos*, in PG 23, 1362-1366.

that everything in Scriptures refers to Christ and the Church.⁵² Thus despite his tendency for exaggeration, the Church has esteemed highly his work on the Psalm.

John Chrysostom (†407)

Perhaps the most famous product of the school of Antioch, John is the master of sacred oratory and one of the great ecumenical fathers of the Greek Church. His fame for delivering homilies has continued even to the present. But what is worth stressing is that his best homilies on the Old Testament are those on selected Psalm, including Psalm 117.⁵³ The particularity of these homilies is his freedom to use different translations of the Psalm in his commentary (he uses up to three or four different versions⁵⁴). Moreover, despite his rigor in literal interpretation, he finds no difficulty in discerning the spiritual meaning of Scripture. Thus in the psalm, he identifies Christ's prefiguration in various points: the stone rejected by the builders (verse 22), the incarnation as God's enlightening (verse 27). He also sees in the psalmist the cry of the persecuted Christian, with the invitation to take refuge only in God (verse 5), and the encouragement that God not only saves the suffering but also makes him shine, acquire glory (verse 14). For those who trust in men are doomed (verses 8-9). He then proposes two ways of praying to the Lord: the prayer of perseverance according to the example of the faithfulness of God on his work of salvation (verse 25) which has begun in each one, as well as a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord for sharing his glory and his unending mercy (verse 20).

Theoderet of Cyrus (†466)

Another prolific writer of the school of Antioch, Theodoret was a very brilliant master, capable of going beyond cultural division for the betterment of the Church (for example, his willingness to find an accord regarding the errors of Nestorius and the school of Antioch⁵⁵). His exegetical works are classified into two: those expositions in the form of question and answers, and his continuous commentary, as in the case of his *Interpretatio in Psalmos*, which contains Psalm 117.⁵⁶ In the preface of this work, he states the problem of the commentaries on the psalms

⁵² Thus he says in his introduction: «Omnia ad Christum et ad Christi Ecclesiam referebant» (EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA, *Commentaria in psalmos*, in PG 23, 22D).

⁵³ Cf. J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. III, cit., 435; the text can be found in: JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Expositio in psalmum CXVII*, in PG 55, 328-338.

⁵⁴ Cf. J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. III, cit., 435.

⁵⁵ Cf. E. CAVALCANTI, «Teodoreto di Ciro», in DzP, 3373.

⁵⁶ Cf. PG 80, 1810-1819.

which he had read – some are too allegorical while others apply messianic psalms to the past instead of Christifying them – and he avowed as his duty the task of supplying a commentary without falling into either extremes. For example, the interpretation of the cornerstone as referring to Christ is constant in tradition. But he reports that there are those who interpret it as referring to Old Testament characters, like Zorobabel. For this, his interpretation leads him to consider the central figure of Christ. But he also highlights the figure of the Church, Christ's body. He puts verse 10 on the lips of the Church, "all the nations surrounded me; in the Lord's name I crushed them", this gathering of all men from all over the earth against her, who in the midst of the persecutions has God as her defense. Moreover, he puts verse 26 on the lips of the friends of God, "we bless you from the Lord's house". Here he is probably referring to the martyrs. Then, he states that the glory of the Church is that day made by the Lord, when Christ resurrected from the dead and united into himself two peoples. Suffice it to say, Theodoret, in his interpretation of Holy Scriptures adopts a middle course «avoiding excessive literalness and allowing an allegorical and typological explanation whenever this appears preferable».⁵⁷

Augustine (†430)

This prolific author of ancient Latin thought is perhaps the most famous of the Fathers who commented the Psalms. His *Ennarationes* is the most appraised in the Latin Church. «This is the longest of Augustine's work and the richest in spiritual doctrine, and forms the only complete treatise on the Psalms in patristic literature».⁵⁸ With regards his manner of exposition, Augustine is well aware of the inherent Christological value of the Psalms. But more particularly, he proposes the Christological interpretation in a broad sense, the principle of *Christus Totus*, wherein the psalm can be the voice of Christ, or the voice of the Church, Christ's body. Regarding Psalm 117, however, aside from the exposition, he treats it in two homilies, thus providing more material for this study.

The first work is his exposition on Psalm 117.⁵⁹ It is probably an Easter sermon in Hippo. His Christological interpretation is very evident, since he sees either Christ or the Church or both

⁵⁷ J. QUASTEN, *Patrology*, vol. III, cit., 539.

⁵⁸ A. TRAPÈ, «Saint Augustine», in AUGUSTINIAN PATRISTIC INSTITUTE – ROME, *Patrology*, vol. IV: *The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature From the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon*, Christian Classics Inc., Westminster, Maryland (1986), 396.

⁵⁹ AUGUSTINE, *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, vol.3, T. MANUCCI – V. TARULLI (edd.), *Opere di Sant'Agostino*, vol. XXVII, Città Nuova, Roma (1976), 1090-1107.

in every passage. In verses 2-4, he identifies the family of God, who in its multiplicity is united in one purpose, to praise the Lord. This theme reappears on his commentary of verses 22-23, where he explains how the cornerstone unites unto himself Jews and gentiles alike. The figure of the men who surround the psalmist is interpreted as the (spiritual) evil forces as well as the evildoers. As a consequence, verses 10-19 are interpreted as referring to the persecution suffered by Christ himself as well as that of his Church. The victory of the Church is Christ's glorious presence, and the purpose of suffering is seen as an exhortation to living out justice, with which one enters through the gate of righteousness into eternal joy. In addition to that, his allegorical interpretation is of the same Christological principle: the bees that surround the psalmist signify the sweetness of Christ passion in the midst of his persecutors; while the fire among thorns signifies the Church scattered all over the earth and under persecution. He concludes that man's real joy is praising the Lord, for this is what awaits him in Heaven.

The first of the two homilies dedicated to psalm 117 was delivered at the cathedral of Carthage on the occasion of the vigil of Pentecost.⁶⁰ Here Augustine treats solely the first verse of psalm 117 and explains the two-fold meaning of the verb "to confess": the affirmation of man's faults and the exaltation of God's goodness. Thus he lingers a while in explaining man's innate desire for goodness. In this discourse, Augustine treats the subject in a more "familiar" manner than in his expositions. The second homily,⁶¹ probably delivered in a similar circumstance as the first, takes up the same argument – on the two meanings of the verb "to confess". But this time he explains in depth the necessity and the convenience to confess one's sins in order to be able to confess eternally the mercy and goodness of the Lord.

From this brief enumeration of patristic commentaries on psalm 117, a few considerations can be made. First of all, it can be noticed that the exposition of the psalms is relatively one of the longest works undertaken by some fathers. This implies the great interest of ancient Christianity on understanding this sacred poetry. Secondly, a few theological considerations have been consistently present in these works (aside from the factor of their mutual influence): the Christological character, the presence of the Church, as well as the reality

⁶⁰ Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 29, in P. BELLINI – F. CRUCIANI – V. TARULLI (edd.), *Opere di Sant'Agostino*, vol. XXIX, Città Nuova (1979), 536-543.

⁶¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 544-549.

and meaning of suffering through persecution. These elements will continue to be present in the liturgical tradition regarding this psalm.

It must be mentioned, in conclusion, that this presentation does not pretend to exhaust all patristic sources which treat this particular psalm, for different motives, one of which is the absence of critical studies in determining or completing the commentaries on the psalms. Thus, on the one hand, fragmentary works of very scarce content have been left out.⁶² On the other hand, other fragmentary comments which were not originally expositions on the psalms are also left out.⁶³

1.3.3. History of its usage in the liturgical tradition

The actual usage of the psalms and their connection of some of them to different elements (hour, day, and occasion) is a product of centuries of liturgical tradition. Psalm 117, in particular has acquired its Christological sense through the constant usage, to the point of integrating a part of it into the liturgy itself. Therefore, a brief survey through history is interesting in order to identify the constant references and connections to other liturgical elements, for a better understanding of the psalm.

Antiphonals

R.J. Hesbert worked in gathering together the six most ancient Antiphonals extent of the Roman Mass.⁶⁴ A brief consideration of the use of psalm 117 in these documents is of great relevance in as much as they are testimonies of the tradition of first-millennium Christianity. On whether the psalm is sung entirely, these ancient antiphonals don't indicate. On the contrary they only present a verse of the psalm. However the choices of the antiphon or verse are good enough to indicate the connection of the psalm with the liturgy being celebrated.

In the mass on the day of Christmas (*Mane Natalis Domini*), the responsorial psalm or Gradual is taken from Ps. 117: 26-27^a, together with verse 23: It is clearly interpreted in the light of the mystery being celebrated – the Birth of Christ, the one who comes in the name of the Lord. The addition of the verse *Dominus illuxit nos* is a significant interpretation of the psalm in

⁶² For example: CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Explanatio in psalmos*, in PG 69, 1270.

⁶³ There are many references, for example, that can be found in Tertullian's *Against Marcion*.

⁶⁴ R.-J. HESBERT (ed.), *Antiphonarum Missarum sextuplex, d'après le Graduel de Monza et les Antiphonaires de Rheineau, du Mont-Blandin, de Compiègne, de Corbie et de Senlis*, Herder, Roma 1935.

as much as it is connected to the mystery of the Incarnation. All six manuscripts testify to this usage, giving the impression that it is a solid tradition.⁶⁵

During the Easter season, the psalm takes on a very relevant role in the Liturgy. The responsorial «*Haec est dies quam fecit Dominus*» (verse 24) is continuously repeated all throughout the season.⁶⁶ This is of course due to its very evident reference to the event of the Resurrection. In addition to that, this responsorial is enriched with verses from the same psalm: «*Benedictus qui venit*» (verse 26) in relation to Jesus Christ; «*Confitemini Domino quoniam bonus*» (verse 1), which is an invitation to the assembly to praise the Lord; «*Dexteram Domini fecit virtutem*» (verse 15), which signifies the power of God in this wondrous event; «*Dicat nunc Israel*» (verse 2) or «*Dicant nunc qui timent Dominum*» (verse 4) identifies the people chosen by the Lord as his own. These various elements, present in most of the Antiphonals, testify to the use of the psalm in the celebration of Christ's victory over death, a celebration of the Church that has lasted for centuries and continues until now.

Some verses are also used for the acclamation before the Gospel. In particular, *Confitemini* (verse 1) is very much present in the Easter season, but not exclusively, in celebrating the mercies of the Lord.⁶⁷ Also, the verse *Haec dies* (verse 24) is used as verse for the gospel acclamation during Easter,⁶⁸ for further emphasis on the event of the resurrection. While during the year, the verse *Dextera Domini* (verse 16) is used as an alleluiatic verse, which highlights the continuous works of the Lord for man.⁶⁹

For the offertory song the previously mentioned verse, *Dextera Domini*, is sung as an antiphon with verse 5 (*invocavi Dominum et exaudivit me*). This configuration is present during the Christmas season and with greater frequency during the season of Lent.⁷⁰ This also points out the help which lies in the Lord alone, in whom man should only look for.

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 80-86.

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 79b, 88a, 94a, 105, 199a.

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 86, 87, 106.

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 199a.

⁷⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 26, 55, 77b, 97bis.

Missal

Although the *Missale Basileense*⁷¹ is not a missal in the full sense of the term, it serves to indicate the entirety of the repertoire for the mass. Moreover, it is relevant in supplying a few details to the liturgical tradition at the beginning of the second millennium. In fact it presents elements already present in the repertoires of the 8th and 9th centuries.

The psalm is used as an entrance hymn on the Thursday within the octave of Easter.⁷² It highlights the continuity of the liturgical interpretation of the psalm with a paschal denotation. Not only this, also verses 26 and 27^a (Blessed is he who comes ... the Lord has given us light) are used as a verse of the Gradual⁷³ on Friday, and as the antiphon for the offertory⁷⁴ on the Saturday of the same week.

But it is not limited only to this reason. The very same verses 26 and 27^a are also used in the office of the Matins for the day of Christmas, as well as the responsorial of the mass on that same day.⁷⁵ This is also in continuation with the liturgical tradition of interpreting psalm 117 in the light of the mystery of Christ's becoming man.

The most used verse is *Confitemini* (verse 1), prevalently during the Easter tide, with varied functions: it is the alleluiatic verse for the Easter vigil, as verse for the responsorial on the mass of Easter Sunday, and an entrance antiphon for the octave of Easter as well as for the vigil for Pentecost.⁷⁶ What becomes notable in this multiplicity is the fact that the same verse can serve as an invitation for praising the Lord at one time and as a proclamation of his mercy at another. This testifies to the fact that the liturgy is an authoritative interpreter of the psalm in particular and of the Scriptures in general.

Pontificals

A quick glance at the Pontificals edited by M. Andrieu sheds light on the general trends in the usage of psalm 117 in the liturgy. There was a noticeable change of application during the 13th century, although it was not a lasting one. It should be noted that the pontificals didn't

⁷¹ A. HÄNGGI – P. LADNER (edd.), *Missale Basileense saec. XI (Codex Gressly): Textband*, Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, Fribourg 1994.

⁷² Cf. *ibid.*, 89,1.

⁷³ Cf. *ibid.*, 90,2.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 91,4.

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 10,2.

⁷⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 84, 7; 85, 2; 86, 1; 87, 1; 89, 1; 112, 1.

bother much about identifying the songs to be sung. But the few indications which have been conserved may give an idea of the interpretation of the psalm, at least at the time of their redaction.

In the Roman Pontifical of the 12th century, Psalm 117 is present in the Easter vigil service. The *Ordo in Sabbato Sancto* collocates Psalm 117 (or at least the first few verses) in the responsorial after the last the reading and before the gospel.⁷⁷ Here, it is indicated as different from the *tractus*. This data is very much in continuity with the liturgical tradition. But aside from this, Psalm 117 is also indicated in another occasion, perhaps a new conception or simply a further development of the usage. In the funeral services, Psalm 117 is being linked to the rite of burial, having as its responsory, «*aperite mihi portas iustitiae*» (verse 19). Here the verse is interpreted not anymore as the way of the just but the gate of heaven itself. This is bound to influence the following editions of the pontifical during this century.

The pontifical of the Roman Curia of the 13th century does not mention the use of Psalm 117 in the Easter vigil. This does not necessarily mean that there has been a change but perhaps a simple omission. It presents however the use of the psalm during the funeral services: during the last greeting, after the rites done in Church, also at the moment of the burial.⁷⁸

The pontifical of William Durand, which is an elaboration of the previous one, presents the use of Psalm 117 during the celebration of Holy Saturday. It specifies that this psalm is the verse (which is different from and is precedent to the *tractus*) and is sung by all.⁷⁹ However, it does not specify whether the whole psalm is sung or is sung only in part. Then it does not mention the employment of this psalm during funeral services.

These testimonies affirm the usage of psalm 117 as a gradual psalm, and in very close relation to Eastertide. This is a constant in the liturgy up that period. The other use of the psalm in relation to the eschatological perspective of Christian death has not been mentioned before and has been lost in the succeeding centuries. However, it signifies a new comprehension of the psalm that has lead to its new location.

⁷⁷ M. ANDRIEU, *Le Pontifical romain au Moyen-Age, I: Le Pontifical romain du XII e siècle*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano (1938), anastatic reprint (1972), 248.

⁷⁸ Cf. M. ANDRIEU, *Le Pontifical romain au Moyen-Age, II: Le Pontifical della Curie romaine au XIII e siècle*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano (1940), anastatic reprint (1972), 501, 509.

⁷⁹ Cf. M. ANDRIEU, *Le Pontifical romain au Moyen-Age, III: Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano (1940), anastatic reprint (1972), 509.

Ordinals

The above-mentioned books are specifically on the usage of the psalms in the celebration of the Eucharist, with very rare references regarding the Liturgy of the Hours. The principal sources for the liturgical tradition regarding the latter are the Ordinals. However, the Ordinals also present in a few instances the other uses of the psalm. With regards to the use of psalm 117 in the Liturgy of the Hours, there are common traits as well as particularities among the different books.

