

# **PSALMS: BEAUTY ANCIENT, EVER NEW**



“Everyone of us needs half an hour of prayer each day,  
except when we are busy – then we need an hour.”  
(St. Francis de Sales)

If the psalm prays, pray;  
If it grieves, grieve;  
If it is happy, rejoice;  
If it hopes, hope;  
And if it fears, be afraid.  
For everything that is written here is a mirror  
in which we see ourselves.  
(St. Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm 31*)

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## ***Contents***

<b>Praying Psalms An Experience of Sabbath Rest.....</b>	3
Psalm 29: The Resounding Voice of God.....	4
Mutual Listening.....	5
Listening in Silence.....	6
The Life-Giving Word of God .....	7
Psalm 95: Invitation to Worship .....	8
 <b>Psalm 1: Entering the Prayers of Praise .....</b>	 9
The Choicest of Psalms .....	10
The Way of Blessing .....	11
Delight .....	12
Meditate .....	13
Deeply-Rooted Tree .....	14
 <b>Praying the Psalms Through Him and With Him and In Him .....</b>	 15
Psalm 110: The Messiah, King and Priest .....	16
Psalms 20 and 21: Royal Psalms of Victory .....	17
Psalm 118: A Hymn of Transformation .....	18
Psalm 111: Praise of the LORD from First to Last .....	19
 <b>Praying the Psalms in the Time of COVID-19 .....</b>	 20
How Long, O LORD, How Long? .....	21
Praying to the God of Refuge .....	22
Praying in Hope .....	23
Psalm Prayers in Time of Distress .....	24
Jesus' Psalms of Lamentation .....	25
 <b>Psalms of Mercy .....</b>	 26
Psalm 130: Lamenting and Mercy .....	27
Psalm 51: Confession and Mercy .....	28
Psalm 85: Mercy Personified .....	29
Psalm 103: Blessing and Mercy .....	30
 <b>Psalms for the Journey .....</b>	 32
Life-Long Journey .....	33
Psalm 15: Walking in Justice and Integrity .....	34
Walking in Holiness .....	35
Psalm 8: Walking in Mystery .....	36
 <b>Alleluia: Psalms of Praise .....</b>	 37
Psalm 113: Feast Day Praise .....	38
The Magnificat: Mary's Psalm of Praise .....	39
Psalm 136: The Great Hallel .....	41
Psalm 150: A Noisy Song of Praise .....	42
 <b>Resources .....</b>	 43

**PRAVING PSALMS: AN EXPERIENCE OF SABBATH REST****שבת שלום****Shabbat Shalom: Sabbath Peace**

The Sabbath day is set aside in Judaism for rest, in Hebrew *menuhah*.

"*Menuhah* ...means much more than withdrawal from labor and exertion, more than freedom from toil, strain or activity of any kind. *Menuhah* is not a negative concept but something real and intrinsically positive. This must have been the view of the ancient rabbis if they believed that it took a special act of creation to bring it into being, that the universe would be incomplete without it. ... What was created on the seventh day? Tranquility, serenity, peace and repose."

(Heschel, 220)

*Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,  
and I will give you rest.*

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,  
for I am meek and humble of heart;  
and you will find rest for yourselves.*

*For my yoke is easy,  
and my burden light. (Matt 11: 28-30)*

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In the Book of Psalms, Psalm 92 (**Saturday Morning, Week II**) is identified as "A song for the Sabbath," the only psalm assigned to a specific day in the psalter.

On the Sabbath (a day that offers a pattern for all of life), we begin with "**thankful praise.**" (The opening verb can mean to praise or to give thanks)

- A way to give thankful praise is to **proclaim** God's love and fidelity.
- The psalm ends with the same verb: proclaiming that the Lord is just is another way of proclaiming God's love and fidelity.
- The first part of the psalm is addressed to God;
- in the second part, the psalmist proclaims what God does and who God is.

\*\*\*\*\*

It is good to proclaim God's goodness in your own life, in ordinary experiences, and in all of creation.

### *Instructions for Living a Life*

*Pay attention.  
Be astonished.  
Tell about it.  
(Mary Oliver)*

Write your own proclamation of God's love and fidelity. Repeat daily!

**PSALM 29: THE RESOUNDING VOICE OF GOD****Monday morning, Week I**

(In Jewish tradition, prayed on the Sabbath)

Praying psalms aloud can often assist us in hearing the beauty and vigor of their poetry and imagery. This is particularly true of Psalm 29, which even in its English translation is filled with the sounds of the storm. In the waters and thunder and tempest, God's voice shatters and shakes, resounds and rumbles. Seven times in the psalm the expression "the voice of the Lord" is repeated, reverberating almost like claps of thunder. In fact, the **Hebrew word for voice (*qol*) is also the word for thunder.** The voice of Lord can smash both cedar and oak, and cause the mountains to tremble, and can be heard as the storm progresses from the sea to the wilderness. (from the north to south, Lebanon to the desert of Sinai)

***Qol:*** voice, sound, crackling, thundering, bleating, growling, lowing.

The LORD thundered from heaven,  
the Most High made his voice resound. (Psalm 18: 14)

You kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;  
chant the praises of the Lord,  
Who rides the heights of the ancient heavens,  
whose voice is thunder, mighty thunder. (Ps 68: 33-34)

**In his temple they all cry: "Glory!"**

**Glory:** *kabod*: "signifies splendor, magnificence, brilliance, luster, rich ornamentation, power, and worth. It connotes something beautiful and desirable.... Glory signifies something akin to a weighty radiance of divine presence in the world, the heavy, plump, fat brightness of God's immanence drawing near and passing by to enlighten, warm, and set things right." (Johnson, 52)

**The LORD will bless his people with peace.**

**Peace:** *shalom*: peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare, and tranquility.

**Shalom with God** means reconciliation, healing, and joy in God's presence.

**Shalom with others** can entail end to hostilities as well as averting war; it also refers to socially just relationships between individuals and classes.

**Shalom within oneself** implies inner security arising from trust in God with minds steadfastly set on the LORD, along with quietness of spirit coming from right relationships.

\* \* \* \* \*

- Listen to the many ways that God is speaking to you.
- How is God speaking?
- Where have you seen/experienced God's glory today?
- Rest in the peace of God's presence.

## **MUTUAL LISTENING**

Hearken to my speech, O LORD,  
attend to my utterance.

Listen well to my voice crying out, my king and my God,  
for to you I pray. (Psalm 5: 1-2; *translation, Robert Alter*)

Listen, LORD, to the needs of the poor;  
you encourage them and hear their prayers. (Ps 10:17)

I call upon you; answer me, O God.  
Turn your ear to me; hear my prayer (Ps 17: 6)

Hear my voice, LORD, when I call;  
have mercy on me and answer me. (Ps 27: 7)

O, Listener to prayer,  
unto you all flesh shall come. (Ps 65: 3; *Alter*)

\* \* \* \* \*

I will listen for the word of God;  
surely the LORD will proclaim peace. (Psalm 85: 9)

Oh, that today you would hear God's voice! (Ps 95:7)

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
And delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me;  
Listen, so that you may live. (Isaiah 55:1-3)

## **MANY VOICES**

The person who prays the psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours prays not so much in his own person as in the name of the Church, and, in fact, in the person of Christ himself. If one bears this in mind difficulties disappear when one notices in prayer that the feelings of the heart in prayer are different from the emotions expressed in the psalm, for example, when a psalm of joy confronts a person who is sad and overcome with grief, or a psalm of sorrow confronts a person full of joy.... The person who prays the psalms in the name of the Church can always find a reason for joy or sadness, for the saying of the Apostle applies in this case also: "Rejoice with the joyful and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15) (General Instruction # 108)

