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Psalm 87: A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. A Song.

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Psalm 87
A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. A Song.
(RSV)

- 1 On the holy mount stands the city he founded;**
2 the LORD loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.
3 Glorious things are spoken of you,
O city of God. *Selah*
- 4 Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon;**
behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia—
“This one was born there,” they say.
5 And of Zion it shall be said,
“This one and that one were born in her”;
for the Most High himself will establish her.
6 The LORD records as he registers the peoples,
“This one was born there.” *Selah*
- 7 Singers and dancers alike say,**
“All my springs are in you.”

Psalm 87 is a praise of Zion, namely, Jerusalem as the city most highly favored by the LORD. It stands on the holy mountain, it was founded by God himself, it is the city of our God (verses 1-2).

The Hebrew text of verse 4 says quite simply that the various nations mentioned acknowledge, or will acknowledge, Yahweh, and they are counted as belonging to the people of God. That would accord well with yesterday's Psalm, 86:9. Alternatively, the text may mean that Yahweh includes all the Israelites who live in those countries in the Diaspora (the Dispersion of the Israelites after the Babylonian Exile). It may also mean all the people in those countries who have converted to the Israelite religion and are therefore included among the people of God. Taken in connection with verses 5-6 it seems quite likely that Yahweh is saying that all were born in Zion, and that he registers the peoples (non-Jews) as citizens of Zion. All in the end have Zion as their mother. So the praise of Jerusalem ends in verse 7 (in the translation suggested by the United Bible Society), “All shall dance for joy and sing, “Zion, in you we are at home.”

In Galatians 4:26 St. Paul may well have been thinking of this Psalm when speaks of the “Jerusalem above who is our mother,” distinguishing it from the earthly Jerusalem. Thus, when Christians pray this Psalm, they are thinking how God's choice of the earthly Jerusalem as his own city and of which he speaks such glorious things is a (proto)type of the heavenly Jerusalem, who as mother of us all is Holy Mother Church, in whose womb we have been formed, through whom we have been born unto eternal life, and from whom we have learned to know our heavenly Father.

Prayer to accompany Psalm 87:

Lord God, your Son wept over ancient Jerusalem, establishing the new Jerusalem firmly upon the rock and making her the mother of the faithful. Make us rejoice in your Church, and grant that all people may be reborn into the freedom of your Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.