

# Exposition on Psalm 129

by St. Augustine

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*The Church has endured persecution from its youth up, but it will not fail, and the righteous Lord will punish the wicked for their pride and sin.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 4:8, Psalm 128:1, Psalm 128:4, Matthew 11:17, Matthew 13:39, Mark 12:42, Luke 18:13, Luke 19:2, John 3:29

**Topics:** "Church Persecution", "Gods Mercy"

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## Description

St. Augustine preaches on the enduring nature of the Church throughout history, citing examples from Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and the people of Israel, emphasizing the Church's resilience against wickedness and persecution. He urges believers to trust in God's mercy and draw strength from past examples of faithfulness. Augustine also addresses the challenges faced by the Church, including dealing with sinners, hypocrites, and those who refuse to follow God's Word, reminding them of the righteous judgment of the Lord. He concludes by highlighting the importance of blessing others in the name of the Lord and discerning between those who are rooted in charity and those who are destined for destruction.

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## Transcript

1. The Psalm which we have sung is short: but as it is written in the Gospel of Zacch<sup>us</sup> that he was little of stature, Luke 19:2-9 but mighty in works; as it is written of that widow who cast two mites into the treasury, little was the money, but great was her charity; Mark 12:42, 44 thus also this Psalm, if you count the words, is short; if you weigh the sentiments, is great....Let the Spirit of God speak, let It speak to us, let It sing to us; whether we wish or wish not to dance, let It sing. For as he who dances, moves his limbs to the time; so they who dance according to the commandment of God, in their works obey the sound. What therefore says the Lord in the Gospel to those who refuse to do this? We have piped unto you, and you have not danced: we have mourned unto you, and you have not lamented. Matthew 11:17 Let Him therefore sing; we trust in God's mercy, for there will be those by whom He consoles us. For they who are obstinate, continuing in wickedness, although they hear the Word of God, by their offenses daily disturb the Church. Of such this Psalm speaks; for thus it begins.

2. Many a time have they fought against me from my youth up Psalm 128:1. The Church speaks of those whom She endures: and as if it were asked, Is it now? The Church is of ancient birth: since saints have been so called, the Church has been on earth. At one time the Church was in Abel only, and he was fought against by his wicked and lost brother Cain. Genesis 4:8 At one time the Church was in Enoch

alone: and he was translated from the unrighteous. Genesis 5:24 At one time the Church was in the house of Noah alone, and endured all who perished by the flood, and the ark alone swam upon the waves, and escaped to shore. Genesis vi.-viii At one time the Church was in Abraham alone, and we know what he endured from the wicked. The Church was in his brother's son, Lot, alone, and in his house, in Sodom, and he endured the iniquities and perversities of Sodom, until God freed him from amidst them. Genesis xiii.-xx The Church also began to exist in the people of Israel: She endured Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The number of the saints began to be also in the Church, that is, in the people of Israel; Moses and the rest of the saints endured the wicked Jews, the people of Israel. We come unto our Lord Jesus Christ: the Gospel was preached in the Psalms.. ..For this reason, lest the Church wonder now, or lest any one wonder in the Church, who wishes to be a good member of the Church, let him hear the Church herself his Mother saying to him, Marvel not at these things, my son: Many a time have they fought against me from my youth up.

3. Now may Israel say. She now seems to be speaking of herself: for she seemed not to have commenced herself, but to have answered. But to whom has she replied? To them that think and say, How great evils do we endure, how great are the scandals that every day thicken, as the wicked enter into the Church, and we have to endure them? But let the Church reply through some, that is, through the voice of the stronger, let her reply to the complaints of the weak, and let the stable confirm the unstable, and the full-grown the infant, and let the Church say, Many a time have they vexed me from my youth up Psalm 128:2. Let the Church say this: let her not fear it. For what is the meaning of this addition, From my youth up, after the words, Many a time have they fought against me? At present the old age of the Church is assailed: but let her not fear. Hath she then failed to arrive at old age, because they have not ceased to fight against her from her youth up? Have they been able to blot her out? Let Israel comfort herself, let the Church console herself with past examples. Why have they fought against me? For they could not prevail against me.

4. Upon my back have sinners built; they have done their iniquity afar off Psalm 128:3. Why have they fought against me? Because they could not prevail upon me. What is this? They could not build upon me. I consented not with them unto sin. For every wicked man persecutes the good on this account, because the good man consents not with him to evil. Suppose he do some evil, and the Bishop censure him not, the Bishop is a good man: suppose the Bishop censure him, the Bishop is a bad man. Suppose he carry off anything, let the man robbed be silent, he is a good man: let him only speak and rebuke, even though he does not reclaim his goods, he is everything bad. He is bad then who blames the robber, and he is good who robs!...Heed not that such an one speaks to you: it is a wicked man through whom It speaks to you; but the word of God, that speaks to you, is not wicked. Accuse God: accuse Him, if you can.