A general observation on the different ways of distributing the psalms serves as a background on the exposition that follows.⁸⁰ The primitive distribution of the Office – also called the roman psalter – has reserved psalm 117 for Prime on Sundays. This disposition will be modified with the adaptation of the Benedictine psalter. This latter places the psalm among the psalms for Matins or Lauds on Sundays. There will be a greater adherence to the Benedictine psalter. But sometimes, influences of the roman psalter do appear. In the ordinals, where these data are not presented, they are simply presupposed as already given. Some critical editions present this fact in the introductory part.

The Ordinal of Montecassino, from the 11th century, presents the usage of Psalm 117 according to the Benedictine tradition. However, the editor T. F. Kelly in the introductory part, specifies that the Ordinal did make use of the roman psalter.⁸¹ Following the order according to the Rule of St. Benedict, this psalm is probably assigned as one of the psalms for Matins on Sundays. The ordinal mentions a few cases, wherein it affirms this position: on the first Sunday after the octave of Epiphany and on the Sunday of the *Septuagesima*.⁸² Another indication puts it as the alleluiaic psalm for the Easter vigil.⁸³ While this belongs to the roman psalter, the following Ordinal follows the monastic psalter.

The Ordinary of the Abbey of St. Denis in France (1234) confirms the monastic ordering of Psalm 117 as one of the psalms for Lauds on Sundays throughout the liturgical year: the first and the fourth Sundays of Advent, the first Sunday after Epiphany, the three Sundays before

⁸⁰ Cf. R. TAFT, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (2nd Ed.), The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota (1993), 136-137.

⁸¹ Cf. T. F. KELLY, *The Ordinal of Montecassino and Benevento: Breviarium sive ordo officiorum, 11th Century*, Academic Press Fribourg, Fribourg (2008), 78.

⁸² Cf. *ibid.*, 205, 305.

⁸³ Cf. *ibid.*, 453.

Lent, the first two Sundays of Lent, and the first Sunday after the octave of Pentecost.⁸⁴ Aside from this, the psalm is also assigned as entrance verse for the mass on the Thursday within the octave of Easter.⁸⁵ Moreover, it is also used as one of the psalms for Lauds on the Saturdays after the octave of Pentecost.⁸⁶ Regarding this latter usage, there is still no explicit reference to the connection between the psalm and the Marian Office.

The Ordinal from the Abbey of St. Arnold (1240), almost contemporary to the one previously mentioned, contains only a few indications regarding the use of Psalm 117 (probably it completely presupposes the traditional order). The first indication is regarding the procession during Palm Sunday, wherein the whole psalm is being sung.⁸⁷ This is certainly in connection to the gospel narrative on the solemn entrance of Jesus to Jerusalem. Another indication is the use of the psalm, on the vespers of Thursday after Trinity.⁸⁸ And finally, the psalm is also used as one of the psalms for Lauds on Saturday after the Trinity. Here the connection between the psalm and the Office of the Blessed Virgin is explicit, as the title of the paragraph indicates – *De die Sabbati et de officio Beate Virginis in illa die*.⁸⁹

The Ordinal of the papal court during the 13th century only presents the traditional assignment of Psalm 117 to the morning prayers of Sunday.⁹⁰ But there is no explicit reference whether it is used during Lauds or during Prime. The Ordinal by Haymo di Faversham (1243-1244), which is an adaptation of the previous one for the use of the Franciscan order, contains a more abundant reference on the usage of the psalm. There is an indication of its use as one of the psalms for Prime on the second Sunday after Epiphany.⁹¹ After this indication, the following paragraph explains that this distribution is valid for the whole liturgical year with the exception of Lent. The psalm is also presented as one of the psalms for Lauds on Saturdays *de tempore*.⁹² This mariological connection is most likely a product of the recent enrichment of the usage. In

⁸⁴Cf. E. B. FOLEY (ed.), *The First Ordinary of the Royal Abbey of St.-Denis in France* (Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine 526), The University Press, Fribourg (1990), 291, 302, 329, 341, 340, 349, 359, 442.

⁸⁵Cf. *ibid.*, 342.

⁸⁶Cf. *ibid.*, 444-449.

⁸⁷Cf. A. ODERMATT (ed.), *De Liber Ordinarius der Abtei St. Arnulf vor Metz* (Metz, Stadtbibliothek, Ms. 132, um 1240), Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, Fribourg (1987), 148d, 149b, 149d.

⁸⁸Cf. *ibid.*, 236d.

⁸⁹Cf. *ibid.*, 239a.

⁹⁰Cf. S. J. P. VAN DIJK – J. H. WALKER, *The Ordinal of the Papal Court from Innocent III to Boniface VIII and Related Documents*, The University Press, Fribourg (1975), 450.

⁹¹Cf. S. J. P. VAN DIJK, *Sources of the Modern Roman Liturgy: The Ordinals by Haymo of Faversham and Related Documents (1243-1307)*, II: *Texts*, E. J. Brill, Leiden (1963), 50-51.

⁹²Cf. *ibid.*, 50.

addition to this, the Ordinal also contains some indications regarding the Gradual: *Confitemini* (verse 1) is the *tractus* for the second Sunday of Lent⁹³; the psalm (probably a few verse if not the whole) is sung after the readings during the Holy Saturday service⁹⁴; during the vigil of Pentecost, the psalm is sung after the alleluia⁹⁵; and on the mass of Easter Sunday, the verse of the gradual is from this psalm.⁹⁶ These indications confirm the liturgical tradition regarding the use of the psalm, and the testimony of the reception of recent developments.

A century later, the *Usus Psallendi Ecclesiae Vercellensis* would only reaffirm the roman tradition of designating Psalm 117 as one of the psalms for Prime on Sundays all throughout the year and on feasts.⁹⁷ As a matter of fact, in the roman Office, the permanent place of this psalm is for Prime on Sundays. This is the primitive order and has lasted until the reform of the second Vatican council. In the reform of the Breviary proposed by Cardinal Quiñonez, it was moved to the Prime of Wednesday. But the liturgical tradition maintained its place, as can be observed in the *Breviarium Romanum* of 1568.⁹⁸ The liturgical reform of Pope Pius X somehow synthesizes these two principal trends. While following the traditional collocation of the psalm for Prime on Sundays, this order is interrupted during the Lenten season when the psalm is said not during Prime but during Lauds of Sunday.⁹⁹ Thus both traditions continues to co-exist until the reform of the Second Vatican Council.

⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 225.

⁹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 248.

⁹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 257.

⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 251.

⁹⁷ Cf. I. BRUSA (ed.), *Usus Psallendi Ecclesiae Vercellensis* (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, cod. LIII), C.L.V. – Edizioni Liturgiche, Roma (2009), 21.

⁹⁸ Cf. M. SODI – A. M. TRIACCA (edd.), *Breviarium Romanum. Editio Princeps (1568)*, edizione anastatica, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano (1999), 19-20.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Breviarium Romanum ex decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Tridentini restitutum S. Pii V Pontificis Maximi jussu editum aliorumque pontificum cura recognitum Pii Papae X auctoritate reformatum*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Romae (1923), 45-49.

PART II: The usage of Psalm 117 in the Liturgy of Today

After the brief survey presented in the preceding pages, on the uses which tradition has assigned to this psalm in the course of history, this part intends to present its actual usage. An organic exposition of the topic, in as much exhaustive as possible, will be of great importance in understanding and in making evident its liturgico-theological richness. As this research pretends to uncover the different contents of the text starting with the liturgical celebration itself, it is but right to examine these liturgical books such as the Roman Missal, the Lectionary, the Gradual and the Liturgy of the Hours. The organic exposition of these elements can be grouped into three. First, the psalm will be examined as it is used by the liturgy in its entirety. This will highlight the prominent place of the psalm. Second, one very significant element which enriches the recitation or proclamation of the psalm is the antiphon. Within the usage of the psalm, very often the antiphon is taken from the psalm itself. This process of appropriation may be significant in determining the various readings of the psalm in relation to the mystery being celebrated. Third, a quick glimpse on other elements around the psalm is interesting for a better understanding of it. The liturgy provides the psalm with other elements aside from the antiphon, some of which are even explained in the norms present in each liturgical book. The various choices are made to highlight a particular aspect (without eliminating other possibilities). It must be remembered, however, that the present research limits itself to the celebration of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours.

But before entering into the arguments proposed above, it may be very useful to present schematically the observations proposed by exegetical studies regarding this particular psalm. Two basic considerations may be of help in identifying the motive behind the process of selecting a few verses to create a certain unity and to highlight a particular aspect: the basic structure and the supposed distribution of parts. Certainly, this is not an exhaustive research on biblical exegesis, but a fundamental background can serve as a blue print for the liturgico-theological inquiry.

The processional nature of the psalm explains the richness in movements and dialogues, which can be traced all throughout the psalm. Thus, the psalm can be divided basically into two: the procession towards the temple, which is the gathering together and the going towards the temple gate (verses 1-18); and the procession inside the temple (verses 19-29). The dividing

point is of course the temple gate (verse 19).¹⁰⁰ It must also be noted that there is a genuine inclusion, with the use of an antiphon (verses 1 and 29),¹⁰¹ which assures the unity of the psalm despite its complications. In each part, the psalm presents an introductory or invitational dialogue (verses 2-4 and 19-20), which testifies to the organic structure of the liturgy being celebrated.¹⁰² These elements can be summed up thus: there is a two-fold procession (outside and inside the temple) accompanied by the hymns of thanksgiving; yet, both are part of the one and the same solemn liturgy.

Another way of identifying the structure of the psalm is the distribution of the verses to different characters. On the one hand, the hair-split distinction of parts even within the same stich is exuberant and almost surreal. On the other hand, it is evident that there is a sudden change of character every now and then. For instance, the first person singular is usually attributed to a real individual, although he may be speaking in the name of the people – as, for example, in the case of a king – 5-7, 10-14, 17-18, 21-24, and 28. The assembly has also its part in the liturgy, almost always with a responsorial character and sometimes in a dialogue. This is obvious in the responsory of 2-4, 8-9, 15-16, and 25-29. In addition to this, a third character is being called for in this psalm. Since the supposed liturgical procession has the temple as its center, the participation of the priestly order is very likely. That is why some verses are attributed to the priests, particularly the dialogues and the benedictions: 2-4, 20, 26-27. In synthesis, the structure of the psalm presupposes the participation of these characters: a representative (probably the king), the assembly, and the priestly order.¹⁰³

Having presented this background, the following sections will specify the choice done by the recent liturgical discipline regarding Psalm 117, respecting the inherent structure and significance and at the same time taking into consideration the indication by the liturgical tradition.

2.1. The privileged role of Psalm 117

Psalm 117 enjoys a special role in Jewish liturgy due to its being part of the so-called *Hallel* Psalms (112-117). This group of psalms is said on some four special occasions throughout

¹⁰⁰ Thus Allen, in describing the second part as “within the temple”, excludes this verse (ALLEN, *Psalms*, cit., 122).

¹⁰¹ RAVASI, *Il libro dei Salmi*, vol. 3, cit., 419.

¹⁰² Feast of the Tabernacles or maybe a particular military victory (ALLEN, *Psalms*, cit., 123).

¹⁰³ RAVASI, *Il libro dei Salmi*, vol. 3, cit., 421.

the year, the most important of which is the family celebration.¹⁰⁴ The Christian reception of the psalm includes also the reception of the Jewish tradition. Jesus in fulfilling the Passover meal made use of Jewish elements. Thus Christian conception of the new Pasch realized by the Lord on the cross and on his resurrection has certainly these elements, although this time with a new meaning.

2.1.1. Psalm 117 for Eastertide

In the presentation of the previous part (1.3.), it can be seen immediately that this psalm was from the beginning seen in the context of the Paschal mystery. Christ's death and resurrection from the dead became the principal motive of this song of the thanksgiving. In the voice of the psalmist, who proclaims the wonders done by the Lord in favor of his faithful servant and against his persecutors, the voice of Christ is recognized. This is the reason behind the preponderant use of the psalm during the whole Easter season.

The solemn celebration in commemorating the resurrection of the Lord from the dead – the vigil and the solemn day of Easter Sunday – has made use of this psalm in the liturgy to promote that spirit of gratitude for God's gift of salvation and to express the praise due to the risen one. Already in the Easter vigil, psalm 117 is used as the responsorial psalm as well as the offertory hymn.¹⁰⁵ In both instances, the accentuation falls on the phrase "*dextera domini*", the power of God who wrought this marvelous event, wherein the stone rejected by the mighty ones on earth has been constituted as the cornerstone of a new and everlasting testament. During the day of this solemnity, the psalm is used again as a responsorial psalm as well as the three part psalm assigned to the Daytime prayer.¹⁰⁶ The responsorial psalm underlines the occasion, "*haec dies*" when salvation has come for all men. The Office expresses clearly the event of the resurrection and its motive, the way by which man is justified and is oriented towards heaven.

During the octave of Easter, the use of the psalm is almost daily. The present liturgical practice has indicated it as a three part psalm for the Office of Readings on Thursday,¹⁰⁷ which is a continual remembrance of the salvation worked by God, stressing clearly the initiative of God

¹⁰⁴ ALLEN, *Psalms*, cit., 100.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. LE I, 644-645; GS 151.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. LE I, 648; LH II, 410-412.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. LH II, 461-463.

and man's bewilderment. The responsorial psalm of Friday,¹⁰⁸ recalls the tribulation undergone by the Lord and the victory of God's goodness making him the foundation of a new order of grace. The following day, Saturday, the responsorial psalm¹⁰⁹ proposes once again the novelty of the resurrection using the words of the psalm, with the invitation to trust in the Lord, for he listens to the call of his faithful servant. The second Sunday, which marks the end of the Octave, presents this psalm as the responsorial psalm,¹¹⁰ proposing different selections of verses according to the cycle of readings to highlight the spirit of trust and gratitude towards the Lord. Thus the Octave of Easter is very much filled with this psalm.¹¹¹

Among the responsorial psalm proposed during the Easter season, this psalm is presented with the invitation "*exsultemus et laetemur*" for that day on which the Lord has triumphed over death and has established the kingdom of heaven by showing the truth of life beyond and above death.

In every Sunday, from Easter to Pentecost, the psalm is recited in its entirety in the Liturgy of Hours. The psalm is recited during Lauds on the fourth and sixth Sunday and during midday on the third, fifth, as well as on Pentecost Sunday.¹¹² The continual presence of the psalm during this season is a very interesting reminder of the central element of the Christian faith, in its reality of being a mystery and in its relevance, being the source of faith and hope for the Christian ideal of the resurrection as the final destiny of humanity.

The presence of this psalm during the Eastertide is far greater than in any time of the year, for the reason explained in these preceding paragraphs. But it should be noted that the usage of the psalm is not confined to the Easter context. The liturgy in its wisdom has made use of the psalm in different circumstances showing that a variety of readings does not necessary destroy the original meaning of the psalm.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. LE I, 662.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. LE I, 664-665.

¹¹⁰ Cf. LE I, 666-667; 669-670; 672-673.

¹¹¹ The psalm is also present as Responsorial psalm for the IV Sunday of Easter, Year B (cf. LE I, 715).

¹¹² Cf. LH II, 410-412; 592; 685; 809-811.

2.1.2. *Psalm 117 on Sundays*

Perhaps the relationship with the use of psalm 117 on Sundays is very much related to the Easter meaning, as presented in the previous section. However a brief consideration can help to enlighten certain changes which the liturgical tradition has adopted for the Liturgy of the Hours.

The traditional ordering of the psalm in a span of a week has assigned Psalm 117 on Sunday morning (be it Matins or Prime). As a consequence, the psalm should have been said every week of the year. An indication of the 13th century ordinal by Haymo di Faversham, however, seems to contrast this continuity.¹¹³ In fact there has been a tendency to substitute another psalm during the Lenten season. Later, with the Roman Breviaries, this continuity was restored. Even in the liturgical reform promoted by the second Vatican Council, where the psalms are distributed within a span of four weeks, Psalm 117 has maintained its place every Sunday.