**Psalm 142** (Sunday Evening Prayer, Week I): "What is written in this psalm was fulfilled in our Lord's passion." (Saint Hilary)

**Psalm 90** (Monday morning, Week 4): "A prayer of Moses, the man of God."

\* \* \* \* \*

*Choose one psalm to pray. What different voices do you hear?*

## LISTENING IN SILENCE

*The words in **bold** are based on the Hebrew word **damam**: be still, silent; be struck dumb, astounded in amazement and fear (e.g. Ex 15: 16; composed and quieted.  
Translation by Robert Alter.*

Know that the LORD set apart His faithful.  
The LORD will hear when I call to Him.  
Quake, and do not offend.  
Speak in your hearts on your beds, and **be still**. Ps 4: 4-5

*selah\**

**Be still** before the LORD and await Him. (Ps 37: 7)

Only in God **be quiet**, my being, for from Him is my hope. (Ps 62: 6)

To You **silence** is praise, God, in Zion. (Ps 65:2)

I have calmed and **contented myself**

like a weaned babe on its mother – like a weaned babe I am with myself. (Ps 131: 2)

\* \* \* \* \*

*\*selah: A notation found 71 times in the Psalms with the precise meaning unknown. A common interpretation of the term is "silence," or "pause," perhaps a musical interlude, "a pause in the voices singing, while the instruments perform alone." Suggestion: use selah to take a pause to think about what the Scripture says – to reflect on the meaning of the verse before continuing to read the rest of the passage. Even without selah, pausing between lines is a form of silence.*

Be still and know that I am God. (Ps 46: 11)  
(In Psalm 46, "be still" [Hebrew raphah] means, according to Alter, "to relax one's grip.")

Moses addressed Israel in the desert: "Be silent, O Israel, and listen!  
This day you have become the people of the LORD your God. (Deut 27:9)

\* \* \* \* \*

**Aleph** is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. "It is the only letter that makes no sound of its own in a word --- and yet from it arises the entire alphabet of sounds and infinite meanings. The sages regard *Aleph* as signifying that everything each of us accomplishes, however important in daily life, first emanates from stillness and silence." (Hoffman, 20)

"'In silence' words may be sifted, guarded, nourished, and held until they begin to yield what we need. We need literal places of silence in order to open up the interior 'places' of silence that allow us to ponder, consider, contemplate, reflect, and receive what we need." (McEntyre, Caring for Words, 228)

- Re-read the Aleph or McEntyre quote, concentrating on what happens to words in silence. How do you experience the power of words in silence? Write your own description.
- Silence is experienced in many modes, sometimes entirely opposite: comfortable and uncomfortable; tranquility and impatience. Reflect on your own moments of silence. What do you hear? What do you experience?

## ***THE LIFE-GIVING WORD OF GOD***

**"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Matt 24: 35)**

Revive me in accordance with your word, (Ps 119:25)  
strengthen me in accordance with your word. (Ps 119, 28)

Be merciful to me in accordance with your word. (Ps 119:58)  
give me understanding in accordance with your word. (Ps 119:169)

Remember your word to your servant,  
whereby you have given me hope. (Ps 119:42)

Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path. (Ps 119:105)

The unfolding of your words gives light;  
it gives understanding to the simple. (Ps 119:130)

Faithfulness is the essence or your word. (Ps 119:160)  
My heart stands in awe of your word,

I rejoice in your promise,  
like one who finds great treasure. (Ps 119:161-162)

Certain constant characteristics appear throughout the Psalms: simplicity and spontaneity of prayer; the desire for God himself through and with all that is good in his creation; the distraught situation of the believer who, in his preferential love for the Lord, is exposed to a host of enemies and temptations, but who waits upon what the faithful God will do, in the certitude of his love and in submission to his will. The prayer of the psalms is always sustained by praise; that is why the title of this collection as handed down to us is so fitting: "*The Praises.*" Collected for the assembly's worship, the Psalter both sounds the call to prayer and sings the response to the call: Hallelu-Yah! ("Alleluia"), "Praise the Lord!"

*(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2589)*

A word is dead  
When it is said  
    Some say.  
    I say it just  
Begins to live  
    That day.  
(Emily Dickinson)

\* \* \* \* \*

*Choose one word or phrase from the verses or quotes above.  
Write about that word for five minutes.*

*Whose voices do you hear? What are they saying?*

## PSALM 95: INVITATION TO WORSHIP

Before beginning their prayers,  
Christians invite and exhort one another in the words of this psalm.  
(Athanasius of Alexandria, 296-373)

Used in morning prayer of Jews and Christians alike, Psalm 95 serves as an introduction both to our morning prayer and to the series of five psalms (95-100) devoted to the themes of worship and praise. It begins with a mutual invitation: we are encouraging one another to participate in coming together, singing joyfully, coming before God with praise and thanksgiving.

### **Three notes on translation:**

1. Come, let us **sing** to the LORD.

“Sing” (Hebrew *ranan*): cry aloud for joy, a ringing cry of joy, sung exaltation.

*The psalm opens with loud, public, communal, vibrant, joyful praise!*

2. ... the flock he shepherds...

Literally: “the flock of his hand”

The same “hand” that formed the depths and heights cares for us.

“As the creation is handmade and handheld,  
so are God’s people the sheep of his hand.” (Kidner, 344)

3. Do not grow stubborn...

Literally: “Do not harden your hearts.”

The joyful praise and humble worship must arise from the heart, and be  
expressed in faithful obedience.

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart” (Deut 6: 5)

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### **Biblical background: Meriba and Massah**

Massah: derived from Hebrew word for “test”

Meriba: derived from Hebrew word for “strife, contention, quarreling”

Here there was no water for the people to drink. They **quarreled**, therefore, with Moses... Moses replied, “Why do you **quarrel** with me?” Why do you put the LORD to a **test**?.... The place was called Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites **quarreled** there and **tested** the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD in our midst or not?” (Ex 17: 2, 7; see also Numbers 20: 1-3)

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### **MEDITATION**

- In introducing morning prayer, Psalm 95 sets forth a pattern for the whole day: joyful praise, humble reverence, and obedience. How are these three elements present throughout your day? When and how do you give joyful praise? How do you express humble reverence to God? How do you show obedience?
- Choose a word or phrase from Psalm 95 for *lectio*, at day’s beginning or end.

*PSALM 1: ENTERING THE PRAYERS OF PRAISE*



*COME INTO GOD'S PRESENCE  
SINGING FOR JOY*

## ***THE CHOICEST OF PSALMS***

- the main entrance to the mansion of the psalter (Saint Jerome)
- a prolog to set the tone for the entire hymnic collection. (Walter Brueggemann)
- the choicest of all psalms (Rabbi Yudan, 4<sup>th</sup> century)

**Blessed** the one who does not walk  
according to the counsel of the **wicked**,

nor stand in the way of **sinners**,  
nor sit in company with **scoffers**.

Rather, the **Torah** of the LORD is that person's **delight**,  
God's law **meditated** on day and night.

That one is like a tree  
**rooted deeply** near streams of water,

that **yields fruit** in season;  
its leaves **never wither**,  
and whatever it produces thrives. [or "whatever this person does prospers."]

Not so, the wicked!  
They are like chaff driven by the wind.

Therefore the wicked will not survive judgment,  
nor will sinners in the assembly of the just.

