



Greetings to you all on this beautiful spring day! Hoping you are all in good health and spirits.

Most of my clergy friends and I have been reading 91st Psalm each day during this pandemic. It is the same Psalm many of us read daily in the days and weeks following 9-11. (No coincidence in the numbers) It is a psalm of protection and deliverance often invoked during times of danger, calamity, and evil. This is the prescribed psalm read by every priest engaged in spiritual warfare, deliverance, and exorcisms.

During my seminary training, I was taught to recite it after every visit with those near death, and when giving last rights (extreme unction). I must have read the 91st Psalm several hundred, perhaps a thousand times. I cannot think of a better time for its recitation than this time of pandemic.

It is believed, as written in the Hebrew Midrash, that Moses wrote this psalm while ascending the clouds atop Mt. Sinai before he encountered God for protection from the angels of destruction. The Hebrew book of Jewish law, the Talmud, calls the 91st Psalm "The Psalm of Plagues". If recited in faith, it offers God's promise of deliverance from demons and evil spirits and Divine assistance in times of trouble.

Psalm 91 is also considered to be the "Soldiers Psalm," often called the "Soldiers Prayer". Verses from this psalm have been used in literature for centuries, and in musician's songs, from Sinead O'Conner's "The Lion and the Cobra," to a Jerry Garcia (Grateful Dead) song "My Sisters and Brothers". Obviously, this psalm holds an ageless and recurring appeal, for it acknowledges life's dangers and difficulties against a manner of evil and destruction seen and unseen, while showing us the goodness, power, and faithfulness of God.

The first verse reads "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty". As one reads this during this time, the word "shelter" should be emphasized. Seems like every time I read or hear an update or report about the corona virus, this word "shelter" is used as a precautionary warning. Most of the world is "sheltering in place".

I'd like to offer some thoughts on biblical shelter. The King James version of the bible mentions the word shelter around 80 times. Almost always, its use is, in a very comforting way, illustrating that attribute of God. A "Sheltering Refuge" seems to me to be so timely, relevant, and important. The words of this 91st Psalm appear to be written just for us at this very specific time.

We certainly need God's help to get us through this; we need His protection, His healing His deliverance, and His wisdom. He does in fact, as the psalm indicates, offer us all of this and more. God's desire is not just to shelter us physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. He is able to "Shelter our Hearts". He wishes to strengthen our weary limbs, revive our drooping spirits, and restore our troubled souls. Our entire world is in pain, confused, frightened, and vulnerable. We are in effect, "All at Risk". God is offering us shelter and refuge, comfort and provision, protection and healing.

As we wait out this storm, let's not merely seek shelter in our homes, but in God's everlasting arms. My hope and prayer is that when this dreadful plague passes, that we who have found our hope and comfort in Christ, will become His vessels of hope and peace for all we meet. I pray that, we the church, can truly be a place of refuge, a sacred, holy dwelling place of God's presence welcoming all. This storm will pass, but it won't be the last; however, God remains forever and ever our Shelter and Refuge!

Psalm 91, the Psalm of Plagues, could you join with me and others by making this psalm a daily devotion ?

God's peace and love be with you all,

Fr. Peter