According to the structure of the distribution, the four-week psalter, Psalm 117 is present as the only psalm for Daytime prayer, divided into three sections, on the Sundays of the first and the third weeks of the said psalter. Each section has its antiphon during Ordinary time while only an antiphon is provided during other liturgical seasons (with very few exceptions). And on the Sundays of the second and the fourth weeks of this psalter, the psalm is indicated as the first of the three psalms for Morning prayer. This dual scheme reflects greatly the two ancient manners of ordering the psalm (the old Roman psalter and the Benedictine psalter). Before, it was indicated as a psalm either for Matins or for Prime. Notwithstanding the suppression of the latter canonical hour,¹¹⁴ this duplicity is still reflected in the actual liturgical discipline. The previous section which treats the Easter season presents this factor, but the general ordering applies to the whole year, without exception.

In addition, the Lenten use of this psalm is not only reaffirmed but also, in a way, developed. On the one hand, this psalm is proposed as an entrance hymn for the fourth Sunday of Lent,¹¹⁵ the so called *Laetare* Sunday, which somehow establishes the intimate connection of this liturgical season to the succeeding one, the Easter season. On the other hand, this psalm is also used as the entrance hymn for Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord. This latter use was

¹¹³ Cf. VAN DIJK, *Sources of the Modern Roman Liturgy* vol. II, cit., 490.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 89d.

¹¹⁵ Cf. GS 102.

already present in the Ordinal of the Abbey of St. Arnold,¹¹⁶ thus showing the continuity of the liturgical tradition regarding its use.

These few elements, notwithstanding the modesty of the use, are indicative of the fact that the psalm was not assigned randomly but with a particular consideration of its liturgical use in the past. This can still be explained further by looking into the other uses of the psalm outside the context of Easter and Sunday.

2.1.3. Other uses of Psalm 117

Aside from the aforementioned major uses of the psalm, there are still a few other uses which may be relatively less organic but not necessarily less interesting. There are uses in the proper of Saints, in the common of Saints, in some ritual Masses and finally in ferial celebration.

In the proper of Saints, some solemnities and feasts, in appropriating the psalms of Sunday (week one), include Psalm 117 for Daytime prayers. There may not be particular reasons for this choice save that of a systematic selection, but the antiphons which are proper to the celebration may sometimes shed light on the understanding of the psalm. However, these particularized considerations may be beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say, this psalm is present in the solemnities of the Birth of St. John the Baptist, of Saints Peter and Paul, of the Assumption, and of all Saints. In addition to that, one particular indication on the psalm is its use as the entrance antiphon of the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle,¹¹⁷ with a particular reference on his Phrase “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20: 28), which finds echo in verse 28, “You are my God.”

In the common of Saints, the psalm is indicated as a two-part psalm (the first two psalms) in the Evening prayer I for the Common of Martyrs. Regarding this indication, there are no particular testimonies in the previous books of the Divine Office. The only reference possible could be the homilies of the Fathers, many of whom identify a connection between the suffering of the psalmist and the attitude of Christians in front of persecutions, particularly the martyrs, who put their trust in the Lord alone.

In the ritual Masses, the psalm is used as a responsorial psalm for the Dedication of a Church or the blessing of an Altar.¹¹⁸ In this occasion the verses 19-20, which tell of the gate of

¹¹⁶ See note 87.

¹¹⁷ Cf. MR 710.

¹¹⁸ Cf. LE III, 480.

justice is being included among the verses, closely connected with the celebration where the Church as temple is instituted for the cult. Also, the psalm is proposed as a responsorial psalm for the Mass for various necessities, for the unity of Christians.¹¹⁹ Here, the emphasis is on the stone, Christ, who is the cornerstone, the foundation of the Church, and the motive of her prayers. It is also present in the votive mass of the Holy Cross, thanking God for having saved his chosen one and for having constituted him salvation for all men through his cross (verse 21). Finally, the psalm is present in the liturgy of the Dead, in particular as entrance hymn and during the procession towards the cemetery.¹²⁰ This application was already present in the Pontifical of the 13th Century, which underlines an eschatological interpretation of the gates of justice.

These uses of the psalm in its entirety or partially show the different connotations which the Church's liturgical tradition has of Psalm 117. The integral use of the psalm depends in many cases upon other elements in order to highlight a particular aspect, as for example the choice of antiphons. The partial use on the other hand is in itself descriptive of the focal points of the psalm as used by the Liturgy.

2.2. Psalm 117 as Antiphon

Among the elements around the psalm, the most useful in understanding the psalm better is undoubtedly the antiphon. It is described thus by the General instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours.¹²¹ Although the General Instructions of the Roman Missal limits itself to indicating the opportunity of reciting or singing the antiphons,¹²² the previous affirmation still holds true in the celebration of the Mass. Moreover, the added comprehension of the psalms through their antiphons is very significant when these latter are taken from the same psalm which they introduce. Also, the repeated use of the same verses in different occasions is very significant since they underline the different meanings assumed by the psalm. This is the case of Psalm 117, as is the case of the rest of the psalter. First, the most repeated verses are presented in order to identify the general themes of the psalm. Then other uses are enumerated to complete the description of its usage.

¹¹⁹ Cf. LE III, 525.

¹²⁰ Cf. GS 403-404; 427-428.

¹²¹ «Tria in traditione latina multum contulerunt ad psalmos intellegendos vel in precationem christianam vertendos, scilicet tituli, orationes super psalmos et *praecipuae* antiphonae» (IGLH 110).

¹²² Cf. IGMR 48b, 87b.

2.2.1. Most frequently used verses

In this section, verses that have been used more than twice in the selected celebrations are being considered. This however does not exclude the possibility that more uses could be found in other liturgical celebrations.

a. *Confitemini Domino quoniam bonus*¹²³

This is the most used verse of the psalm (six times). In itself, this verse, which is at the beginning and at the end of Psalm 117, has been considered as a real antiphon by exegetes.¹²⁴ Aside from its original role, it is also used as the motif of the whole psalm – an invitation to thank the Lord for all He has done. Its general character can be seen in the way it is being used by the liturgy.

In all six cases, the verse is used as the responsorial antiphon of the psalm in between the scriptural readings. This verse is therefore an acclamation repeated by the people, which in fact is very similar to its original context. It is present in the second Sunday of Easter, still within the Easter octave, having as its motivation the resurrection of the Lord. The response is maintained during the three-year cycle with changes in the accompanying verses of the same psalm.¹²⁵ This is already a triple usage of the verse. In another occasion, the psalm is used on Thursday of the twenty-fourth week in Ordinary time.¹²⁶ This use, clearly outside the Easter or Sunday context, proposes once again the invitation to trust in the Lord for his unending goodness. Then, the verse is also present in the ritual Mass of the Dedication of a Church,¹²⁷ having as the concrete motive for the thanksgiving the very same celebration. And finally, it is present in the votive Mass of the Holy Cross.¹²⁸ Here the perspective is the reconciliation brought about by the cross, a very important reason for thanksgiving.

¹²³ «Give thanks to the Lord who is good, (whose love endures forever) » (Ps 117: 1).

¹²⁴ It is proposed at the start and is repeated at the end, probably by everybody (cf. ALLEN, *Psalms*, cit., 122).

¹²⁵ Cf. LE I, 666, 669, 672.

¹²⁶ Cf. LE II, 565.

¹²⁷ Cf. LE III, 480.

¹²⁸ Cf. LE III, 630.

*b. Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*¹²⁹

In the Order of the Mass, this verse is present in the angelic hymn *Sanctus*, which if considered would make this verse the most used (in as much as it is present in every Eucharistic celebration). However, with the exception of this datum, the verse is used six times. The axis of this verse which permits a multi-dimensional comprehension is the verb *venit*, always referred to Christ the one who comes from God. However, a variety of meanings can be discovered by observing its use.

This verse is used twice on Palm Sunday. This is certainly in direct relation to the original ambiance of Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem, where the people received him with joy and proclaimed these words of blessing. Particularly, it is used as the antiphon for Lauds and the entrance antiphon for the Mass,¹³⁰ in which it introduces the psalm and connects it to the liturgical context of Passion Sunday. All throughout the Ordinary time, this verse is the antiphon for lauds of Sunday (second week of the Psalter). This use indicates not anymore the entrance of the Lord to Jerusalem but the continual coming of the Lord in a Christian's journey through time. In another occasion the verse is used as entrance antiphon during the Christmas season and as the verse for the Alleluia on the day after Christmas,¹³¹ where Christ's coming is interpreted as his coming down to become man. Still, previous to that, the verse is also used as responsorial antiphon in the first week of Advent,¹³² where the coming of Christ is interpreted also as the second coming, the perfection of creation.

Thus, these different meanings of Christ's coming not only enrich this verse in particular but also the psalm in general, where different aspects may be seen in a new perspective thanks to the indications provided by the liturgical tradition.

*c. Haec dies quam fecit Dominus*¹³³

This verse, less used than the previous two, has a very precise and somewhat "fixed" meaning, attributed to it by Tradition itself. The actual liturgical discipline limits its use within the season of Easter: as responsorial antiphon for the Resurrection Sunday, as the alleluiaic

¹²⁹ «Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord» (Ps 117: 26).

¹³⁰ Cf. LH II, 322; GS 115.

¹³¹ Cf. MR 143; LE III, 281.

¹³² Cf. LE I, 49.

¹³³ «This is the day the Lord has made» (Ps 117: 24).

verse for the whole week of the Octave,¹³⁴ as a possible responsorial antiphon during this season, and as antiphon for lauds on the sixth Sunday of Easter. It is therefore consequential that the day of the Lord is the day of the resurrection. This idea was already present in the commentaries of the Fathers, who insisted on the importance of this “new day” not so much so the day itself, as that which it announces – Christ’s victory over death and the dawning of life eternal. This “day of the Lord” has become the foundation of Christian cult and the zenith of Christian time. Thus the famous exhortation: «*iuxta domenicam viventes*».¹³⁵

*d. Dexterā Domini fecit virtutem*¹³⁶

Next to the previous one, this verse is used three times, and not exclusively for Eastertide. It is used as offertory antiphon during the celebration of the Easter vigil, with an immediate reference to the marvelous work done by the Lord – the resurrection – and an allusion to the definitive victory of good over evil. This hope-filled vision is present even in the middle of the Lenten observance. On the *Laetare* Sunday, the antiphon for lauds is this same verse, which indicates the final victory of God’s right hand, although man’s journey may seem for now crossing the valley of death. Finally, it is used on some Sundays during the Ordinary time as the second antiphon for Daytime prayer. It is interesting to note that this verse serves to introduce the part of the psalm, from verse seven to verse eighteen, since it establishes the keypoint of these verses.

2.2.2. Other verses used as antiphons

The following verses are treated for the purpose of a more complete vision of the usage. However, given their infrequent usage, the exposition limits itself to a brief presentation. In fact, the following verses are used as antiphon only once, or at most twice.

*e. De tribulatione invocavi Dominum et exaudivit me.*¹³⁷ This verse is presented twice as antiphon, with a relatively general character. During the Ordinary time, it serves as the antiphon which introduces the first part of the psalm at Daytime prayer of Sunday, week three. It is also present in the entrance hymn of the fourth Sunday of Lent. In both cases, the antiphon suggests

¹³⁴ From Monday to Saturday within the Octave of Easter (cf. LE I, 652; 654; 657; 660; 662; 665).

¹³⁵ IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *ad Magnesios*, 9, 1-2, in PG 5, 670; This has been reemphasized by Pope Benedict XVI (BENEDICT XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 02/22/2007, 72).

¹³⁶ «The Lord's right hand strikes with power» (Ps 117: 16).

¹³⁷ «In danger I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free» (Ps 117: 5).

the Christian way of putting one's trust in the Lord, according to the example of Jesus himself, for God never forgets his faithful servant.

*f. Bonum est confugere ad Dominum.*¹³⁸ This verse appears only once, as the antiphon which introduces the first part of the psalm on Daytime prayer of Sunday, week one (Ordinary time). It offers almost the same invitation, to trust in the Lord, as the previous verse.

*g. Fortitudo mea et laus mea Dominus; Et factus est mihi in salutem.*¹³⁹ The first stich is used as antiphon for the second section of the psalm as used in Daytime prayer of Sunday, week one (Ordinary Time). The second one is used as antiphon for the same section as used in the Office of readings on Thursday within the Octave of Easter. The aspect of this verse is that of a confession of God's mighty intervention in saving his servant.

*h. Non moriar, sed vivam et narrabo opera Domini.*¹⁴⁰ This verse appears once, as the antiphon for the whole psalm on the fourth Sunday of Easter. The context brings in the concept of the resurrection (being in Easter and on a Sunday) as if these words came from the mouth of Christ, he who proclaims the works of the Lord.

*i. Aperite mihi portas iustitiae et ingressus in eas confitebor Domino.*¹⁴¹ This verse appears only once, in the Gradual, as entrance antiphon in the Mass for the Dead. This particular usage puts these words on the mouth of the Christian who knocks at the door of paradise. Those who enter will give thanks to the Lord forever.

*j. Haec porta Domini, et iusti intrabunt in eam.*¹⁴² Also, this verse appears only in the liturgy of the Dead, as an antiphon for the procession towards the cemetery. The use is very much connected to the previous one and the meaning is complementary to it. It is as if a response to the call is given, explaining who can enter this gate of justice.

*k. Confitebor tibi quoniam exaudisti me.*¹⁴³ This is used as antiphon twice. First, it is the antiphon of the third section of Psalm 117 in Daytime prayer of Sunday, week one (Ordinary

¹³⁸ «Better to take refuge in the Lord (than to put one's trust in mortals) » (Ps 117: 8).

¹³⁹ «The Lord, my strength and might, came to me as savior» (Ps 117: 14).

¹⁴⁰ «I shall not die but live and declare the deeds of the Lord» (Ps 117: 17).

¹⁴¹ «Open the gates of victory; I will enter and thank the Lord» (Ps 117: 19).

¹⁴² «This is the Lord's own gate, where the victors enter» (Ps 117: 20). While in the original context the translation of «*iustus*» to «victor» is comprehensible, in the liturgical context a better translation may be the common meaning, «just».

¹⁴³ «I thank you for you answered me; (you have been my savior) » (Ps 117: 21).

time). Here it refers to the prayer of Christ answered by the Father in the event of the resurrection. This same idea is present in the other use of this verse, as responsorial antiphon for the mass of Saturday within the Octave of Easter.

*l. Lapidem quem reprobaverunt aedificantes, hic factus est in caput anguli.*¹⁴⁴ Despite the celebrity of this verse, very much cited by the New Testament books, it is used only once as antiphon, that is in the Responsorial psalm of the sixth Sunday of Easter. Of Course, its paschal character is immediately perceivable since this comprehension is inherent in the verse as interpreted by the Christian tradition.

*m. Deus Dominus illuxit nobis.*¹⁴⁵ In both instances where it is used, the theme of Christ as the light is present. As antiphon for the third section of the psalm in Daytime prayer of Sunday, week three (Ordinary time), it highlights the splendor of the resurrection. As antiphon for the entrance hymn of Tuesday during Christmas season, it underlines the coming of Christ to Earth as the light given by God.

*n. Deus meus es tu, et confitebor tibi; Deus meus es tu et exaltabo te.*¹⁴⁶ This verse has a multiple context in its use, since there are two different points of reference, two different “characters”. It is used as antiphon for Lauds on the fourth Sunday of Lent, in which these words seem to fit best in the mouth of the Lord, who praises the Father. In another place, this verse is used as antiphon for the entrance hymn during the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle. In this latter case, the words seem to fit best in the mouth of the apostle, who addresses the Master as his Lord and God.

In synthesis, a general observation on the antiphons may be interesting. Exegetical works, in their efforts to identify the structure of Psalm 117 propose, among many possibilities, the division according to the characters involved in the psalm.¹⁴⁷ Given this, it is noteworthy that the majority of the verses chosen as antiphons are those applied to a “soloist”.¹⁴⁸ And very often, they are applied to Christ. There are other verses for the assembly or a choir, or even for the priestly class.¹⁴⁹ On the one hand, this is indicative of the inherent Christological content of the

¹⁴⁴ «The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone» (Ps 117: 22).