5. Thou accusest a man of avarice, and he accuses God on the ground that He made gold. Be not covetous. And God, you reply, should not make gold. This now remains, because you can not restrain your evil deeds, you accuse the good works of God: the Creator and Architect of the world displeases you. He ought not to make the sun either; for many contend concerning the lights of their windows, and drag each other before courts of law. O if we could restrain our vices! For all things are good, because a good God made all things: and His works praise Him, when their goodness is considered by him who has the spirit of considering them, the spirit of piety and wisdom.. ..

6. Lend not money at interest. Thou accusest Scripture which says, He that has not given his money upon usury. I wrote not this: it went not forth first from my mouth: hear God. He replies: let not the clergy lend upon usury. Perchance he who speaks to you, lends not at interest: but if he do so lend, suppose that he does so lend; does He who speaks through him lend at interest? If he does what he enjoins you, and thou

dost it not; you will go into the flame, he into the kingdom. If he does not what he enjoins you, and equally with you does evil deeds, and preaches duties which he does not; you will both equally go into the flames. The hay will burn; but the word of the Lord abides for evermore.. ..

7. The righteous Lord shall hew the necks of the sinners Psalm 128:4....Which of us does not fix his eyes upon the earth, like the Publican, and say, Lord, be merciful unto me a sinner? Luke 18:13 If therefore all are sinners, and none is found without sin; all must fear the sword that hangs above their neck, because the righteous Lord shall hew the necks of the sinners. I do not imagine, my brethren, of all sinners; but in the member which He strikes, He marks what sinners He strikes. For it is not said, The righteous Lord will hew the hands of the sinners; or their feet; but because proud sinners were meant to be understood, and all proud men carry lofty necks, and not only do evil deeds, but even refuse to acknowledge them to be such, and when they are rebuked, justify themselves: ..as it is written in Job (he was speaking of an ungodly sinner), he runs against God, even upon his neck, upon the thick bosses of his bucklers; Job 15:26 so he here names the neck, because it is thus you exalt yourself, and dost not fix your eyes upon the ground, and beat your breast. You should cry unto Him, as it is cried in another Psalm, I said, Lord, be merciful unto me, for I have sinned against You. Since thou dost not choose to say this, but justifiest your deeds against the Word of God; what follows in Scripture comes upon you: the righteous Lord shall hew the necks of sinners.

8. Let them be confounded and turned backward, as many as have evil will at Sion Psalm 128:5. They who hate Sion, hate the Church: Sion is the Church. And they who hypocritically enter into the Church, hate the Church. They who refuse to keep the Word of God, hate the Church: Upon my back have they built: what will the Church do, save endure the burden even unto the end?

9. But what says he of them? The next words are, Let them be even as the grass of the house tops: that withers before it be plucked up Psalm 128:6. The grass of the house tops is that which grows on house tops, on a tiled roof: it is seen on high, and has not a root. How much better would it be if it grew lower, and how much more joyfully would it bloom? As it is, it rises higher to a quicker withering. It has not yet been plucked up, yet has it withered: not yet have they received sentence from the judgment of God, and already they have not the sap of bloom. Observe their works, and see that they have withered....The reapers will come, but they fill not their sheaves from these. For the reapers will come, and will gather the wheat into the barn, and will bind the tares together, and cast them into the fire. Thus also is the grass of the house tops cleared off, and whatever is plucked from it, is thrown into the fire; because it had withered even before it was plucked up. The reaper fills not his hands thence. His next words are, Whereof the reaper fills not his hand; neither he that binds up the sheaves his bosom Psalm 128:7. And, the reapers are the angels, Matthew 13:39 the Lord says.

10. So that they who go by say not so much as, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we have blessed you in the name of the Lord Psalm 128:8. For you know, brethren, when men pass by others at work, it is customary to address them, The blessing of the Lord be upon you. And this was especially the custom in the Jewish nation. No one passed by and saw any one doing any work in the field, or in the vineyard, or in harvest, or anything of the sort; it was not lawful to pass by without a blessing....Who are the passers by? They who have already passed hence to their country through this road, that is, through this life: the Apostles were passers by in this life, the Prophets were passers by. Whom did the Prophets and Apostles bless? Those in whom they saw the root of charity? But those whom they found lifted on high on their house tops, and proud in the bosses of their bucklers, they declared against these what they were doomed to become, but they gave them no blessing. You therefore who read in the Scriptures, find all

those wicked men whom the Church bears, who are declared cursed, pertain unto Antichrist, pertain unto the devil, pertain to the chaff, pertain to the tares....But they who say, None save God sanctifies, nor is any man good save by the gift of God; they bless in the name of the Lord, not in their own name: because they are the friends of the bridegroom, John 3:29 they refuse to be adulterers of the bride.

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