The LORD **knows** the way of the just,  
but the way of the wicked is lost. (Psalm 1: 1-6)

## ***THE TWO WAYS***

I have set before you life and death...  
Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live. (Deut 30:19)

Each individual has choices to make: with whom to associate, and where to find life. The individual (Heb: 'ish) in the psalm is a term frequently used to designate "humankind," often appearing in contexts that call for resolution, courage, and stamina. Here, the individual chooses not to walk, stand, or sit with evil.

## ***THE WAY OF THE WICKED***

- **Wicked:** characterized by arrogance, pride, vainglorious bluster, insolence; they are contemptuous of others, deliberately pervert administration of justice; often have an outward show of goodwill which conceals malice. (Sarna, 32)
- **Sinners:** stray from the path or miss the mark; they are habitual oral blunderers.
- **Scoffers:** mockers, cynics, outrageously and proudly insolent.

## ***THE WAY of BLESSING***

The first word in the psalter is '*ashrei*', the Hebrew equivalent to the first word in the sermon on the mount, *makarios*: beatitude. Psalm 2 ends with a beatitude: happy/blessed all those trusting in him. (Psalm 2:12) The verses together create an atmosphere of beatitude for all of life.

'*ashrei*' is happiness or blessing that "is deep-rooted, penetrates the very depths of one's being and it is serious and enduring." (Sarna, 30)

"God's blessings are not merely abundant. They are extravagant, beyond all expectation and imagining." (Nagel, 53)

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Blessed are those who take refuge in God. (Psalm 2: 11)

How blessed are those whose offense is forgiven,  
whose sin is blotted out. (Psalm 32:1)

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,  
The people God has chosen as his heritage. (Psalm 33:12)

Blessed are they whose trust is in the LORD.

Blessed is anyone who cares for the poor and the weak. (Psalm 41:1)

Blessed are those who live in your house,  
ever singing your praises. (Psalm 84:5)

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.

Blessed are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart,  
who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways. (Psalm 119: 1-3)

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### **Blessings/ beatitudes**

- ❖ give a sense of identity
- ❖ describe an existing reality
- ❖ strengthen community with a common vision / value system
- ❖ promote specific actions and attitudes, esp. living justly
- ❖ include both promise and mandate

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*Try re-phrasing divine commands and teaching as proclamations of blessing.  
How do you hear them differently?*

## ***DELIGHT***

Their delight is in the law (Torah) of the LORD,

The Hebrew word for delight (*chaphets*) means to take pleasure in, to give delighted **attention**.

To delight in someone or something involves taking time, being attentive, and using our senses to relish what is before us. (A **variety of translations** highlight the rich meaning: love, joy, desire; approve, will, be ardently devoted to; please.)

\* \* \* \* \*

The law of the LORD is their *joy*;  
God's law they study day and night. (Psalm 1: 2; NAB)

Great are the deeds of the LORD,  
discovered by all who *desire* them. (Psalm 111: 3; tr. Alter)

Happy the one who fears the LORD,  
who is *ardently devoted to* his commandments. (Ps 112: 1; Jewish Study Bible)

God rescued me because God *loves* me. (Psalm 18: 20; cf 22:9; NAB)

Those whose steps are guided by the LORD,  
whose way God *approves*, may stumble,  
but they will never fall,  
for the LORD holds their hand. (Ps 37: 23-24; NAB)

Our God is in heaven,  
whatever God *wills* is done. (Psalm 115: 3; NAB)

Whatever the LORD *pleases* he does,  
in heaven and on earth,  
in the seas and all deeps. (Psalm 135: 6; NRSV)

I the LORD act with kindness,  
justice, and equity in the world;  
For in these I *delight*. (Jer 9: 23; Jewish Study Bible)

\* \* \* \* \*

We are **blessed** when we **delight** in the Torah of the LORD.

"*Torah* is how God shapes the soul, like a road map that guides and identifies landmarks toward a destination.... The *torah* is the open door to praise through which one has access to interior rooms." (Schaefer, 3)

"The study of the sacred and revered text itself constitutes a pious act, a profoundly religious experience and is an important mode of worship." (Sarna, 29)

\* \* \* \* \*

- Review the various ways the word *chaphets* (delight) is translated. What words would you use to describe delight in your own experience?
- Take time to delight in something today, and give thankful praise!

## ***MEDITATE***

On God's law (Torah) they meditate day and night.

The Hebrew verb for meditate (*hagah*) "has a physical and auditory connotation, to mutter, to whisper with one's lips." (Schaefer, 6). The psalmists meditate on **personal and community experience, on history, creation, on life.**

Have the book of this Law always **on your lips**; meditate on it day and night, so that you may carefully keep everything that is written in it. (Joshua 1:8)

***General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours***

To sing the psalms "with understanding" we must meditate on them verse by verse, our hearts always ready to respond in the way the Holy Spirit desires. The Holy Spirit, as the one who inspired the psalmist, will also be present to those who in faith and love are ready to receive his grace. (# 104)

Though the psalms originated very many centuries ago in the East they express accurately the pain and hope, the unhappiness and trust, of people of every age and country, and celebrate especially faith in God, revelation and redemption. (# 107)

"Meditation is not having great thoughts,  
but loving the words you hear and letting them shape you." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

\*\*\*\*\*

On my bed I remember you.

On you I muse through the night (Ps 63: 7-8 Sunday morning I)

I remember the days that are past:  
I ponder all your works.

I muse on what your hand has wrought  
and to you I stretch our my hands. (Ps 143: 5-6; Thursday morning, IV)

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***MARY: a model of meditation:***

Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)

His mother kept all these things in her heart. (Luke 2: 51)

"Ponder suggests a very active reflecting, much like holding a prism in sunlight and delighting in the variety of light and color that can be observed, turning the prism to encounter new lights from every angle." (Park, 23)

\*\*\*\*\*

*Choose a biblical verse for meditation.  
Say it aloud repeatedly until you know it by heart.*

## ***DEEPLY-ROOTED TREE***

They are like a tree planted near streams of water,  
that yields its fruit in season;  
Its leaves never wither; whatever they do prospers. (Psalm 1: 3)

Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,  
whose hope is the LORD.

This one is like a tree planted beside the waters  
that stretches out its roots to the stream.

It fears not the heat when it comes, its leaves stay green. (Jer 17: 7-8)

- **Well-rooted:** “even if all the world’s winds were to blast it, they could not dislodge it.” Because of its deep roots it is resilient, stable, steadfast, deeply-rooted in the spiritual and ethical soil of the Torah. (Sarna, 42)
- **Fruit-laden:** giving of oneself to others, “nourishes and sustains society, enriching the lives of others.” (Sarna, 41)
- **Ever-green:** “The foliage provides perpetual shelter from the blazing sun.” Since the leaves are considered medicinal, the tree provides food, shelter and medicines to those in need. (Sarna, 42, 43)

The prophet Ezekiel describes such a tree:

Along the banks of the river, fruit trees of every kind shall grow; their leaves shall not fade, nor their fruit fail. Every month they shall bear fresh fruit, for they shall be watered by the flow from the sanctuary. Their fruit shall serve for food, and their leaves for medicine. (Ezek 47: 12)

*Take some time to envision the tree, deeply-rooted, fruitful, with never-fading leaves.  
How does this image describe who you are? Pray. Write. Give thanks.*

\* \* \* \* \*

## ***ABIDING RELATIONSHIP***

The LORD **knows** the way of the just,  
To be known by God:

- to be under God’s **personal care and guidance**. (Sarna, 44)
- to be **embraced** by God (Alter, 4)
- to be **cherished** by God (*Jewish Study Bible*)
- the LORD **watches over** them (NAB)
- Yahweh **takes care** of the just. (Zerr)

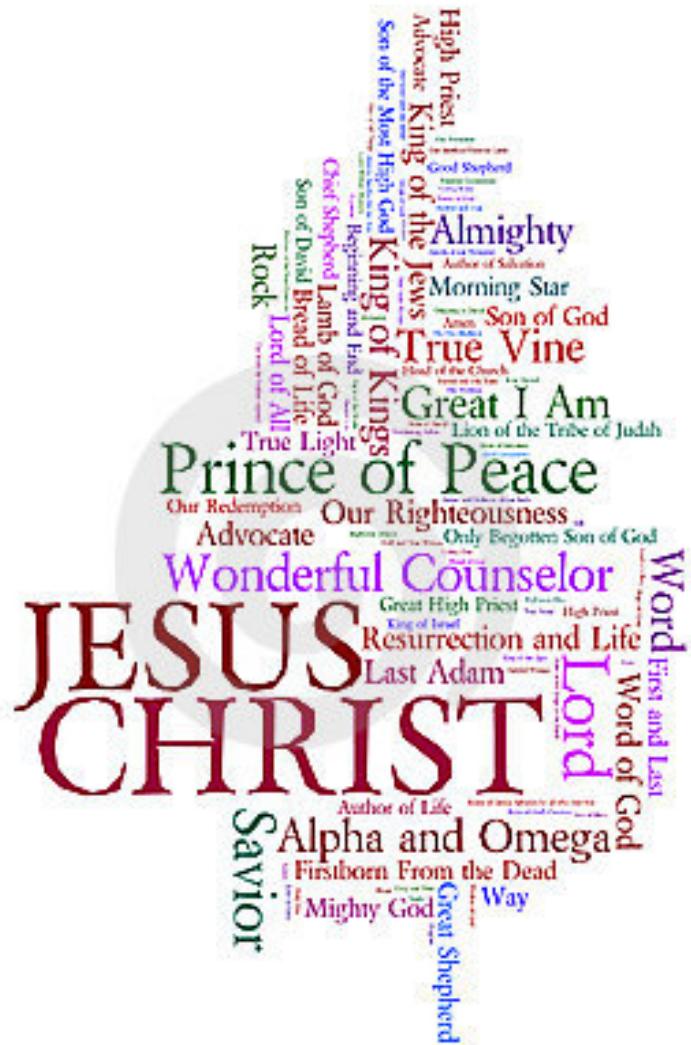
Psalm one, introducing the whole psalter, concludes with the assurance that God is ever-present and attentive: caring, guiding, embracing, cherishing, watching over, taking care of all of us.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Choose one of these descriptions and spend time immersed in this relationship.  
What other words would you use to describe God’s knowing you?  
Be blessed. Delight. Meditate.*

# **PRAVING the PSALMS**

## **THROUGH HIM, AND WITH HIM, AND IN HIM**



"Christ prays for us, and prays in us, and is the object of our prayer... Let us then hear our voices in his voice, and his voice in ours.

## (General Instruction, # 7)

...the Fathers, and the liturgy itself, could legitimately hear in the singing of the psalms **the voice of Christ crying out to the Father, or of the Father conversing with the Son**; indeed, they also recognized in the psalms the voice of the Church, the apostles and the martyrs.

(General Instruction, # 109)

**PSALM 110: THE MESSIAH, KING AND PRIEST****Sunday Evening II, Every Week**

Solemnities (e.g. Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost)

Responsorial Psalm: Feast of Corpus Christi, Year C

**A ROYAL PSALM**

Royal psalms speak to or about the king in a wide variety of circumstances. They may be sung as part of a king's anointing or anniversary, for a royal wedding, before a battle or after a military victory. "The royal psalms, which in their literal historical meaning referred to the reigning king, were then perceived as open-ended in both Jewish and Christian tradition, a position from which a hope for a messiah was natural. Thus Christian usage finds in them the celebration of Christ the king." (Schaefer, 358)

When the kings of the house of David were enthroned, the ceremonies highlighted their relationship with the LORD God. Such a relationship is expressed dynamically in the opening verse of Psalm 110.

**Hebrew:** YHWH said to my adonai  
**Greek**        kyrios said to my kyrios

Early Christians read this mysterious address as a conversation between the Lord God (the Father) and the Lord Jesus. The Father assures the Son he will be seated at his right, and speaks to him of his role of putting enemies beneath his feet, and of being a priest forever.

In its original context, Psalm 110 thus pictures the earthly king as second only to God who gives the king all the power he wields. God's power enables the king to overcome his enemies so completely that they become his footstool. The meditation verse introducing Psalm 110 in the Liturgy of the hours gives enemies another interpretation: "Christ's reign will last until all his enemies are made subject to him (1 Cor 15: 25)

**Monarch and Priest:**

In addition to the kingly task of governing and defeating enemies, the ruler also performs priestly duties such as leading in prayer and giving blessings. With a solemn oath, God now formally gives this priestly office to the king, assigning to him the same dual responsibility as the priest-king Melchizedek, (Gen 14: 18-19) a mysterious figure whose name means "King of justice," suggesting the manner in which he was to exercise his office.

Of the one hundred fifty psalms in the psalter, Psalm 110 is the one most frequently cited in the New Testament (see e.g. Matt22: 44; Acts 2: 34). The Psalm's kingly character made it readily and widely re-interpreted in light of the kingship of Jesus and is used in celebrations of his kingly and priestly rule.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Pray the psalm-prayer following Psalm 110 in the Liturgy of the Hours for weeks I and II (repeated for III and IV). How do these prayers add to your understanding of Psalm 110 as fulfilled in Jesus? Similarly, reflect on the antiphons for the feasts of Christmas, Epiphany, Sacred Heart, and All Saints. How do these antiphons enhance the meaning of the psalm?*

## ***PSALMS 20 & 21: ROYAL PSALMS of VICTORY***

Tuesday Evening, Week I

Psalms 20 and 21 are companion psalms about victory for the king: Psalm 20 a prayer for victory before battle, and 21 thanksgiving after battle. Both psalms have cognates of the Hebrew word *yasha'* (translated “victory” in Psalm 20 and “saving” in 21). The word has quite an elasticity: **save, deliver, rescue, be victorious, preserve, defend.** It refers both to being victorious in physical battles, moral battles, victory over sin and evil. More fully, it refers even to victory over death, and eternal salvation.

As royal psalms, both have been re-read as messianic hymns about Jesus. When Jesus called out in his own time of trial, God heard. Jesus’ triumph far transcends the military conquest envisioned in the original context: “The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for he subjected everything under his feet.” (1 Cor 15: 26-27)

Although Psalm 20 is a plea for victory, God’s answer is so assured that it can be understood as already accomplished. Prayed in light of the paschal mystery, the petition thus becomes a faith-filled proclamation about Christ the King

The LORD answered you in time of trial;  
the name of Jacob’s God protected you....  
I am sure that the LORD  
has given victory to his anointed.

**As a companion to Psalm 20, Psalm 21** gives thanks that God has answered their prayer. The two psalms share the vocabulary of victory and rejoicing and the granting of the heart’s desire, first as a request, and then as a gift.

**In the Liturgy of the Hours, some verses are left out of Psalm 21.** (verses 9-13). These verses speak of the king being victorious over enemies:

Your hand will reach all your enemies;  
your right hand will reach your foes!  
At the time of your coming  
you will drive them into a furnace.  
Then the LORD’s anger will consume them,  
devour them with fire. (Ps 21:9-10, NAB)

\* \* \* \* \*

How do we pray verses about defeat, even violence, against enemies? What do these verses mean when prayed in, with, and through Christ?