¹⁴⁵ «The Lord is God and has given us light» Ps 117: 27).

¹⁴⁶ «You are my God, I give you thanks; my God, I offer you praise» (Ps 117: 28).

¹⁴⁷ RAVASI, *Il libro Dei Salmi*, cit., 421.

¹⁴⁸ In the enumeration, these are: c, e, g, h, k, l, n.

¹⁴⁹ Those for the assembly: d, f. those for the priests: b, j, m.

psalm, especially on the mystery of redemption. On the other hand, these brief considerations will be of great help in the following section, which treats the question on the selection of verses.

2.3. Other elements provided by the liturgy

In the Liturgy of the Hours, the psalm is provided with other elements, aside from the antiphon, which are directed to a better understanding of the psalm: the psalm title and the introductory quotation. In the liturgy of the Eucharist, aside from the musical presentation of the verses – which are also indicative of its meaning (but this is beyond the limit of this study) – the selection of verses in the responsorial psalm and in the hymns can also contribute to a better understanding of the psalm. This section treats these elements, though in a sober way, to provide the most comprehensive description possible.

2.3.1. The Psalm Title

Strictly speaking, this element is not properly a liturgical text since it is not recited by those who celebrate the Divine Office. However, it may be useful for the one praying the psalms in as much as it is an aid to grasp better the main theme of the psalm as well as its implications in Christian life.¹⁵⁰ With regards to Psalm 117, the psalm title being used in the actual liturgy is: *Vox iubilationis et salutis*.¹⁵¹ On the one hand, this title highlights the spirit or the prevalent sentiment of the psalm, that of rejoicing, rather than the content – thus it doesn't mention a particular character to which the psalm can be applied (at first glance, this may seem less useful). On the other hand, the choice for a general title can allow the psalm to accommodate the different indications of the psalm, as can be noted in the various psalm titles gathered in the course of history. These psalm titles originally «consist of commentaries on the form of normally short statements that accompanied each Psalm, giving it a certain coloring that favored Christian prayer».¹⁵² Thus this voice of jubilation is interpreted as the voice of Christ who speaks of himself.¹⁵³ This voice is also a cry of salvation since the psalm encourages the faithful to trust in the Lord, and only thus is it possible to enter the gate of justice.¹⁵⁴ But not only that, this voice – already attributed to Christ – is also the voice of the Church. In this psalm, she tells of her

¹⁵⁰ Cf. A. LAMERI (ed.), *La Liturgia delle Ore*, Messagero, Padova (2009), 48.

¹⁵¹ It is translated as: *Song of joy for salvation*.

¹⁵² F. M. AROCENA – J. A. GOÑI (edd.), *Psalterium Liturgicum I: Psalmi in Missale Romano et Liturgia Horarum*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano (2005), XL.

¹⁵³ «Vox Christi de se dicentis» (*ibid.*, 383).

¹⁵⁴ «Ut ostendatur via homini, per quam incedens perveniat ad portam, quam ingressus diem habeat et noctem exclude possit» (*ibid.*, 384).

travails, of those who persecute her, and she narrates her redemption, which comes through Christ.¹⁵⁵ As a consequence, this voice of jubilation has become the cry of the Church's brilliant members, the martyrs, whose trust in the Lord is solid and undivided, and whose only longing is to be received into that gate to be in the presence of the cornerstone himself.¹⁵⁶ This diversity of perspectives is united in the central figure of the victorious risen Christ, whose suffering and victory are prefigured in the words of the psalmist, for it is Christ who is the cornerstone and the light which illuminates human kind.¹⁵⁷

2.3.2. *The New Testament or patristic quotations*

This other element, unlike the previous one, can be a liturgical text since it can be employed as antiphon in certain circumstances.¹⁵⁸ But aside from this practical consideration, these quotations can be very useful in opening the Old Testament texts, such as the psalms, to the light of the revelation of Christ. For this, these phrases are also helpful, like the titles, in highlighting the Christological matrix of the psalms. For Psalm 117, the quotation is taken from the Acts of the Apostles: *Hic est lapis qui reprobatus est a vobis aedificatoribus, qui factus est in caput anguli*.¹⁵⁹ This passage, already presented in section 1.3.1., is an emphatic interpretation of the psalm's verse 22 as fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ, in testimony against those who put Him to death. Thus, the paschal character of the psalm is once more highlighted, much more so if this verse is used as antiphon since it not only uses the psalm verse but directly and explicitly applies it to Christ. Moreover, having these words uttered by no less than the apostle Peter, as it is presented in the pericope, the voice of the Church is all too evident. And the apostle, being himself in the midst of persecution and on trial, the voice of the martyrs and those who boldly confess their faith and trust in the Lord is also immediately present. Through this brief consideration of the quotation, it can be made evident that this element, no matter how minute and oftentimes secondary, is placed in the liturgy by the Church for further aid to a fuller comprehension of the psalm being recited.

¹⁵⁵ «Ecclesia de persecutoribus suis loquitur et de Christo» (*ibid.*).

¹⁵⁶ «Vox fidelium Domino confidentium et in eo solummodo confidentium, qui aperiri sibi portas iustitiae deprecantur, de angulari lapide, hoc est Domino Salvatore, subiungens» (*ibid.*).

¹⁵⁷ «Quod Ipse sit lapis angularis et dies illuminationis nostrae» (*ibid.*).

¹⁵⁸ «In Officio vero per annum sine cantu, loco harum antiphonarum, adhiberi possunt pro opportunitate sententiae psalmis adiunctae» (IGLH 114).

¹⁵⁹ «This Jesus is the stone which, rejected by you builders, has become the stone supporting all the rest» (Act 4: 11).

2.3.3. The section of verses

In the liturgy of the Eucharist, the use of the psalms in general appears very fragmentary. This impression is primarily due to the practice of selecting a few verses and setting aside the rest. This generalization does not exclude Psalm 117. However, a closer look at the over-all use of the psalm may shed light on a quite different reality.

This psalm is principally used as a responsorial psalm during the Liturgy of the Word. Only in a much lesser frequency is it present as verse for the songs of the Mass. And it must be affirmed that the psalm is used in its entirety by the Liturgy, without leaving behind even one verse. Among the Responsorial psalms distributed throughout the year, every single verse is present at least once. If the verses used in the songs are included, then every verse is used at least twice. This fact, however, does not annul the inquiry on the choice of verses. Is there any particular pattern? Is there any particular reason?

Among the most used verses of Psalm 117 are verses 1, 16, 17, 22, and 23. This pattern is quite similar to that of the antiphons.¹⁶⁰ Verse one is the common invitation to give thanks to the Lord. Verses sixteen and seventeen synthesize the marvelous intervention of God, for which the celebration of thanksgiving is called for in the first part of the psalm. Verse twenty-two and the one that follows express the motive of the liturgy of thanksgiving inside the temple, as the second part of the psalm. As has been mentioned, these verses have received a very evident Christological hue.

The liturgy around the passion of the Lord proposes a combination of verses¹⁶¹ having as its core verses ten to twelve. These verses which speak about enemies surrounding the psalmist have a very clear allusion to the passion, to those who persecuted and put to death Jesus on the cross. The Fathers of the Church often interpreted this in like manner and also extended it to the sufferings of the Church. This traditional interpretation found its way into the liturgical discipline.

¹⁶⁰ See section 2.2.1.

¹⁶¹ This ranges from verse 4 to 17. It is found in the entrance hymn of the 4th Sunday of Lent and the responsorial psalms the Votive mass of the Holy Cross.

The liturgy around the Easter event is very consistent in combining the initial verses with central verses of the psalm.¹⁶² The Easter color of the first four verses directs the object of God's goodness principally on the resurrection. Thus the motive for this great thanksgiving is one, but expressed in different terms: the triumph of God's right hand, the victory over death, the cornerstone, the wonderful work done by God, etc. Moreover, verses 17, 22, and 23 have been identified by exegetes as parts appertaining to a soloist. If this is the case, these verses are almost surely put on Christ's lips, he who is the victor and who is God's right hand. Closely connected to this, the Masses related to the Church – the dedication of a Church and the Mass for various necessities, for the unity of Christians – is connected to verses 22 and 23, making evident the fundamental dependence of the whole structure of salvation on the one cornerstone made by God himself.

With regards to the liturgy of the Dead, the combination of verses is taken from the first part of the psalm. Aside from the opening verses which serve as invitation, a common reference is made to verses five, eight, thirteen, and twenty. The first three are indications on the help of the Lord for those who ask it from Him, and so the value of trusting in the Lord. Verse twenty which belongs already to the second part of the psalm is a declaration, a judgment for those who are going to encounter God, since only the just ones may enter the gate heaven.

The combination of verses 25-27 can be interpreted in various levels as presented in the previous section.¹⁶³ This variety of interpretation can be centered on two points – the “one who comes” and the “one who enlightens” – both of which are attributed directly to Christ. Thus, this combination is present during Advent, at Palm Sunday, and at Eastertide.

To conclude this second part, it is appropriate to make an overview of the study. At the beginning, this research introduces the argument by expounding on the relation between Scriptures and Liturgy. The succeeding sections of the first part are a survey on tradition's use of and interpretation of Psalm 117 – the books of the New Testament, the Church Fathers, and the history of liturgical tradition. In this second part, the survey is continued to the present liturgical practice, including other elements which are helpful to the scope of the study. But if it is to be asked whether every element is already accounted for, the answer is absolutely negative.

¹⁶² Verses 1-4, 16-18, and 22-24. These are basically the five most used verses along with some others.

¹⁶³ See section 2.2.2.

Up to this point, the psalm has been analyzed somehow in an isolated way, without much reference on the actual context of the liturgical celebration (maybe with the exception of those references on the liturgical year). Nonetheless, these elements hitherto considered may be deemed a sufficient preparation for the theological exposition in the following part.

PART III: Psalm 117 – A Theological-Liturgical study in the Easter context

In the preceding part, the uses of Psalm 117 and its various highlights have been presented in the most comprehensive manner possible, within the limits of this study. This may

Such an affirmation is at the same time a premise for this part, wherein the theological and liturgical implications are formed into one coherent enunciation. In fact, while the previous part enumerates a diversity of hues which the text acquires depending on the context, this section limits itself further to a particular context: the Eastertide. Consequently, this choice would imply two things: on the one hand, it excludes the consideration of other liturgical contexts, although these other elements have been already presented briefly; on the other hand, the Sunday context, which pervades the entire liturgical year is taken into consideration in as much as it is related to the Easter theme. However, this limitation does not necessarily put a limit into the richness of the psalm since the usage is very abundant so as to be able to assume other meanings which may be presented more evidently somewhere else.

For the purpose of organization, this part will be divided into three sections, each one dealing with a particular theological area: the Christological relevance, the Ecclesiological highlights, and the Eschatological underpinnings. In each section, the psalm will be examined according to its liturgical contexts, in order to make evident these theological themes.

3.1. The Christology of Psalm 117

The appropriation of the psalms by Jesus himself, and in consequence, by the first Christian community has lead to the development of its Christological meaning. This Christologization, in turn, can be understood in two ways, two perspectives of seeing the same reality. On the one hand, the Christification of the psalms can be applied to the manner of praying the psalms. This argument has already been treated in section 1.2.1. On the other hand, the Christification of the psalms can be referred to the content of the psalm itself, to the inherent figures fulfilled in the person and in the life of Jesus. This section intends to develop this second aspect, by presenting the different figures embedded in the text, which refer to the mystery of Jesus Christ. Psalm 117, in particular, despite the fact that it is not a messianic psalm – one which is centered on the figure of the Messiah – contains some elements which already in the early Christianity were applied to Jesus's person or the events of his earthly life.

3.1.1. *Qui venit in nomine Domini: God becoming man*

The original context of Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem, which in effect is a messianic scene, incorporates this passage from verse 26, with clear reference to Jesus' coming for the salvation of Israel. From a liturgical greeting for those who arrive at the temple, the passage is now read as referring to Jesus, the one promised by God for the salvation of Israel.¹⁶⁴ St. Augustine, in referring this interpretation, links this verse with the words spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of John: «*Ego veni in nomine Patris mei*».¹⁶⁵ This theologically consolidated juxtaposition has been seen almost as a natural context of the psalm verse, somehow automatic. Yet it must be presented as a first stage of the process of christification. Aside from that, the liturgical contribution can further illumine the subject, for a better and clearer understanding of Christ's person.

In the second Sunday of Easter, year B, the presence of verse 26 in the Responsorial psalm is accompanied by a reading from the first letter of John, which asserts the faith in Jesus as Son of God: «Who is the victor over the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?»¹⁶⁶ Thus the origin of Jesus Christ is clearly emphasized by the same author, who wrote in the prologue of his gospel that this Word made flesh was in the beginning with God.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, the divine origin of Jesus is given ulterior definition – that this Son of God who comes from Heaven is also God – as asserted by the same prologue. This clarification is supplied by the Liturgy on the same Sunday, year C, where the presence of the psalm verse is accompanied by the reading from the Book of Revelation, which asserts the eternity from which Jesus comes, who is the Alpha and the Omega: «Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives».¹⁶⁸

The affirmation on the divine origin of Jesus has a dual aspect: the intra-Trinitarian mystery of the distinction of persons, the Father and the Son; and the extra-Trinitarian mystery of the Son's mission in the world. The former is barely mentioned and is not immediately

¹⁶⁴ «It was a blessing that the priests addressed and, as it were, bestowed upon the pilgrims as they arrived. But in the meantime the phrase “who enters in the name of the Lord” had acquired Messianic significance. It has become a designation of the one promised by God» (J. RATZINGER, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy week: from the entrance into Jerusalem to the resurrection*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco [2011], 7).

¹⁶⁵ Jn 5: 43 (cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 117, 21, cit., 1104).

¹⁶⁶ 1Jn 5: 5. The second reading is taken from 1Jn 5: 1-5.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Jn 1: 2.

¹⁶⁸ Rev 1: 17-18.

perceptible in the psalm verse. The latter aspect, however, is interesting since it can be extracted from the verse in question. In fact, *qui venit* is being understood by the Christian tradition as *qui missus*, the one sent by the Father to the World.¹⁶⁹ This enrichment in meaning is not alien nor forced into to the liturgical context since the celebration itself presents supporting proof. For example, the gospel passage presents Jesus' sending off of the disciples on the basis of his being sent himself.¹⁷⁰ This mission of the Son is realized by the Incarnation and fulfilled in the paschal mystery. For this reason, the antiphon to the responsory acquires unique Christological hue: *confitemini Domino quoniam bonus, quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius* – wherein this eternal love of the Father for men is easily identified with the sending of his Son.¹⁷¹ This also finds echo in the incipit of the collect prayer of this Sunday: *Deus misericordiae sempiternae*.¹⁷²

Far from an apparent demotion or diminution of the Son's dignity in the fact of being sent to the world, he has gained his dignity in the midst men who recognized his divinity. In particular, the phrase *nomen Domini* may at first glance appear devaluating the equality of the two divine persons; if the Son comes in the Lord's name, it seems like He is subordinate to the Father. But the mystery of Christ's person points to another point of view, the real and effective equality in divinity between the Father and the Son. As a matter of fact this *nomen* appears in the accompanying reading of the same Sunday, year C, where it is rendered into *nomen Christi* – in whom alone there is salvation.¹⁷³ This is an effective affirmation of the divinity of the Son, one and equal with the Father, which can be perfectly seen in the affirmation of the Apostle Thomas in the same gospel passage: *Dominus meus et Deus meus*.¹⁷⁴ This interpretation is already present in the commentary of Hysechius, who in commenting verses 10-12, the phrase *in nomine Domini*, repeated three times, is interpreted Christologically.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ This is very evident in the parable of the wicked tenants, where Jesus explains in parable his coming passion (cf. Mt 21: 33-46).

¹⁷⁰ «Sicut misit me Pater, et ego mitto vos» (Jn 20: 21).

¹⁷¹ «For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son» (Jn 3: 16).

¹⁷² MR 386.

¹⁷³ «Et non est in alio aliquo salus, nec enim nomen aliud est sub caelo datum hominibus, in quo oportet nos salvos fieri» (Act 4: 12).

¹⁷⁴ «Respondit Thomas et dixit ei: "Dominus meus et Deus meus!"» (Jn 20: 28).

¹⁷⁵ «Nomen autem ipsi Christus, quod ad omnes insidias vindicandas satis est: illud enim et armatura, et scutum et custodia est illi qui gerit ipsum» (HYSECHIUS, *Fragmenta in Psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 26, in PG 93, 1135).

3.1.2. *Dominus factus est mihi in salutem: The salvation brought by Christ*

In Psalm 117, verses ten to thirteen describes the suffering endured by the psalmist, outnumbered and surrounded by his enemies, and his triumph over them through the help brought by God. Thus, in conclusion to this narration of victory, the psalmist unveils the source of his strength, «*fortitudo mea et laus mea Dominus et factus est mihi in salutem*».¹⁷⁶ The original context of a national military victory can be easily traced in this verse, as in the entire psalm, where “*salus*” is equivalent to “victory”. A parallel meaning has occurred to the more famous verse 25, *O Domine salvum me fac*, which is better recognized by the expression *Hosanna*.¹⁷⁷ However, with the coming of Jesus, and the subsequent fulfillment of Scriptures in his person, the messianic idea of salvation in terms of military and political victory has been changed into a deeper and supernatural dimension – the salvation of mankind from death and sin. This is made concrete through his Incarnation. In his “solidarity” with human beings he “was made salvation” for them. All of his life is one act of salvation which will end up in the ultimate act of “satisfaction” for sins on Calvary with the effective remission.

The claim on the salvation in Jesus is certainly not a secondary development of Christian soteriology. Jesus himself has expressed that his coming is for the salvation of men, that the Father has sent him that the world may have life to the full. This latent hue of the verse can be made evident, for example, in the liturgy of the fourth Sunday of Easter. This verse is selected to form part of the Responsorial psalm. The soteriological hue is reflected in the accompanying reading from the Acts of the Apostles, where Peter confesses in front of the leaders of Israel his faith in Jesus as savior. Peter makes explicit his confession on the “uniqueness” of the salvation brought by Christ.¹⁷⁸ This may be better expressed as the “unicity” of the salvation brought by Christ, which in turn has its foundation on the universality of Christ’s redemption. Thus, Peter’s confession is the confession of the Church.

That Christ is the one “made salvation” is already present in the previous paragraphs; but how it was actualized or concretized remains to be said. On the same liturgical context, the fourth Sunday of Easter, the Gospel presents another aspect of this salvation in Christ. The

¹⁷⁶ Ps 117: 14.

¹⁷⁷ For a lengthy explanation on the evolution of the text, see for example: J. J. PETUCHOWSKI, *Hoshi'ahna in Ps 118,25. A Prayer for rain*, «Vetus Testamentum», 5 (1955), 266-271.

¹⁷⁸ «There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved» (Act 4:12).

gospel passage presents Christ speaking to his disciples and explaining through an image –that of the good shepherd – his mission of salvation: «*Ego sum pastor bonus: bonus pastor animam suam ponit pro ovibus*». ¹⁷⁹ As mentioned earlier, Christ's entire earthly existence is salvific, but the most significant act by which he saves mankind is through his self offering on the Cross. Thus what is meant by Christ *factus in salutem* is actually *peccatum fecit*, ¹⁸⁰ when he offered himself in sacrifice for our reconciliation. Moreover, Christ offered himself up with total freedom, and herein lays his great act of salvation. In the light of this, *factum est in salutem* acquires an active meaning despite its passive form to mean that Christ willed it to be so, as in the case of the Christological hymn in the letter to the Philippians. ¹⁸¹

When Christ rose from the dead, his act of salvation is ratified by the Father. Thus the full scene of the salvation brought by Jesus is made manifest. And the memory of his passion is completed with the joy in his resurrection. On Thursday within the Octave of Easter, the Office of readings presents Psalm 117 in three parts, the second of which is introduced by the antiphon *factus est in salutem*. Here, the fullness of the work of redemption is taken into consideration, and the joy of the resurrection not only reaffirms but also illumines the reality of Christ's sacrifice, which is not so much on the suffering he endured as to the obedience which he shows as example for humanity. And in the Sundays of the year, particularly during the Ordinary Time, the first stich of the same verse is used as antiphon during the Daytime prayer of Sunday, week one, wherein is affirmed that the Lord is the source of man's salvation. The redemption offered by God the Father by sending his Son is the excellent expression of his faithfulness to himself. ¹⁸² For this reason, man's joy is expressed in the invitation, *confitemini Domino quoniam bonus*. As Dydimus the blind would write regarding this verse that Christ became man precisely for the salvation of mankind. ¹⁸³

3.1.3. Lapidem quem reprobaverunt aedificantes: the Passion and Death of Jesus

The entire verse 22, very known for its Easter meaning, can be considered as a profession of faith on the paschal mystery of Jesus. The Christological appropriation of this text has been so

¹⁷⁹ Jn 10: 11.

¹⁸⁰ «Eum, qui non noverat peccatum, pro nobis peccatum fecit, ut nos efficeremur iustitia Dei in ipso» (2 Cor 5:21).

¹⁸¹ «He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross » (Phl 2:8).

¹⁸² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 04/03/1979, 9/2.

¹⁸³ «Non enim factus est Deus Verbum, nec veritas, nec sapientia, nec Filius, sed factus est nobis iustitia, et sanctificatio, et redemptio» (DYDIMUS THE BLIND, *Expositio in Psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 14, in PG 39, 1559).

immediate to the point of putting it directly on the mouth of Christ.¹⁸⁴ And the entirety of its content underlines the unity of the paschal event. Jesus himself explains this to his disciples on the way to Emmaus: on the one hand, the testimony of the Scriptures; on the other, the coherence of his suffering and his glorification.¹⁸⁵ As the stone rejected, Jesus undergoes the passion which culminates on the cross. As the cornerstone, Jesus becomes the foundation of the new order of creation through his resurrection. In this section the focus is on the suffering of Jesus.

It is interesting to note the constellation of three wills in this historic and salvific event of the passion. First, the most obvious in terms of syntax is of course the will of Christ's persecutors, the subject of the verb *reprobaverunt*. On Friday within the Octave of Easter, this verse is the antiphon for the Responsorial psalm. In the reading which accompanies it, Peter explicitly identifies the subject of this verb, while he was being questioned for having preached in the Temple. He says referring to Jesus, «*hic est lapis, qui reprobatus est a vobis aedificantibus*».¹⁸⁶ In the Mass of Easter Sunday, where Psalm 117 is the Responsorial psalm, this verse which is present in this liturgical context is accompanied by a reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Here, Peter proclaims to his listeners the fact in a concise but vivid way: «they put him to death by hanging him on a tree».¹⁸⁷ Thus, the identification of the character is very well defined – the Jews as the ones responsible for Jesus' suffering and death. But is this the most important aspect? Certainly no. The second character is God the Father, who willed that his Son become man in order to save humanity. Perhaps the remotest yet clearest prefiguration of this is the episode of Abraham, who was tested to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.¹⁸⁸ God, who prepared the coming of his Son through the Old Testament, has not been in no way equivocal on this. Moreover, on the Cross, God the Father's will outlast infinitely that of Abraham in fulfilling his plan of redemption to the end, by the real death of the Son. And besides, Jesus himself, during the whole of his public ministry has declared that he comes to do the Father's will, which includes the undergoing of suffering and death – best proved by his prayer at the garden of

¹⁸⁴ See section 1.3.1.

¹⁸⁵ «“Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures» (Lk 24: 26-27).

¹⁸⁶ «He is the stone rejected by you, the builders» (Act 4: 11).

¹⁸⁷ Act 10: 39.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Gen 22: 1-12.

Gethsemane.¹⁸⁹ The will of the Father, however, does not by any means eliminate the freedom of the Son. Thus the third character is the Son, who himself has also willed to take unto himself this act of redemption. It is already visible in the scene at Gethsemane, where he explicitly and freely accepted with his human will to follow the Father's will. And with regards to his freedom to undergo death, he has said in another passage, «I lay down my life in order to take it up again».¹⁹⁰ As already mentioned in the previous section, the obedience of the Son is an integral factor of salvation, not only on the general but also in the particular option to suffer and die in order to redeem man.¹⁹¹

The psalm does not present any specific reference on the particularities of the Passion; that is why it is not cited in the account of the Passion in all four gospels. However, an allusion to the persecutors of Jesus can be read in verses 10-12. Many Fathers have commented on these verses having in mind the ones who put the Lord to death. Specifically, they describe the ferocity and the agility with which the evildoers put their plan into action.¹⁹² And the same verses repeat thrice the victory of goodness, that is, the victory of life over death. This immense conflict is best synthesized in a line of the Easter sequence *Victimae Paschali*: «*mors et vita duello confluxere mirando: dux vitae mortuus, regnat vivus*».¹⁹³

The fact of Jesus' death does not lack in emphasis. While the psalm verse speaks explicitly only of "rejection", the Lord himself explained by way of parable what this "rejection" means.¹⁹⁴ In Matthew's Gospel and its parallels, Jesus is presented explaining to the Jewish leaders how his rejection is to take place: «When the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance." They seized him,

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Mk 14: 36 and parallels.

¹⁹⁰ Jn 10: 17.

¹⁹¹ This theme is treated more extensively in: F. OCÁRIZ – L. F. MATEO SECO – J. A. RUESTRA, *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*, Four Court Press, Ireland (1994), 208-218.

¹⁹² On the application of the verse to Christ: «Christo ab omnibus gentibus oppugnato magis congruit haec dicere» (ORIGEN, *Selecta in Psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 22, in PG 12, 1579).

On the interpretation of bees and fire: «Non enim dixit solummodo, *Circumdederunt*, sed, *Sicut apes, et sicut ignis in spinis*. Per apes quidem magnum animi alacritatem, per spinas vero iram intolerabilem, et qui extingui non poterat, bilis ardorem significans» (JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Expositio in Psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, 3, in PG 55, 332).

¹⁹³ GS 160.

¹⁹⁴ Thus Jesus applies to himself this verse at the conclusion of the parable of the wicked tenants (cf. Mt 21: 42 and parallels).

threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him».¹⁹⁵ As to the soteriological relevance of his death, R. Guardini points out that, with his dying, Jesus reaches the bottom of evil, going beyond the barrier of death, that “non-existence”, from which will then rise a new creation, in a way, a “re-creation” of man.¹⁹⁶ Thus man’s salvation is brought to its perfection with Christ’s passage to death, in order to defeat sin. The last of the series of readings during the Easter vigil, which is previous to the Responsorial psalm containing verse 22, underlines the effect of Christ’s death for man: «as to his death, he died to sin once and for all».¹⁹⁷

3.1.4. Dextera Domini exaltata est: Christ’s exaltation

As was mentioned above, the unity of the paschal mystery is very evident in the confessions of the early Church. This present division is merely an attempt for a systematic presentation. While the previous section was dedicated to the passion, this present section treats the glorification of the Son. This stich, taken from verse 16 of the psalm, forms part of a triple affirmation regarding God’s right hand (verses fifteen and sixteen). The original meaning connected to the psalmist’s victory over his persecutors is given a new depth when the psalm is applied to the person of Christ. The New Testament narratives are very clear on the events that immediately followed the death and burial of Jesus. An excellent summary can be found in the Discourse of St Peter, as narrated by the Act of the Apostles: «God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses. Exalted at the right hand of God, he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth, as you see and hear».¹⁹⁸ This confessional passage enunciates that Christ’s exaltation is threefold: his resurrection, his ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹⁹

This psalm verse is part of the Responsorial psalm on the Easter vigil celebration. It is accompanied by the synoptic accounts on the resurrection, thereby establishing a clear point of reference. The liturgical context is univocal in identifying the one extolled by God – Jesus whom God raised from the Dead. It can also be identified in a more general sense as the glorification of Christ. Jesus expressed before his passion two types of his glorification, his going up on the

¹⁹⁵ Mt 21: 38-39. Exegetes posit as a possible explanation of the citation the word interplay between the Hebrew *ben* (son) and the word *‘eben* (stone), through association (cf. D. A. HAGNER, *Matthew 14-28*, «Word Biblical Commentary» 33B, Word Books, Dallas, Texas [1995], 620-624).

¹⁹⁶ Cf. R. GUARDINI, *Il Signore* (2nd Ed.), Vita e pensiero, Bergamo (1950), 370.

¹⁹⁷ Rm 6: 10.

¹⁹⁸ Act 2: 32-33.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. : F. OCÁRIZ – L. F. MATEO SECO – J. A. RUESTRA, *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*, cit., 229-251.

cross, and his going up from the grave. And in front of the bitterness of the former, he put his hope on the greatness of the latter, as can be noticed in his prayer: «I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do. Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began».²⁰⁰ And the preaching of the Apostles is precisely the novelty of the Resurrection, notwithstanding the expected resistance on the part of the listeners. Thus Paul, for example, hands over this tradition to the Corinthians as integral part of the Christian faith.²⁰¹ Thus the collect of this Vigil Mass describes very well the event of the resurrection as «*gloria dominicae resurrectionis*».²⁰²

Closely related to the resurrection are the events of the ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit, intimately related to one another. The ascension to heaven is described as Christ's sitting at the right hand of the Father. Thus *dextera Domini* finds an appropriate link to another psalm verse, «*Dixit Dominus Domino meo: "Sede a dextris meis"*».²⁰³ This link has been used already by St. Peter in the Acts, when he explained the event of the Resurrection.²⁰⁴ This confession is constantly renewed by the Church in her liturgical celebration through the recitation of the Creed: «*et ascendit in caelum, sedet ad dexteram Patris*».²⁰⁵ And this "going up" of Jesus is a necessary condition to the descent of the Holy Spirit, as he Himself announced to his disciples. Moreover, the descent of the Holy Spirit is a further glorification of Jesus. He told this to his disciples during the last supper, when he promised the coming of the Paraclete. Speaking of the Holy Spirit he said: «He will glorify me, because he will take from what is mine and declare it to you».²⁰⁶

²⁰⁰ Jn 17: 4-5.

²⁰¹ «For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Kephaz, then to the Twelve» (1Cor 15:3-5). K. Adams highlights the importance of this passage on account of its antiquity (cf. K. ADAMS, *The Son Of God*, Sheed & Ward, London [1934], 211-244). Moreover, this text is taken as part of the articles of faith in the Nicene Creed: «et resurrexit tertia die, secundum Scripturas» (MR 513).

²⁰² MR 360.

²⁰³ «The Lord says to you, my lord: "Take your throne at my right hand"» (Ps 109: 1).

²⁰⁴ «For David did not go up into heaven, but he himself said: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'"» (Act 2: 34-35).

²⁰⁵ MR 513.

²⁰⁶ Jn 16: 14.

One interesting element of the psalm which is closely related to the glorification of Christ is verse 24, *Haec dies quam fecit Dominus*.²⁰⁷ A constant in the resurrection account is the precise indication of the day, *tertia die*, which is also present on the Symbols of faith. The Fathers insisted that it is not so much on the day, but the content of this day, that the attention should be drawn. But the same can be said the other way around. Precisely because of this special event, the center of Christian time is no longer the Sabbath but the Lord's Day. The Sabbath is the day per excellence in the Old Testament, having as its foundation the event of creation. Only an event with as much cosmic character as the previous if not greater can effect a change on the religious outlook of time, and such was the resurrection.²⁰⁸

3.2. The Ecclesiology of Psalm 117

The original context of the Psalm, according to the studies of exegetes, manifests by itself the basic structure of the people of God, Israel: the community, the priestly order, and a special role perhaps of the king or some sort of leader.²⁰⁹ With the assumption of its fuller meaning in Christ, the psalm is understood to represent the inherent structure of the new family of God, the Church, who assumes upon herself the title of the new Israel. The novelty of the structure rests on the centrality of the person of Christ, as the head of this body composed of many members.²¹⁰ A prominent passage during the Easter season captures in a synthesized manner the basic traits of this community of believers: «They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers».²¹¹ Thus in this section, the Church is described in its four basic characteristics, in as much as presented by the psalm and its context: unity, sanctity, universality, and apostolicity.