Pray Psalm 20 first as a prayer in time of trial, praying through, with, and in Jesus. (Try putting the words into first person, with Jesus pleading with God in the time of trial) Then pray it as a prayer answered. Write your own prayer in time of trial.

Reflect on enemies: Where are the enemies in my life? How do I deal with them? And in the context of praying through, with, and in Christ, how did Jesus himself treat enemies? What did he show us?

## **PSALM 118: A HYMN OF TRANSFORMATION**

*The rejected stone becomes the cornerstone*

Sunday morning, Weeks II and IV

Palm Sunday, Easter Vigil

Psalm 118 is a liturgical thanksgiving in which the whole community joins in giving thanks for the LORD's *chesed*/ lovingkindness. Terminology and imagery in the psalm suggests that this is a song of victory, perhaps celebrating the people's return from exile and their joyful entrance into the Jerusalem temple.

Forms of the word *yasha'* emphasize God's saving presence:

- the LORD is my **savior**;
- shouts of joy and **victory**;
- You are my **savior**;
- Lord, grant **salvation**.

God's saving action brings about transformation, changes of situation or status:

- distress to freedom;
- being surrounded by threats to crushing them;
- being hard-pressed to rejoicing in victory;
- rejected stone becoming a corner stone.

The original context of Psalm 118 has been re-interpreted by Christians in light of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection, and is one of the most frequently cited psalms in the New Testament. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowds, waving palm branches, acclaim him in the words of Psalm 118: "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed in the name of the Lord is he who comes." (Matt 21: 8-9) And Jesus himself quotes the psalm when he is faced with rejection: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the corner stone." (Matt 21: 42) In a transformation that extends far beyond the expectations of the ancient singers of the psalm, the Lord's right hand has raised up Jesus, and exalted him in glory. (Acts 5:31)

### **A VERBAL TRANSFORMATION!!**

**"Grant us salvation" in Hebrew: *hoshi'a-na*, literally: "save, please"**

The untranslated Hebrew terminology is shortened to *hosanna*, and becomes an acclamation of praise. The meaning of *hoshi'a-na* is thus transformed from petition to praise, from beseeching to exaltation!

\*\*\*\*\*

- Reflect on the transformations of Psalm 118, both in its original context and as re-interpreted in light of Jesus passion, death, and resurrection.
- What other transformations can you think of in the Hebrew scriptures and in the life of Jesus and his disciples?
- What do such changes reveal about God?
- What is your response?
- What transformations do you pray for?
- What have you already experienced?
- Write a prayer that includes the acclamation "Hosanna."

***PSALM 111: PRAISE of the LORD from FIRST to LAST***

Sunday evening II, Week III  
Feasts of Corpus Christi and Sacred Heart

*We are lost in wonder at all that you have done for us,  
our Lord and mighty God (Rev 15: 3)*

Psalm 111 begins with the acclamation *Halleluia: Praise the LORD!* In the Hebrew scriptures, the word occurs only in the psalms, at the beginning and / or end of hymns of praise. The verb *halal* denotes enthusiastic, jubilant praise, often expressed by accompanying sounds: clapping, shouting, singing, musical instrumentation.

An alphabetic acrostic of twenty-two lines, each line of Psalm 111 begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Thus the **structure** of the psalm itself, encompassing the whole alphabet, draws attention to the completeness of God's majestic works.

The **content** of the psalm also emphasizes totality and expansiveness, with repetition of the words "all" and "[for]ever."

I give thanks with **all** my heart;  
the Lord's works pondered by **all** who love them;  
**all** God's precepts are justice and truth;  
**all** who fear the Lord are wise.

God's justice stands firm **forever**;  
God keeps the covenant **ever** in mind;  
God's precepts stand firm **forever and ever**.  
God has established the covenant **forever**;  
God's praise shall last **forever**.

The psalm is sometimes considered as a didactic, or teaching, psalm. Israel's rich traditions are woven throughout, with focus on the great moments of salvation history, particularly those recounted in Exodus when God fed the people, made a covenant with them, and gave them their own land. The descriptions of the LORD as compassion and love, justice and truth provide a kind of summary of the essential repeated divine attributes found in the Torah and prophets. The psalm can thereby serve as a means of teaching, in the context of thankful praise, the abiding relationship of God and people that encompasses all times, standing forever secure.

***Multiple reasons to proclaim Halleluia!***

\* \* \* \* \*

- Pray the Psalm WITH and IN Jesus, speaking to THE LORD GOD;
- Pray the Psalm TO Jesus, addressing him as LORD.
- How does the meaning of the various verses change? e.g. "He gives food to those who fear him" and "He has sent deliverance to his people"?
- Compose your own alphabetic psalm. Weave into your psalm prayers that express what we believe, how we encounter God, and other statements that elicit Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

## *PRAYING the PSALMS in the time of COVID-19*



*Let nothing disturb you.  
Let nothing upset you.  
Everything changes.  
God alone is unchanging.  
With patience all things are possible.  
Whoever has God lacks nothing.  
God alone is enough.  
(St. Teresa of Avila)*

***HOW LONG, O LORD? HOW LONG?***

How long, LORD?  
Will you utterly forget me?

How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I carry sorrow in my soul,  
grief in my heart day after day? (Psalm 13: 2-3)

How long, LORD?  
Will you stay hidden forever? (Psalm 89:47)

Relent, O LORD!  
How long?  
Have pity on your servants. (Psalm 90: 13)

\* \* \* \* \*

***PSALMS 141 and 142***  
(Sunday Evening I, Week I)

**Psalms of Lament**

1. Introduction: Usually an anguished cry to God for help, sometimes reinforced with questions about God's lack of action on behalf of the lamenter.
2. Main body: description, often very colorful, with graphic imagery, of the psalmist's distress: sickness, enemies, exile, etc. the language and imagery is often so symbolic that the precise complaint is difficult to discern. That makes it widely applicable. For example, sickness may arise from physical, social, political, religious circumstances. Enemies may be persons or anything, either internal or external, that afflicts the psalmist.
3. Conclusion: Usually framed with a spirit of confidence, since the psalmist anticipates a positive response. Sometimes it is expressed with such certainty that the whole prayer sounds more like one of thanksgiving than lament.

***PRAY-ERS SEEKING REFUGE***

Psalm 142: A song of David, when he was in the cave.

"Whatever David says in his book pertains to himself, to all Israel, and to all times."  
(Sarna, 7)

My eyes are upon you, O God my Lord;  
in you I take **refuge**; do not strip me of life. (Ps 141: 8)

I cry out to you, LORD,  
I say, You are my **refuge**,  
my portion in the land of the living. (Ps 142:6)

**Refuge:** (*chasah*): (occurs over 40 times in the psalms)

**Verb:** seek protection, shelter, refuge; flee for protection

**Noun:** a safe place, a shelter from danger or hardship; act of turning to someone or something for assistance or security.

*PRAYING to the GOD of REFUGE*

The poor have the LORD as their refuge. (Ps 14: 6)

Keep me safe, O God;  
in you I take refuge. (Ps 16:1)

Show your wonderful love,  
you who deliver with your right arm  
those who seek refuge from their foes. (Ps 17: 7)

LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer,  
My God, my rock of refuge,  
my shield, my saving horn, my stronghold. (Ps 18:3)

How precious is your love, O God!  
We take refuge in the shadow of your wings. (Ps 36:8)

God is our refuge and our strength,  
an ever-present help in distress. (Ps 46: 2)

As for me, to be near God is my good,  
to make the Lord God my refuge. (Ps 73:28)

Say to the LORD, "My refuge and fortress,  
my God in whom I trust." Ps 91:2)

**A reading from the Second Book of Samuel:**

David sang the words of this song when the LORD had rescued him from the grasp of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer,  
my God, my rock of refuge!  
My shield, the horn of my salvation,  
my stronghold, my refuge,  
my savior, from violence you keep me safe.  
Praised be the LORD, I exclaim,  
and I am safe from my enemies.  
The LORD reached out from on high and grasped me;  
he drew me out of the deep waters. (2 Sam 22: 1-4, 17)

**Pray for those seeking refuge:** Merciful God, we pray for families and individuals who have left or fled their homes, seeking safer and better lives. We lift up to you their hopes, fears, and needs, that they may be protected on their journeys, their dignity and rights may be honored and upheld, and they may be welcomed with open arms into generous and compassionate communities. Amen. (from Catholic Charities)

\* \* \* \* \*

Meditate on David's song. (If possible, SING!) What are the words that he uses to describe God? Add your own description, particularly when you are suffering. What words would you use on the other side of suffering? Write (or SING) your own psalm.

## ***PRAYING IN HOPE***

"In times of peace and blessing, hope gives thanks and expects further good. In times of affliction and distress hope, still directed toward God, longs for deliverance. The dynamic of this relation is paradoxical, even contrarian, for genuine hope grows in strength as a situation grows more desperate, becoming a 'hope against hope' that refuses to give trouble the last word because ultimately God's mercy will encompass it with care and new life." (Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 203)

**Blessed are they who hope in the Lord. [refrain is from Psalm 40]**

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I hope all day long. (Psalm 25: 5)

Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
Wait for the LORD! (Psalm 27: 14)

Be strong and take heart,  
All you who hope in the LORD. (Psalm 31: 25, NAB)

The LORD's eyes are upon the reverent,  
Upon those who hope for God's gracious help,  
delivering them from death, keeping them alive in times of famine....

May your kindness, LORD, be upon us;  
We have put our hope in you. (Psalm 33: 18-19, 22)

For God alone my soul waits in silence,  
for my hope is from God,  
who alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress;  
I shall not be shaken. (Psalm 62:5-6)

I hoped for the LORD, my being hoped,  
and for God's word I waited.

More than the dawn-watchers watch for the dawn.  
Wait, O Israel, for the LORD,

For with the LORD is steadfast kindness,  
and with God is great redemption. (Psalm 130: 5-7)

\* \* \* \* \*

- According to these verses, for WHAT do we hope?
- HOW do the psalmists hope? (actions, attitudes, beliefs)
- How would you describe the relationship with God embedded in these prayers?
- Pray in hope for yourself, for those who are suffering, and may feel hopeless.

## *PSALM PRAYERS in TIME of DISTRESS*

**A deep distress has humanized my soul. (William Wordsworth)**

May the LORD answer you on the day of distress,  
The name of Jacob's God make you safe. (Psalm 20:2)

The distress of my heart has grown great.  
From my straits bring me out. (Psalm 25: 17)

The rescue of the just is from the LORD,  
Their stronghold in time of distress.  
And the LORD will help them and free them,  
He will free them from the wicked and rescue them,  
For they have sheltered in Him. (Psalm 37: 39-40)

**\*Call Me on the day of distress –  
I will free you and you shall revere me. (Psalm 50:15)**

Answer me, LORD, for Your kindness is good,  
In Your great compassion turn to me.  
And hide not Your face from Your servant,  
For I am in straits. Hurry, answer me. (Psalm 69: 17-18)

My voice to God – let me cry out.  
My voice to God – and hearken to me.  
In the day of my straits I sought the Master. (Psalm 77: 2-3)

**From the straits you called and I set you free. (Psalm 81: 8)**

When I am in straits I call You, for You will answer me. (Psalm 86: 7)

**He calls Me and I answer him,  
I am with him in his straits.  
I deliver him and grant him honor. (Psalm 91: 15)**

They cried to the LORD from their straits,  
From their distress He saved them. (Psalm 107: 6,13,19,28:

This is a refrain announcing God's repeated saving  
action, rescuing people throughout history.)

\*Psalm verses in bold print are the voice of God speaking to the psalmist.

(Translation: Robert Alter, The Book of Psalms.  
New York and London: W.W. Norton,2007

## *JESUS' PSALMS of LAMENTATION*

Throughout Jewish and Christian history the biblical laments with their open and metaphorical language have given words and images to sufferers and so enabled them to express both their pain and their faith in God, and thus overcome the isolation and hopelessness that so often accompany suffering. ... The laments provide some of the language and images for Mark's descriptions of Jesus' sufferings. At the same time they link the suffering Jesus to the whole tradition of suffering encapsulated in the Psalms and to the sufferings of many people in our world today. (Donahue and Harrington, 412-13)

### *PSALMS IN THE PASSION NARRATIVE*

#### ***PRAYER IN GETHSEMANE (Mark 14:32-42)***

My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember...  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God. (Ps 42:6,11)

My heart is in anguish within me, the terrors of death have fallen upon me.  
Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me. (Ps 55:4-5)

#### ***PETER FOLLOWS AT A DISTANCE (Mark 14:53-54)***

My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction,  
and my neighbors stand far off. (Psalm 38:11)

#### ***JESUS' SILENCE WHEN QUESTIONED (Mark 14: 61)***

I am silent; I do not open my mouth. (Ps 39:9)

#### ***CRUCIFIXION AND DIVIDING OF GARMENTS (15:24)***

They divide my clothing among themselves,  
And for my clothing they cast lots. (Ps 22:18)

#### ***MOCKERY OF JESUS (Mark 15:27-32)***

He trusted himself to the LORD, let the LORD set him free!  
Let him deliver him, as he took such delight in him. (Ps 22:8)

#### ***JESUS' CRY (Mark 18:34)***

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Ps 22:1)

#### ***OFFERING OF SPONGE WITH VINEGAR (Mark 15:36)***

I hoped for sympathy, but in vain, for consolers – not one to be found.  
To eat they gave me poison, to drink, vinegar when I was thirsty. (Ps 69:20-21)

#### ***JESUS' DYING WORDS (Luke 23:46)***

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. (Psalm 31:6)

\* \* \* \* \*

The psalms of the passion narrative, particularly Psalm 22, "have something important in common: Each echoes the voice of an innocent person suffering cruel opposition and persecution. They are psalms of the suffering just ones and take the form of lament psalms. Jesus had preeminent cause to call out to God, his Father, for saving help in face of such cruelty.... when a Christian prays a lament psalm it is not difficult to pray it with the suffering Jesus." (Endres and Liebert, 220)

**PSALMS OF MERCY**



*I will arise and go to my father.*

May we always recognize  
that Jesus Christ "is the face of the Father's mercy."

May we never cease to proclaim to the world  
the pardon and salvation offered through Jesus,  
and to live out the Gospel through humble acts of mercy.