3.2.1. *Lapidem quem reprobaverunt aedificantes, hic factus est in caput anguli: The Church, the one body of Christ*

This verse (22) is used in its entirety as the antiphon for the responsorial psalm of the fourth Sunday of Easter, year B. The accent on the second stich is not without any basis since the accompanying readings allow a deeper understanding of it. On the one hand, the liturgical

²⁰⁷ Athanasius interprets this verse thus: «Significatur autem dies resurrectionis Salvatoris nostri, quae ipsi cognominis est, scilicet Dominica» (Athanasius, *Expositio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 16, in PG 27, 479).

²⁰⁸ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Jesus of Nazareth*, cit., 257-259.

²⁰⁹ See the introduction of part two, pages 30-31.

²¹⁰ It is best summarized in this Pauline passage: «He is the head of the body, the church» (Col 1: 18).

²¹¹ Act 2:42. This passage is present in the first reading of the Second Sunday of Easter, year A.

context identifies to whom the figure *lapis* is applied. On the other hand, the same milieu unfolds the implications of the figure *caput anguli* through the use of other figures of the New Testament. The first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, identifies this cornerstone as Jesus himself, an interpretation pronounced by St Peter, the *petra* or stone chosen by Jesus on which to build his Church.²¹² As mentioned previously, this description is used by the Liturgy of the Hours as the introductory quotation of the psalm.²¹³ The second reading, taken from the letter of St. John, makes an allusion to man's union with God, expressed in terms of sonship, on account of Jesus, the Son of the Father.²¹⁴ And the gospel presents the figure of the shepherd, where Jesus mentions his unique role of gathering together humanity into one flock under one guide.²¹⁵ Henri de Lubac, in his book on Catholicism, explains that this image of the "one flock" as other images such as "the one vine" refers to the Church, the Body of Christ.²¹⁶ This Pauline expression, *corpus Christi*, gives prominence to the centrality of Christ who is the head, an idea easily perceivable in the psalm verse where Christ is described as the capstone.

This idea on the "oneness" or unity of the Church was already present in the commentaries done by the Fathers regarding this verse. In his commentary on this verse, Dydimus explains that the binding together into one edifice of God is the motive for Christ's becoming the living cornerstone.²¹⁷ Athanasius links this verse with the passage from the letter to the Ephesians 2: 15 synthesizing thus: «*Copulavit duos populos in unum novum hominem*».²¹⁸ And also, John Chrysostom expresses this unity in terms of *coniungere* or gathering together: «*Hic factus est in caput anguli: hoc est, utrasque gentes coniunxit*».²¹⁹ These are a few of the Fathers' ecclesiological understanding of this unity, the unity of Christ body that is presented by this verse.

²¹² «He is "the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone"» (Act 4: 11). On the election of Peter, see Lk 18: 19.

²¹³ See section 2.3.2.

²¹⁴ «See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are [...] Beloved, we are God's children now» (1Jn 3:1-2).

²¹⁵ «I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd» (Jn 10: 16).

²¹⁶ Cf. H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicism*, Burns and Oates, London (1950), 9-11.

²¹⁷ «Vere autem Dei Filius lapis vivus et electus, ut Dei aedificium una vinciens, et utrumque angulum veteris aedificii eorum qui ex circumcisione, et novi aedificii quod ex gentibus, uno angulo retineat [...] nec aliud nobis maius donum Christus largitus est» (DYDIMUS THE BLIND, *Expositio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 22, in PG 39, 1562-1563).

²¹⁸ ATHANASIUS, *Expositio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 22, in PG 27, 479.

²¹⁹ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Expositio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, 5, in PG 55, 336.

St. Paul, in addressing those of gentile provenience emphasized this unity as can be noted in his letter to the Ephesians.²²⁰ There are a variety of deeper meanings behind this unity. Henri de Lubac explains this unity founded on Christ the cornerstone as the breaking of a three-fold wall (the material, the spiritual, and the perfection of God) and the taking into effect of a threefold reunion (man, angels, and God).²²¹ Thus, this unity brought by Christ is of cosmic character, primarily due to the reconciliation brought about between God and man. Moreover, this unity can also be understood in an internal level and in an external one. Odo Casel, in his work on the Church, explains that the members, who are stones of the same edifice, should imitate the head, Christ, who is the measure of the body. As stones fit together in a building so also Christians are united by love to form a perfect body.²²² This position clearly highlights the interior dimension of this unity. From another point of view, Rudolf Schnackenburg puts it thus: «Jesus intended and found only one Church, his own (Mt 16: 18), and the heavenly Christ possesses only one body, his *ecclesia*. Its unity must therefore become visible in every respect: in doctrine, profession of faith, worship, and rule». ²²³ Here the accent is laid on the necessity of the external manifestations of this unity. It must be said that these two positions are not in any way opposite but rather complimentary. Thus, the Church is essentially one within but is at the same time tasked to manifest exteriorly this unity.

3.2.2. Benedicimus vobis de domo Domini: Baptism and Eucharist for the sanctification of the Church and its members

In its original context, this verse (26) forms part of the liturgy inside the temple, which is the second part of Psalm 117. Therefore, by the expression *domus Domini* it is referring to the Temple of Jerusalem, to where the supposed procession, as presented in the psalm, is headed for. With Christ's coming – *qui venit in nomine Domini* – the point of arrival is not the Temple anymore but the Church. To understand this better, it is apt to present a passage from the Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*:

²²⁰ «For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace [...] So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone» (Eph 2: 14.19-20).

²²¹ Cf. H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicism*, cit., 12-13.

²²² Cf. O. CASEL, *Misterio de la Ekklesia*, Ediciones Guadarrama, Madrid (1964), 131-132.

²²³ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Church in the New Testament*, Burns and Oates, London (1974), 132.

«Often the Church has also been called the building of God. The Lord Himself compared Himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles, and from it the Church receives durability and consolidation. This edifice has many names to describe it: the house of God in which dwells His family; the household of God in the Spirit; the dwelling place of God among men; and, especially, the holy temple».²²⁴

Thus, one becomes part of this new edifice through Baptism and where the Holy Eucharist is celebrated – the household of God in the Spirit. This new interpretation is also described by the image used in the gospels when referring to Christ's coming as the groom. And the Church is the bride who awaits his coming. St Paul, in letter to the Ephesians alludes to the mystery of this union.²²⁵ From this union springs forth the sanctity of the bride, who has as her groom the all-holy Lord, the God who became man. And for this reason, the Church blesses and sanctifies her children for she herself has been blessed and sanctified in the first place. And despite the apparent imperceptibility of her holiness, the Church continues to affirm it.²²⁶ In this section the perspective is directed to the effective sanctification of the Church, particularly through the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Thus the psalm verse proposes two principal thoughts: the household of God, to which one enters into through baptism, and the continual sanctification, by the groom who comes in the Eucharist.

Athanasius, in commenting this verse, qualifies it as a prophecy of old. He transposes *Benediximus vobis* to those who believe in Christ. They are blessed who believe in Christ because they are not only members of God's house, *domus Domini*, but each has become a spiritual house. In fact, he concludes, God does dwell in those who believe in Christ.²²⁷ Herein lies the sanctity of the Church and each Christian for that matter. For the dwelling of God is most holy indeed.

The earliest liturgical traditions already testify to the Easter vigil celebration as the occasion per excellence for the baptismal liturgy. The actual liturgical practice retains a few of these elements, although the possibility of a baptismal celebration is highly recommended where

²²⁴ *Lumen Gentium* 6/4.

²²⁵ St. Paul, referring to this union between Christ and the Church as husband and wife says: «This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church» (Eph 5: 32).

²²⁶ The Second Vatican Council describes the Church as «at the same time holy and always in need of being purified» (*Lumen Gentium* 8/3).

²²⁷ «Benediximus vobis de domo Domini, prophetae dicunt iis qui credunt in Christum: Beatos, inquit, vos praedicabimus, quia fuistis domus spiritualis: inhabitat quippe Dominus in vobis» (ATHANASIUS, *Expositiones psalmorum*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 26, in PG 27, 479).

it is possible. In particular, this psalm, which is present as the responsorial psalm, is annexed to a reading from St. Paul's epistle to the Romans.²²⁸ Here, the emphasis on man's death to sin and his participation to new life in Christ is a concise description on the effect of Baptism to the one who receives and to the Church as a whole. Through this sacrament, the Church is continually given that gift of sanctity from above. On the one hand, the sacrament of Baptism is the mystery of man's incorporation to God's household, by the power of the passion and resurrection of Christ. On the other hand, it is the mystery of God's coming to dwell in this new member, also known as the inhabitation of the Trinity. The effect is one, the sanctification of the neophyte. But this does not concern only the individual but the Church as a whole. According to O. Casel, in the sacrament of Baptism, the Church is both virgin and mother: she is virgin because she totally unblemished, without sin, and filled with the Holy Spirit; but she is also a mother, for by it she gives birth to new members for the body of Christ.²²⁹ The richness of Baptism, which every single member of the Church has received, is expressed in the collect of the second Sunday of Easter, where the psalm is also present as responsorial psalm: *quo lavacro abluti, quo spiritu regenerati, quo sanguine sunt redempti*.²³⁰ The cleansing of sins, the spiritual rebirth, in short the redemption brought about by Baptism is the effective sanctification of the Church in each of her members.

This sanctification of the Church, which is renewed in every baptism, is also renewed in the life of each member every time a Christian receives the sacraments of the Church. In a particular way, the Church is continually sanctified by the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is Christ's coming through the form of bread and wine – *panem vitae et calicem salutis*.²³¹ In the last Supper, Jesus instituted the Eucharist and entrusted it to the apostles. Subsequently, it became the characteristic mark of the new people of God, who were devoted in gathering together for the “breaking of the bread” (exemplified by the first reading of the second Sunday of Easter, year B). Here, it can be noted that there is a dual expression or a dual meaning of one expression: the Church as the body of Christ and the Eucharistic species as the mystical Body of

²²⁸ «Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life» (Rm 6: 3-4).

²²⁹ Cf. O. CASEL, *Misterio de la Ekklesia*, cit., 236-237.

²³⁰ MR 386.

²³¹ MR 582. The singularity of this sacrament is noted in the expression “Sacrament of Sacraments” (cf. CCC 1211).

Christ.²³² Thus, the Church, Christ's spouse, is continually renewed in sanctity by his real presence in the sacrament of his Body and Blood. On the one hand, the people of God unceasingly blesses his Lord, his Head, in this celebration of thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), and the Church blesses her children and intercedes for them. On the other hand, Jesus Christ, the Head, sanctifies his Church through his presence, and each member through their participation. So is the Church made holy.

As a recapitulation of this section, here is a quotation from Henri de Lubac, who synthesizes beautifully the relevance of these sacraments to the Church:

«For if the sacraments derive their efficacy from the Church, it is still in view of the Church that this efficacy is bestowed upon them. The water and blood which flowed from the side of Jesus on the Cross, the water of baptism, the blood of the Eucharist, first fruits of the mystical union between Christ and his Church, are, at the same time, the streams at which that Church is nourished».²³³

3.2.3. Dicant nunc, qui timent Dominum: the universal mission of the Church

The original context of the psalm seems to indicate this verse (4) as an invitation to everybody present, after having called distinct groups, to shout together the antiphon *quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius*. The Christian interpretation of it, however, has early on tended to see in it the world of the gentiles, as different from the house of Israel mentioned in verse two of the same psalm. This interpretation is being supported by the Fathers' interpretation of verse twenty-two as the making into one of two peoples, Jews and gentiles. This opening to the world of the gentiles is already present in the Old Testament, particularly in Isaiah, but its fulfillment has to wait for the coming of the Lord of all, the Son of God. The apostolic preaching is very clear about the universal character of the expression *qui timent Dominum*.²³⁴

Origen, in interpreting this verse asserts the universal reach of God's love: «*Misericordiam enim Domini super omnem carnem*».²³⁵ It echoes the sending of the apostles to the whole world by the Lord so that God's mercy may reach all men. Theodoret of Cyrus also comments this verse with a similar horizon: «*Omnes, inquit, Dei benignitatem laudate [...] et qui*

²³² On the evolution of the terminology see for example: R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Church in the New Testament*, cit., 165-175; J. RATZINGER, *Il nuovo popolo di Dio* (4th Ed.), Queriniana, Brescia (1992), 99-109; H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicism*, cit., 35-43; L. BOUYER, *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago (1982), 275-303.

²³³ H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicism*, cit., 33.

²³⁴ The best example can be found in these words of St. Peter: «In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him» (Act 10: 34-35).

²³⁵ ORIGEN, *Selecta in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 4, in PG 12, 1579.

*ex diversis gentibus orti estis a maiorem impietate liberati. Unus enim est omnium Deus».*²³⁶ His exposition focuses on the real effect on those who receive God's mercy – that of being freed from impiety – and at the same time underlines clearly its universality, particularly in the expression *diversis gentibus*. This universal claim is founded on the truth that there is only one God of all.

On Saturday within the Easter Octave, the two New-Testament readings clearly speak of the sending of the Apostles by the Lord to proclaim the gospel. The Gospel passage for the day narrates the final order of the Lord to his disciples: *euntes in mundum universum praedicate evangelium omni creaturae*.²³⁷ The reading from the Acts presents the actual exercise on the part of the apostles after the ascension of Christ into heaven.²³⁸ On the one hand, the ultimate foundation of this claim for universal mission is no less than the eternal design of God the Father, who sent his Son to the world, and after the resurrection sent the Holy Spirit, in order to realize this plan of salvation. Thus the sending off of the Apostles is nothing else but the continuation of this salvific design.²³⁹ On the other hand, the complimentary idea of the psalm's verse 22 – on the constitution of two peoples into one through the cornerstone, Jesus Christ – points out to the internal motive of this universal mission of the Church. «The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father».²⁴⁰ Both aspects are synthesized in the famous expression of St. Isidore of Seville: «*Ecclesia vocatur prope, propter quod omnes ad se vocet, et in unum congreget*».²⁴¹

3.2.4. *Dicat nunc domus Aaron: The foundation of the apostles*

In Psalm 117, there are three basic characters, as has been already presented earlier. While the identification of the “soloist” has not reached a concordant hypothesis among the exegetes, almost everybody has agreed on the role of the priests in this primitive liturgical context. This configuration jives very well with this introductory invitation, the third verse of the

²³⁶ THEODORET OF CYRUS, *Interpretatio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 4, in PG 80, 1810-1811.

²³⁷ «He said to them, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature”» (Mk 16: 16). The Gospel pericope for the Mass of the day is Mk 16: 9-15.

²³⁸ Cf. Act 4: 13-21.

²³⁹ These are the doctrinal principles laid by the Second Vatican Council's decree on the missionary activity of the Church (cf. *Ad Gentes* 3-5).

²⁴⁰ *Ad Gentes* 2.

²⁴¹ ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, liber I, c. I, in PL 83, 739-740.

psalm, addressed to *domus Aaron*, to the group of priests present in the celebration. Parallel to this, the new people of God, who has as its foundation Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, is also provided with a similar order of priests. Jesus himself has willed that they become the foundations of the new Israel – the twelve Apostles are often interpreted to signify the twelve tribes of Israel. However, unlike the priestly order of the Old Testament, these chosen disciples are foundations in as much as they represent Christ. Thus, for example, St Paul’s description of the basic structure of the Church emphasizes the centrality of Christ, for she is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone”. And as can be seen in the resurrection account of the gospel according to St. John, the authority of the Apostles depends on the mission of the Master: «Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you».²⁴² As Schnackenburg explains it: «For this there is no privilege of birth (as with the high priests), or of intellectual formation (as with the Scribes), but vocation, mission, and endowment with grace from on high are alone decisive».²⁴³ Far from being a limitation, this is precisely the source of the power of the apostles, for without the Lord they can do nothing.