AMEN  
(Pope Francis)

**PSALM 130: LAMENTING and MERCY***Sunday Eve I, Week IV**Christmas, Presentation, Annunciation*

Psalm 130 is both a lament and a penitential psalm. “Church tradition, from as early as Augustine, names seven penitential psalms: **Psalms: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.** Praying these psalms has long been considered an excellent path to repentance and forgiveness of sin. Pope Pius V appointed these psalms for prayer on Fridays, especially during Lent, and two of these psalms (Psalms 51 and 130) found particular emphasis on Good Friday.” (Endres and Liebert, 139)

- The psalmist cries out to the LORD (YHWH), the lord (*adonai*), repeatedly, understood as pleading “from the darkness of profound despair, on the verge of death” (Alter, 455), as if “drowning in confusion and sin.” (Schaefer, 311)
- The psalm begins in the singular, and moves to the collective.
- Many laments focus on outside forces/enemies. The cause of lamentation in Psalm 130 is on sinfulness, personal and collective.
- The crying out to God is intense: it is pleading for God’s graciously-given bestowal of mercy (as also in Psalms 51 and 103)
- In the midst of such lamentation, the psalmist’s final words are about God’s *abundant* mercy, translated variously as *fullness, plenteous, generous.*

***MEDITATION***

- Pray the psalm in the voice of those **awaiting** God’s mercy in the time of Jesus.
- Have you ever been in *the depths*? Describe.
- Think of individuals or groups, or even non-human entities, who have experienced being in the depths, either as a one-time occurrence, or as a long-lasting reality.
- Cry out to God, using the words of the psalmist, or your own words. Unite your voice with the voices of others in the depths.

There is a great transformation from the beginning of the psalm to the end.

- Now, describe how God/Jesus shows kindness, both to yourself and to others who have experienced (and perhaps continue to experience) the depths.
- What does *full redemption* mean to you? What other words would you use for *full*?
- From what does God redeem you? How?
- What is your response?

**PSALM 51: CONFESSION and MERCY**

*Every Friday morning  
Good Friday*

Have mercy (*chanan*) on me, O God, in your goodness, (*chesed*)  
In your great tenderness (*rachamim*) wipe away my faults; (*pesha'*)  
Wash me clean of my guilt, ('awon) purify me from my sin. (*hatta't*)

For I am well aware of my faults, I have my sin constantly in mind,  
Having sinned against none other than you,  
having done what you regard as wrong. (*ra'*)

You are just when you pass judgment on me, blameless when you give judgment.  
You know I was born guilty, a sinner from the moment of conception.  
Yet, since you love sincerity of heart, teach me the secrets of wisdom.  
Purify me with hyssop until I am clean; wash me until I am whiter than snow.

Instill some joy and gladness into me, let the bones you have crushed rejoice again.  
Hide your face from my sins, wipe out all my guilt.

God, create (*bara'*) a clean heart in me, put into me a new and constant spirit,  
Do not banish me from your presence, do not deprive me of your holy spirit.

Be my savior again, renew my joy, keep my spirit steady and willing;  
And I shall teach transgressors the way to you, and to you the sinners will return.

Save me from death, God my savior, and my tongue will acclaim your righteousness;  
Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will speak out your praise.

Sacrifice gives you no pleasure, were I to offer holocaust, you would not have it.  
My sacrifice is this broken spirit, you will not scorn this crushed and broken heart.

Show your favor graciously to Zion. Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.  
Then there will be proper sacrifice to please you,  
holocaust and whole oblation, and young bulls to be offered on your altar.

*(Psalm 51; Jerusalem Bible Translation)*

- *chanan*: to graciously give, bestow favor, have mercy on
- *chesed*: unceasing covenant lovingkindness, goodness, mercy. The English word "kindness" is similar to *chesed*: kindness is derived from "kin," thus expressing the feeling of relatives for one other. In *chesed*/kindness, God treats us as "kinsfolk."
- *rachamim*: compassion, related to the word *rechem* (womb), thus described as "womb-love"
- *pesha'*: rebel, revolt, transgress against God; a serious breach of the relationship
- *'awon*: crooked or wrong activity, coming from root word meaning to bend or twist
- *hatta't*: literally "to miss the ark," referring to transgressing of some law or statute.
- *ra'*: evil, malignant, causing pain or unhappiness, harmful, calamity.

\* \* \* \* \*

Repeat throughout the day, "A clean heart create in me, O God" or other word or phrase from the psalm. Pray the psalm for yourself and society.

**PSALM 85: MERCY PERSONIFIED**  
**Tuesday morning, Week III**

In Psalm 85, the psalmist addresses God personally, directly, and boldly in the opening verses. **Reminding the LORD of past actions of mercy**, the pray-er moves to pleading questions that express hope that God will again show mercy. In the second part of the psalm, (beginning with "I will hear what the Lord God has to say") a spokesperson speaks to the community, proclaiming God's message to them. Implicit in the message is a call for right living that includes turning to God in their hearts and fearing, reverencing, standing in humble awe before their LORD God.

Running throughout the entirety of the prayer are cognates of the Hebrew word *shub*, variously translated as *revive, avert, restore, and turn*. The *shub* terminology cleverly shows that God's action of "turning" will have a corresponding response of "turning" on the part of the people, signifying their conversion: turning *away from* sin and *turning toward* their God. The result of their mutual turning is the restoration both of the fractured relationship and a renewed prosperity on the earth. Along with God's glory making a home in the people's own land, heaven and earth will be united by God's beneficent mercy.

A lovely figure of speech in the psalm is the personification of the covenant attributes of mercy (*chesed*), faithfulness ('*emeth*), justice (*tsedeq*), and peace (*shalom*). Such personification is found elsewhere in the psalms, creating a dynamic and vibrant image of the essential aspects of the relationship between God and people.

Send forth your light and your fidelity,  
 that they may be my guide. (Psalm 43: 3)

Love (*chesed*) and loyalty ('*emeth*) march before you. (Psalm 89:15; NAB)

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**MEDITATION**

Delight in the personifications of covenant attributes.  
 Imagine, envision, enjoy!

Some questions to begin, followed by your own.

- What do mercy and faithfulness say to each other when they meet?
- Is it **God's** mercy and the **people's** faithfulness?
- What do they look like?
- Why are justice and peace embracing?
- What is their relationship?
- Why is faithfulness springing from the earth and justice looking down from heaven?
- Is justice looking for something in particular?
- When justice marches before the Lord, where are they going?
- What other covenant attributes can be personified?
- Can you draw any of these images?

**PSALM 103: BLESSING AND MERCY**

*Pray Psalm 103 slowly, pausing at any words that speak particularly to you.*

*Some Themes of the psalm:*

**BLESSING:** The psalm is framed by blessing (*barak*): to kneel, bless, praise, offer oneself in humble submission. Used as an opening and closing exhortation, blessing “imparts a sense of exaltation.” (Alter, 358)

**COMPASSION:** *rachamim* and related words are divine attributes revealed to Moses at Ex 34:6. In compassion, God does not deal with us as our sins, in all their variety, deserve.

**LOVINGKINDNESS.** Like compassion, *chesed* is a divine attribute, and is woven throughout all creation. It “endows the individual’s life, the history of the people, even the cosmos with ultimate meaning.” (Schaefer, 256)

**TOTALITY:** The word “all” and other words signifying the totality and expansive of God’s embrace are woven throughout the psalm. The conclusion announces the totality of praise throughout God’s domain.