Origen, in commenting this verse, points out to this selected group, *domus Aaron*, in contrast to the entire people *Israel*. He describes this priestly order as having received higher honors, *maiores sunt honorem consecuti*.²⁴⁴ However, this remains an allusion in as much as the author doesn’t explicitly transpose it to the new priestly order founded on the priesthood of Christ. St. John Chrysostom, in commenting the same verse,²⁴⁵ while following closely the commentary of Origen, he underlines the image of *sacerdotium*, but remains with the original context and so he does not explicitly apply this image to the priesthood of the new Covenant. Nonetheless, this image is not closed to a deeper interpretation, such as applying it to the Apostles. St. Augustine’s commentary on this verse moves in another direction. In his commentary of the psalm’s verses two to five, he shows the continuity of the people of Israel in those who believe in Christ. He identifies *domus Israel* and *domus Aaron* as the *pusilli* and the

²⁴² Jn 20: 21. The gospel passage for the second Sunday of Easter is Jn 20: 19-23.

²⁴³ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Church in the New Testament*, cit., 126.

²⁴⁴ «Seorsum igitur sacerdotes ad hymnodiam invitavit, eo quod ipsi quoque maiorem sunt honorem consecuti, non solum ratione sacerdotii, verum etiam quoad alia omnia» (ORIGEN, *Selecta in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 3, in PG 12, 1579).

²⁴⁵ «Hic vocat sacerdotes separatim ad laudes canendas, ostendens quam sit excellens sacerdotium. Num quo erant aliis maiores, eo maiorem a Deo gloriam consecuti sunt [...]» (JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Expositio in Psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, 1, in PG 55, 329).

magni respectively making a reference to a previous explanation.²⁴⁶ Then, in the succeeding lines he transposes the comparison to the apostles, to whom the obedience of the little ones is due.²⁴⁷ Thus here it can be seen the assumption of the psalm verse into the context of the new priestly order fulfilled in the apostles.

The liturgy itself provides other figures which describe this relation of faithful and priests. On the fourth Sunday of Easter, the Gospel reading presents Jesus who compares himself to a Shepherd. After his resurrection however, Jesus handed over the care of his flock to his beloved disciples. It may be enough to mention the conversation between Jesus and Peter on the shore of Galilee, where during a triple interrogation the Master commits the care of his sheep to Simon Peter.²⁴⁸ And following the example of the master, the apostles would then tend this flock and would eventually offer their lives for the flock. This image of the priestly order as shepherds is the image of the priesthood in Christianity. Thus, according to O. Casel, the *Pastor aeternus*, the eternal Shepherd did not abandon his fold, he tends it from on high, invisible yet omnipotent, and he sends visible vicars for the care of his sheep.²⁴⁹ Still, another image is offered by the Liturgy, presented in the reading of the second Sunday of Easter, year C. In the second reading, after the responsorial psalm – taken from Psalm 117 and includes verse 4 – the Liturgy presents the initial part of the Book of Revelations, wherein it is described the task given to the Apostle John to write to the seven Churches of Asia minor. It is interesting to note that later, in writing to each Church, the author addresses the angel of that particular Church.²⁵⁰ This image is interpreted as referring to the overseer, the bishop who guides that church. Thus the apostles and their successors are foundations of their respective churches with the office of ambassadors or emissaries of Christ, as the word itself denotes.

²⁴⁶ «Recognoscitis, credo, carissimi, quae sit domus Israel, quae sit domus Aaron... Ipsi enim sunt pusilli cum magnis» (AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 117,3, cit., 1092). Then he refers to his commentary on Psalm 113: 20-24 (cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 113, 9, cit., 1058-1060).

²⁴⁷ «[...] exauditi sunt qui dixerunt: *Adiciat Dominus super vos, super vos et super vestros*; ut Israelitis in Christum credentibus, ex quorum numero sunt Apostoli patres nostri, et ad eminentiam perfectorum et ad oboedientiam parvulorum adiungeretur numerus gentium» (AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 117, 3, cit., 1094).

²⁴⁸ «“Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep”» (Jn 21:16).

²⁴⁹ Cf. O. CASEL, *Misterio de la Ekklesia*, cit., 138-139.

²⁵⁰ For example: «To the angel of the church in Ephesus, write this [...] To the angel of the church in Smyrna» (Rev 2: 1.8), and so on.

It should be added that the authority of the apostles and their successors, on account of their dependence on Christ's authority, is peculiar. The gospel reading for the second Sunday of Easter expresses this authority in this way: «Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained».²⁵¹ The example of Jesus himself makes it clear that he does not refer to some sort of temporal authority, as his conversation with Pilate during his trial reveals. As R. Guardini puts it, the authority which Jesus transmits is meant for service not for domination, as the Lord himself explained to the mother of Zebedee's sons (Mt 20:25-28).²⁵² But at the same time, it is an authority which binds even beyond the earthly sphere, which binds also in heaven. This is simply because the real authority from which the apostles and their successors derive theirs is seated in his throne in Heaven.

3.3. The Eschatology of Psalm 117

The entire history of salvation finds its center in the person of Jesus Christ, the one who has come in the name of the Lord, the one promised in the Old Testament. While Israel awaited the coming of the messiah, identified with the figure of a political liberation, Christ brought with him salvation which is far deeper and incomparably greater than that. Jesus himself, on various occasions escaped from the tentative of others to proclaim him a political leader, a king. His proclamation on the coming of the Kingdom of God, omnipresent in the gospels, is also clear about its being more than a temporal reality. This is expressed clearly in his conversation with Pilate during his trial: «*regnum meum non est de mundo hoc*».²⁵³ The faith of the Church affirms this kingdom, considering her mission the spreading of this kingdom and at the same time making it her petition, "your kingdom come". Precisely this tension towards the future is the characteristic of Christian faith in general. And since the Church's faith is manifested in her Liturgy, so consequently the Liturgy is also eschatological by nature. In fact, perhaps the eschatological nature of the Church is seen best in the Liturgy, where the actions, words, and symbols are explicitly referring to a reality of heaven.²⁵⁴ Psalm 117 also contains some elements, which are indicative of the eschatological nature of Christianity. Far from any pretension of a

²⁵¹ Jn 20: 23.

²⁵² Cf. R. GUARDINI, *La realtà della Chiesa*, Morcelliana, Brescia (1967), 163.

²⁵³ Jn 18: 36.

²⁵⁴ «L'esperienza liturgica illumina il destino della chiesa in cammino verso la Gerusalemme celeste, dove saranno portate a compimento tutte le realtà che ora sono vissute nella fede e nella speranza» (J. CASTELLANO, «Escatologia», in NDzL, 452).

complete treatment on the subject, this section simply presents in an organic manner some relevant points which can be found in the said psalm.

3.3.1. *O Domine, salvum me fac: The object of man's hope*

The history of salvation is full of stories of hope. From the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, where God promised a descendant to Eve, to the incarnation of Christ, where man's hope for salvation is finally heard, there is a continuous exchange between man and God, man hopes for aid and God answers him. This psalm verse (25) expresses exactly this idea. The original context suggests a variety of interpretation, from a prayer for rain to a prayer for victory.²⁵⁵ But with the coming of Jesus, this idea of salvation has reached its full meaning. The revelation of his name at the very start – *Iesus* – already indicates the nature and the extent of the salvation he brings.²⁵⁶ For this reason, the Christian understanding of this *salus* which comes from God has gone beyond the limits of temporality and into the threshold of eternity. The object of Christian hope is to share life eternal with God. The Church, in her teachings, begins with the enunciation of this promise, the object of man's hope.²⁵⁷ The Church, in front of this cannot help but rejoice and sing continually God's praises, for in his mercy, he has brought man into eternity. The reading that follows Psalm 117 (though it does not contain the said verse) on the second Sunday of Easter, year A, expresses well this joy, and this hope:

«Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time».²⁵⁸

This object of Christian hope is also a constant element of Christian prayer. The prayer taught by Christ himself presents this idea in the petition *adveniat regnum tuum*, where the coming of the kingdom is closely linked to the fulfillment of the promise.²⁵⁹ The eucology of the Mass is also rich in this respect, wherein the desire to participate in that heavenly life with the

²⁵⁵ For an extensive explanation see: PETUCHOWSKI, J. J., *Hoshi'anna in Ps 118,25. A Prayer for rain*, «Vetus Testamentum», 5 (1955), 266-271.

²⁵⁶ Thus, the angel announced to Joseph the name of the child and its meaning: «pariet autem filium, et vocabis nomen eius Iesum: ipse enim salvum faciet populum suum a peccatis eorum» (Mt 1: 21).

²⁵⁷ Thus begins, for example the Catechism of the Church: «God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself [...] In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted Children and thus heirs of his blessed life» (CCC 1).

²⁵⁸ 1Pt 1: 3-5.

²⁵⁹ Cf. CCC 2818.

Trinity is often the petition of the Church. Thus, for example, the same liturgical celebration (second Sunday of Easter) expresses this orientation towards the assurance of eternity in the prayer over the gifts, where the hope of obtaining the eternal bliss promised through faith and baptism is made evident.²⁶⁰

Theodoret in his commentary of this passage extends the prayer in this manner: «*O Domine salvum me fac, o Domine bene prosperare.*» *Et in posterum tempus, o Domine, salutem largire, et viam ad te ducentem facilem et expeditam nobis fac*». ²⁶¹ Here, he understood it clearly with an eschatological horizon, in asking salvation in future times. Augustine, on the other hand, interprets this verse as addressed to Christ. In commenting verses 24-25, first he explains *hic dies* as the day when God granted salvation to mankind, then he interprets the verse *salvum me fac* as a prayer asking God to guide man in his journey on earth, on his journey back home.²⁶² This brief allusion to the day of salvation, the day of Christ's resurrection, by which he brought salvation to man, presents the picture of this particular history of salvation, wherein Christ by his death and resurrection has completed the way that bridges the abyss between man and God, thereby making possible man's hope for union with God.

3.3.2. *Non moriar sed vivam: The Christian understanding of Death*

This stich, taken from verse 17, which is found towards the end of the section from verse five to eighteen, is considered to be the apex of the poetic construction. After narrating the sufferings undergone by the psalmist, the power of God is shown to have saved him even from death. This original appraisal of the passage has been developed by the Christian faith into something more spectacular. With Christ's experience – he who after giving in to death had been raised by God's power from the world of the dead and still further has been raised to the heights of heaven – the Christian interpretation of the verse is directed towards an eschatological vision, wherein man's destiny is not the tomb but a life which has no end. On the one hand, the origin of

²⁶⁰ «Suscipe, quaesumus, Domine, plebis tuae (et tuorum renatorum) oblationis, ut, confessione tui nominis et baptismo renovati, sempiternam beatitudinem consequantur. Per Christum» (MR 386).

²⁶¹ THEODORET OF CYRUS, *Interpretatio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, Vers. 25, in PG 80, 1818.

²⁶² «*Hic est dies quem fecit Dominus*. Meminit iste homo se dixisse in superioribus Psalmis: *Quoniam inclinavit aurem suam mihi, et in diebus meis invocavi* (Ps 114: 2), dies suos commemorans veteres; unde modo dicit: *Hic est dies quem fecit Dominus*, id est, quo mihi salutem dedit [...] *O Domine, salvum me fac: o Domine, bene prospera iter vero*. Quia dies salutis est, *salvum me fac*, quia longinqua peregrinatione revertentes seiungimur ab eis qui oderant pacem, cum quibuseramus pacifici et cum loqueremur eis, debellabant nos gratis; *bene prospera iter* redeuntibus, quia tu nobis factus es via» (AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 117, 19-20, cit., 1102-1104).

death cannot be found in God since he is the God of the living,²⁶³ but its origin can be traced to man's erroneous use of his free will. On the other hand, man's destiny for eternity, or more specifically, his consciousness of a greater reality makes him rebel in front of the idea of death, something which he does not really consider as his finality. As *Gaudium et Spes* puts it: «He [man] rebels against death because he bears in himself an eternal seed which cannot be reduced to sheer matter».²⁶⁴ And despite this seeming incongruence, every man is bound to encounter death at some point of his life. Thus, with the example of Christ's death and resurrection, the Christian concept of death is developed in its full meaning: it continues to be the prize of man's sinful nature, but now it can become a participation of Christ's death and consequently of his resurrection, and so it is seen as man's way back home to eternity, where God awaits him.

In a purely material conception, death turns out to be the zenith or culminating point of non-sense, not only the absence of meaning but the altogether extinction of existence. A monotheistic conception of death is better in that it proposes a principle originated from God which goes beyond the fact of dying, the soul which is considered as something immortal. This idea of continuity after death is testified by the Hebrew expressions *she'ol* (the place of the dead) and *refa'im* (the collective term for the dead ones), readily recognizable in the Old Testament.²⁶⁵ Christianity sums up the idea of death in two terms: on the one hand, the phenomenological fact of the disintegration of the human body from its living principle, the soul; on the other hand, the theological background of Adam's fall as proof of the inherent connection between sin and death.²⁶⁶ This twice negative meaning of death is nothing but the shadow of the reality called life. Thus the verse itself exemplifies this contraposition, *non moriar sed vivam*.

However, Christian theology goes deeper into this dialectic through the person of Jesus Christ. When Jesus became man, he participated in our human nature in every possible way with the only exception of sin.²⁶⁷ Thus the death and resurrection of Christ opens a new horizon for humanity. On the one hand, Christ's death is the price for man's reconciliation with God, it is the

²⁶³ «He is not God of the dead but of the living» (Mk 12: 27).

²⁶⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* 18.

²⁶⁵ For further explanation on these terms, see: P. O'CALLAGHAN, *Christ out Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D. C. (2011), 79-80.

²⁶⁶ Cf. B. MONDIN, *Gli abitanti del cielo: Trattato di ecclesiologia celeste e di escatologia*, Edizioni Studio Domenicano, Bologna (1994), 128-129.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Hb 4:15.

justification of man.²⁶⁸ On the other hand, Christ has demonstrated in himself that after death comes the resurrection. Thus death is no longer seen exclusively as the prize of sin. It is no longer the end, but the gate through which one enters into the resurrection. This psalm verse, present in the last responsorial psalm of the mass for the Easter vigil is preceded by a reading from the Epistle to the Romans which affirms this interpretation. Here, St. Paul explains that in baptism Christians participate in Christ's death and as a consequence will also participate in his resurrection.²⁶⁹ It should be noted that the Easter context by itself calls for an interpretation of the verse in this manner. Christ's paschal mystery illumines man's destiny.

It may suffice to present the commentary which St. John Chrysostom did on this verse. He has completely identified this verse as *resurrectionis imago*. In his exposition on this verse, he explains that the experience of being delivered from death – he mentions, in particular, figures like Enoch and Eliah – «*etiam ante Novum Testamentum in periculis opinionem superantibus, resurrectionis imaginem praefigurans*».²⁷⁰ Moreover, he links the expression *non moriar* to the promise of Jesus for those who believe in him.²⁷¹ Thus, the certainty of man's future which is promised by Christ is the hope that motivates him to profess his faith even in front of others who may not share his ideals.

3.3.3. *Bonum est confugere ad Dominum: The way of persecution*

In psalm 117, this phrase is present twice, in verses eight and nine. The poetic artifice of repetition is used to underline clearly the advantage of trusting in the Lord rather than in men. The original context already presents the idea of persecution, in describing the sufferings undergone by the psalmist who nonetheless puts his faith in the Lord's help. The Christian reading of the verse easily transposed this attitude to the person of Christ, who in front of the persecution he faced and the temptation of the bystanders who challenged him to demonstrate his might, nonetheless «he handed himself over to the one who judges justly».²⁷² This passage from the first letter of Peter is preceded by a verse which invites Christians to imitate the Lord in

²⁶⁸ St. Paul captures perfectly this idea in this passage: «And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through his death» (Col 1: 21-22).

²⁶⁹ «We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection» (Rm 6: 4-5).

²⁷⁰ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Expositio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, 4, in PG 55, 334.

²⁷¹ «*Non moriar enim, inquit, altera morte: quam Christus quoque significans, dicebat: Qui credit in me, inquit, etiamsi mortuus fuerit, vivet: et omnis qui vivit et credit in me, non morietur* (Ioan. 11: 25-26)» (*ibid.*).

²⁷² 1Pt 2: 23.

dealing with persecutions: «Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps».²⁷³ Thus this idea of trust in the Lord and the surrender of one's cause to the one who can judge rightly is a constant principle of Christian faithfulness and Christian witnessing of the faith in front of the world. From St. Stephen to the last martyr of the present time, the same declaration of faith continues to resound, *bonum est confugere ad Dominum*.

In the first Sunday of the four-week psalter, this same stich forms part of the first antiphon for Daytime prayer, introducing the first part of Psalm 117. The antiphon is completed with the refrain found in the first four verses, thus the complete antiphon: *Bonum est confugere ad Dominum; in saeculum misericordiae eius*. Here the phrase not only acquires an air of encouragement but even of a profession, a declaration. For this trust in the Lord is not without foundation. In fact, it is precisely the faithfulness of God himself as the guarantee of this hope, since his love is without end. Thus for the Christian who prays – the character of the Daytime prayer itself has a commemorative value, as indicated by the general instructions²⁷⁴ – the text and the liturgical context unite together in bringing back the memory of the passion of Jesus himself, he who is the model and consolation for those who suffer, in whom God's eternal mercy is made manifest, and through whom man's hope is given a real foundation.

In Dydimus' commentary of this verse and the related ones, first he affirms that the Christian community is deigned to receive blows from evil men, then speaking of trust in the Lord, he stresses out that there is only one reason – God is simply the only absolute good that there can be.²⁷⁵ Theodoret, in his commentary on this verse expresses more explicitly the eschatological value of trusting in the Lord, who is described thus: «*bonus et benignus est, et bona vult, et quaecunque vult facere potest, immortalemque potestatem habet*».²⁷⁶ So also is John Chrysostom's interpretation in the same line, stressing on the surety of trusting in the Lord instead of men.²⁷⁷ For those who trust in the Lord will never end in embarrassment.

²⁷³ 1Pt 2: 21.

²⁷⁴ «Mos liturgicus, tam Orientis quam Occidentis, retinuit Tertiam, Sextam et Nonam, praecipue quia iis horis adnectebatur memoria eventum Passionis Domini et primae propagationis evangelicae» (IGLH 75).

²⁷⁵ «Jubet etiam Christi populum hominum impetus sustinere [...] Non una eademque ratione bonum confidere et sperare in Domino, ac confidere in hominibus et sperare in principibus. Illud enim simpliciter et absolute bonum» (DYDIMUS THE BLIND, *Expositio in psalmos* CXVII, vers. 6.8, in PG 39, 1558).

²⁷⁶ THEODORET OF CYRUS, *Interpretatio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, vers. 8, in PG 80, 1811.

²⁷⁷ «Spes autem in Deum non est solum valida, verum etiam tuta, ut quae nullam habeat mutationem» (JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Expositio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, 2, in PG 55, 331).

J. Maritain, in his reflection on a passage of the beatitudes which refers to persecutions, interprets it in an interesting way. Blessed are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice²⁷⁸: he explains that Saints know the reason for their suffering – they suffer for that “divine justice”, whose incarnation has reconciled man with God. Thus those who are persecuted not only are blessed in the future but also in the present in as much as they know the meaning of their suffering.²⁷⁹ Thus the Christian figure of martyrdom is the most significant in this regard. Martyrs are those who testify their faith in Christ. But more particularly, they testify to the absolute value of union with Christ, in preferring death rather than the separation from him.²⁸⁰ In other words, the total trust of these witnesses is the realization of this *confugere ad Dominum* in the best of human possibilities. That is why, in the Christian conception, persecution acquires a very eschatological horizon.

3.3.4. *Haec porta Domini, iusti intrabunt in eam: Christ our justification*

This verse (20) together with the preceding one is the turning point of the whole psalm, originally referring to the gates of the Temple of Israel. Here begins the liturgy within the Temple, attested also by a noticeable increase in the role of the priestly order.²⁸¹ In the Christian tradition, however, there is a change of perspective. On the one hand, with Christ's incarnation the temple of God is no longer limited to the edifice; with Christ being the Emmanuel, God begins to dwell in man; thus men become temples of God. On the other hand, with Christ's resurrection and ascension to heaven, man is now capable of entering heaven – something which, with the fall of Adam has evidently become altogether impossible. Thus for Christians, entering into God's dwelling is not anymore a purely earthly matter; on the contrary, it means entering into God's eternal dwelling, into eternity itself. With this perspective the gate through which one enters is no longer a material one but a person, Jesus Christ.

The Fathers' interpretation of this verse is, almost always, of moral character. St. Athanasius, for example, in interpreting verses nineteen and twenty, develops it in two levels: first, in order to enter the gate one needs to exercise virtuosity and perseverance in suffering,

²⁷⁸ Cf. Mt 5: 10.

²⁷⁹ Cf. J. MARITAIN, *Le cose del Cielo: riflessioni sulla vita eterna*, N. P. GHIGLIA (ed.), Massimo, Milano (1995), 126-127.

²⁸⁰ Cf. G. GOZZELINO, *Nell'attesa della beata speranza: Saggio di escatologia cristiana*, Elle di ci – Leumann, Torino (1993), 197.

²⁸¹ On the structure of Psalm 117, see the introduction to the second part, pages 30-31.

then, upon entering the gate one is lead into contemplation.²⁸² Origen follows the same line of thought, developing further by enumerating a few virtues: «*Sicut aperiuntur portae iustitiae, sic e[t] temperantiae, et fortitudinis, et charitatis*».²⁸³ However, St. Augustine, in his commentary of verses 19-20, indicates an eschatological interpretation of this *porta*. Those who enter the gate, have one purpose, to praise the Lord. Here he identifies this office of praising the Lord as the happiness of the saints in heaven.²⁸⁴ Thus this gate is also the gate of heaven where the just may enter to render praise to the Lord for eternity.

This stich finds an almost immediate resonance in the gospel passage of John where the same image is used by Jesus in referring to himself: «Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep».²⁸⁵ This interpretation is adopted by Theodoret, who in his commentary of the verse presents this gospel passage.²⁸⁶ This idea is rendered better another Iohanine passage where the Lord refers to himself as the way that leads to the Father.²⁸⁷ Here, the eschatological value of *porta* is made clearer. On the one hand, Jesus himself has worked out this way of salvation, and he declared it his personal role to lead the sheep fold back to God.²⁸⁸ On the other hand, Jesus is himself the door, through whom ones enters into salvation. The Liturgy illuminates further this idea on the “gate” or “way” of salvation.

On Saturday within the Octave of Easter, this psalm verse forms part of the Responsorial psalm. It is accompanied by the gospel passage from Mark which ends with the sending of the apostles, and a reading from the Acts of the Apostles which describes the beginning of the preaching of the apostles in the Temple.²⁸⁹ These passages highlights the aspect of gathering into one fold the sheep (Israel, and later on the gentiles as well), in order to bring them to the eternal

²⁸² «*Aperite mihi portas iustitiae*, etc. *Portas iustitiae intelligas profectum in virtutibus, quem obtinent qui afflictionum tempora sustinent. Haec porta Domini, iusti intrabunt in eam. Qui per virtutes incedunt, ad illam prevenient portam, quae ducit as ipsam Domini contemplationem*» (ATHANASIUS, *Expositiones psalmorum*, Ps. CXVII, 19.20, in PG 27, 478D).

²⁸³ ORIGEN, *Selecta in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, Vers. 19, in PG 12, 1582D.

²⁸⁴ «*Ingressus, inquit, in eis confitebor Domino. Illa confessio laudis est admirabilis usque ad domum Dei, in voce exultationis et confessionis, soni festivitatem celebrantis* (Ps 41: 5): haec est aeterna beatitudo iustorum, qua beati sunt qui inhabitant in domo Dei, in saecula saeculorum laudantes eum» (AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 117, 14, cit., 1100).

²⁸⁵ Jn 10: 7.

²⁸⁶ Cf. THEODORET OF CYRUS, *Interpretatio in psalmos*, Ps. CXVII, Vers. 20, in PG 80, 1815A.

²⁸⁷ «I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me» (Jn 14: 6). This juxtaposition can be found, for example in: G. R. BEASLEY-MURRAY (ed.), *John*, «Word Biblical Commentary», 36, Word Books, Waco, Texas (1987), 169-170.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Jn 10:11-16.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Mk 16: 9-15; Act 4: 13-21.

salvation prepared by God. The other aspect is provided by other parts of the mass. In the collect, the gate through which one enters into immortality is identified with baptism, thus the petition of the prayer: «*qui sacramento baptismatis sunt renati, beata facias immortalitate vestiri*».²⁹⁰ Certainly, baptism can cause this passage into salvation in as much as it is participation of Christ's life. Furthermore, the antiphon for Communion of the same mass is more graphic in explaining this: «*Omnes, qui in Christo baptizati estis, Christum induistis, alleluia*».²⁹¹ This image of putting on Christ taken from Galatians 3: 27 find its match in the phrase *iusti intrabunt in eam*. Here the patristic interpretation of the psalms is reconnected, where *Christum induistis* is equivalent to living a virtuous life according to the example of the Lord.

Thus Christ, the just one who has brought divine justice to mankind, is the gate of justice, the model of a just life, and the way to justification, to eternal life.

²⁹⁰ MR 385.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

In this study, which endeavors to present a coherent and consistent research on the liturgical use of Psalm 117 within a particular liturgical context, the Eucharistic celebration and the Liturgy of the Hours, is traced, though in a sketchy manner, the way through which any research in liturgical theology normally pass through. Also, this study is a modest attempt to underline the unity of sacred Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church, as was presented in the first sections of the research.

After the introductory presentation on the relationship of Scriptures – the psalms in particular – and Liturgy, a survey on the usage of Psalm 117 in the Tradition of the Church underlines the development of its meaning and its new significance. The psalm, which in its original context is a temple liturgy, as proposed by exegetical studies, in the new Christian context has acquired its full meaning. This process is realized already within the New Testament itself, where explicit references are made on the psalm together with its new Christian understanding. The patristic commentaries of the psalm give further proof to its new comprehension. In particular, the figures of Christ and his Church are seen consistently as the ones alluded by the psalm. In addition to this, a survey on the liturgical tradition of the Church sheds further light on its interpretation. In a very distinct way, the liturgical order associates the psalm with the Easter context and the Sunday context. Thus the psalm is seen as an appropriate sacred poetry in reference to the resurrection of Christ, the joy of the Church and the foundation of her hope for eternal life.

This enrichment in the significance of Psalm 117, attested by the Church throughout the centuries, is not history but actuality. The second part precisely presents the actual use of the psalm which affirms this Christian interpretation of the psalm, making evident the person of Christ (and more concretely, the figure of the resurrected Christ), underlining the figure of the Church which is Christ's body, and the way of following Christ which goes beyond the limits of death. Also, it can be seen how the different elements – antiphons, the selection of verses, and others – are wisely predisposed by the Liturgy as aid in the proper understanding of the psalm.

Thus this study magnifies this Christian interpretation of Psalm 117. Christ is seen as the one being described by the psalm, particularly, as the one who comes from heaven, who became man, who with his suffering and death has acquired salvation for humanity, and who was

glorified by God by raising him from death and into eternal glory. Consequently, the psalm also speaks of the Church, Christ's body, the household of God, the holy nation, founded on the foundation which is Christ and his apostles. These two figures, Christ and the Church, are richly alluded to in the psalm and are made evident in liturgical tradition. Moreover, the predominant Easter context offers an eschatological interpretation of the psalm, the strong connection between the earthly and the future heavenly reality. In the psalm are contained expressions which refer to the members of Christ, in their participation in his death and therefore his resurrection, in their participation in the persecution he suffered in order to enter into glory, as well as the new understanding of death illumined by the mystery of Jesus Christ. Thus the psalm expresses the hope of man for eternity. All these are but a proof of the richness of the psalm according to the understanding of the Church.

As to the general conclusions obtained from the research, these three principal ideas should not be missed: *First*, the essence of liturgical theology – to start with the liturgical text. This was the guiding principle as the research unfolded. Now, this study is a demonstration of its feasibility. Today, the importance of the liturgical text is not marginal but rather marginalized, since it is not easily taken into consideration. This study intends to offer an example of this possible way of doing theology. *Second*, the richness of the Liturgy can be perceived in its contextualization. Liturgical books are not reference manuals but practical guides for liturgical celebrations. As the research testifies, much of the richness in theological meaning is made evident by the actualization, the effective celebration of the rites described therein. Only in this optics can one find meaning not only in the texts but also in the gestures, the ambiance, and the liturgical space and time in general. This idea, which is complimentary to the first, is also supported by this research. *Third*, the ordering by the Church of the liturgical elements is significant. It is particularly in this respect that this study wishes to give its support. The liturgical ordering is full of meaning and of wisdom. Maybe not all elements have the same value (in this case, maybe not all psalms have the same importance), but clearly there is great wisdom behind this multi-millenary disposition which is only waiting to be discovered.

This study hopes to be of service in the efforts to restore and develop the liturgical inquiry among the theological disciplines promoted by the Church in her efforts for a constant renewal.

APPENDIX

Psalmus 117 (118)

Vox iubilationis et salutis

Hic est lapis, qui reprobatus est a vobis aedificatoribus, qui factus est in caput anguli (Act 4, 11).

¹ ALLELUIA.

Confitemini Domino, quoniam bonus
quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius.

² Dicat nunc Israel, quoniam bonus,
quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius.

³ Dicat nunc domus Aaron,
quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius.

⁴ Dicant nunc qui timent Dominum,
quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius.

⁵ De tribulatione invocavi Dominum,
et exaudivit me educens in latitudinem Dominus.

⁶ Dominus mecum
non timebo quid faciat mihi homo.

⁷ Dominus mecum adiutor meus,
et ego despiciam inimicos meos

⁸ Bonum est confugere ad Dominum,
quam confidere in homine.

⁹ Bonum est confugere ad Dominum,
quam confidere in principibus.

¹⁰ Omnes gentes circuierunt me,
et in nomine Domini excidi eos.

¹¹ Circumdantes circumdederunt me
et in nomine Domini excidi eos.

¹² Circumdederunt me sicut apes,
et exarserunt sicut ignis in spinis,
et in nomine Domini excidi eos.

¹³ Impellentes impulerunt me, ut caderem,
et Dominus adiuvit me.

¹⁴ Fortitudo mea et laus mea Dominus,
et factus est mihi in salutem

- ¹⁵ Vox iubilationis et salutis
in tabernaculis iustorum
- ¹⁶ Dexteram Domini fecit virtutem,
dexteram Domini exaltata est;
dexteram Domini fecit virtutem.
- ¹⁷ Non moriar, sed vivam,
et narrabo opera Domini.
- ¹⁸ Castigans castigavit me Dominus,
et morti non tradidit me.
- ¹⁹ Aperite mihi portas iustitiae,
ingressus in eas confitebor Domino;
- ²⁰ haec porta Domini, iusti intrabunt in eam.
- ²¹ Confitebor tibi, quoniam exaudisti me,
et factus es mihi in salutem
- ²² Lapidem quem reprobaverunt aedificantes
hic factus est in caput anguli;
- ²³ a Domino factum est istud
et est mirabile in oculis nostris.
- ²⁴ Haec est dies quam fecit Dominus
exultemus et laetemur in ea.
- ²⁵ O Domine, salvum fac;
o Domine, da prosperitatem.
- ²⁶ Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Benedicimus vobis de domo Domini.
- ²⁷ Deus Dominus et illuxit nobis.
Instruite sollemnitatem in ramis condensas,
usque ad cornua altaris.
- ²⁸ Deus meus es tu, et confitebor tibi,
Deus meus et exaltabo te.
- ²⁹ Confitemini Domino, quoniam bonus
quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius.

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