- 1      Bless (*barak*) the LORD, my soul;  
          **all** my being, bless his holy name!
- 2      Bless (*barak*) the LORD, my soul;  
          do not forget **all** the gifts of God,
- 3      who pardons **all** your sins,  
          heals **all** your ills,
- 4      delivers your life from the pit,  
          surrounds you with love (*chesed*) and compassion, (*rachamim*)
- 5      **Fills** your days with good things;  
          your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.
- 6      The LORD does righteous deeds,  
          brings justice to **all** the oppressed.
- 7      His ways were revealed to Moses,  
          mighty deeds to the people of Israel.
- 8      Merciful (*rachum*) and gracious (*chanun*) is the LORD,  
          slow to anger, **abounding** in kindness.
- 9      God does not always rebuke,  
          nurses no lasting anger,
- 10     Has not dealt with us as our sins (*hatta’*) :merit,  
          nor requited us as our deeds (*`awon*) deserve.

- 11 As the heavens tower over the earth,  
so God's love towers over the faithful.
- 12 As far as the east is from the west,  
so far have our sins (*pesha`*) been removed from us.
- 13 As a father has compassion (*racham*) on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion (*racham*) on the faithful.
- 14 For he knows how we are formed,  
remembers that we are dust.
- 15 Our days are like the grass;  
like flowers of the field we blossom,
- 16 The wind sweeps over us and we are gone;  
our place knows us no more.
- 17 But the LORD's kindness (*chesed*) is **forever**,  
toward the faithful form **age to age**.
- 18 He favors the children's children  
of those who keep his covenant  
who take care to fulfill its precepts.
- 19 The LORD's throne is established in heaven;  
God's royal power rules over **all**.
- 20 Bless (*barak*) the LORD, **all** you angels,  
mighty in strength and attentive,  
obedient to **every** command.
- 21 Bless (*barak*) the LORD, **all** you hosts,  
ministers who do God's will.
- 22 Bless (*barak*) the LORD, **all** creatures,  
**everywhere in God's domain.**  
Bless (*barak*) the LORD, my soul!  
(NAB translation)

After praying the psalm, write your own psalm of blessing.

*Choose a verse of blessing to recite today, either for this psalm or another;  
e.g. Ps 63: 3-4; 95:6; 34:1)*

## *PSALMS for the JOURNEY*



*God, with his love, walks with us.  
Pope Francis*

*May the Lord watch over us and guide us on our journey. May his saints and angels be with us to protect us on our way. May no harm come to us and may we reach our destination in peace and safety. And may we return safely with the Lord who is our companion and who is present to us always and everywhere. Amen.*  
(Thomas Simons. Blessings for God's People. Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1983, 81)

***LIFE-LONG JOURNEY***

Two repeated Hebrew words for the journey, literal and figurative:

- *Halak*: (66 times in Psalms) walk, proceed, travel, behave, live, manner of life
- *Derek*: (64 times in psalms) road, way, path, journey, manner, habit, course of life,

You will show me the path of life.  
 In your presence is fullness of joy.  
 In your right hand there are pleasures forever. (Psalm 16:11)

Good and upright is the LORD,  
 who shows sinners the way,  
 guides the humble rightly,  
 and teaches the humble the way. (Psalm 25: 8-9)

Grant me justice, LORD!  
 I have walked without blame. (Psalm 26: 1)

Your love is before my eyes;  
 I walk guided by your faithfulness. (Psalm 26: 3)

LORD, show me your way;  
 lead me on a level path. (Psalm 27: 11)

Those whose steps are guided by the LORD  
 whose way God approves,  
 may stumble, but they will never fall,  
 for the LORD holds their hand. (Psalm 37: 23-24)

Show me, LORD, your way that I may walk in your truth,  
 single-hearted and revering your name. (Psalm 86:11)

I run in the path of your commandments,  
 For you have set my heart free. (Psalm 119:32)

Your word is a lamp for my feet,  
 And a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105)

*Surely goodness and kindness...*

\* \* \* \* \*

***PONDERING YOUR JOURNEY***

In Yosemite National Park, the trails have names: Clouds rest; Cathedral Lakes; Happy Isles; Snow Creek; Four Mile trail. Each name gives an idea of what you will experience, or have already experienced, what you see or feel. What names might you give for the paths of your life? How do you experience God on each path of your life's journey?

"God opens paths that invite, but almost always the invitation entails challenge: set your foot on the path and do not look back. Go with no map but a promise. Enter the unknown." (McEntyre, Pause, 19)

**PSALM 15: WALKING IN JUSTICE and INTEGRITY**  
*Monday evening, Week I*

**Psalm 15 begins with a question addressed to God:**

Yahweh, who can **be a guest** (*gur*) in your tent?

The first verb (*gur*): sojourn; dwell as a new-comer; dwell temporarily; the noun *ger* refers to a stranger who takes up temporary residence. "We are guests of God and enjoy divine protection and the intimacy of personal communion. (Sarna, 99)

I sojourn with you [LORD], like a passing stranger,  
 a guest like all my ancestors. (Psalm 39: 13)

Who can **dwell** (*shakan*) on your holy mountain? (Zerr)

The second verb (*shakan*): settle down, abide, dwell. In post-biblical Hebrew the related noun *shekhinah* refers to divine presence. (Sarna, 99) The psalmist is asking who can live in God's holy place?

**God answers the question:**

The one who **walks**: the list presents the "dominant characteristics of the human being; the guiding principles that govern one's entire existence on earth." (Sarna, 99,100)

The list begins with justice (*tsedeq*).All of the other actions are manifestations of justice.

Human justice is modeled after divine justice:  
 establishing, maintaining, and restoring right relationships.

In general terms justice in the Bible can be described as "**fidelity to the demands of a relationship.**" (Donahue, 69)

"The LORD is one."  
 God's way is a single way: God's power is God's love;  
 God's justice is God's mercy.  
 What is divergent to us is one in God.  
 (Heschel, 105)

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- In meditating on Psalm 15, describe how you personally walk in the justice described in the psalm.
- How do you see the list of Psalm 15 lived in church and civic and family communities?
- What are challenges in making this journey?
- What are the graces?

## WALKING IN HOLINESS

**קדש**  
HOLY
**קדש**  
HOLY
**קדש**  
HOLY

### Holy: **kadosh** (*qadosh*)

The word holy, *qadosh*, at its root means “to be set apart, to be different, separate, pure and clear, unmixed with evil. The holy God is utterly transcendent, completely apart from what is finite or sinful”.... Yet the holy God is at the same time profoundly relational. In the accounts of God’s presence, holiness is linked with justice, truth, and involvement with the world in creative and redeeming care: “the incomprehensible holy mystery of God indwells the natural and human world as source, sustaining power, and goal of the universe, enlivening and loving it into liberating communion.” (Johnson, 50, 55)

**Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy. (Lev 19:2)**

Wisdom gave the **holy ones** the recompense of their labors,  
 conducted them by a wondrous road,  
 and became a shelter for them by day  
 and a starry flame by night. (Wisdom 10:17)

Fear the LORD, **you holy ones**;  
 nothing is lacking to those who fear him. (Psalm 34: 10)

God chose us in Christ  
 before the world began  
 to be **holy**  
 and blameless his sight. (Eph 1: 4)

God saved us and called us to a **holy life**,  
 not according to our works,  
 but according to his own design  
 and the grace bestowed on us  
 in Christ Jesus before time began. (2 Tim 1: 9)

As the one who called you is holy,  
 be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct,  
 for it is written, “**Be holy because I am holy.**” (1 Peter 1: 15-16)

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### Reflection on holiness

God calls each of us to holiness. Choose three words that best describe the holiness to which you are called. Pray for the grace to walk in holiness.

Describe someone who embodies the holiness to which we are called. Give thanks to God when you observe this holiness in someone. If so inspired, tell people how you see God’s holiness reflected in them.

**PSALM 8: WALKING IN MYSTERY**

Saturday morning, Weeks II and IV

*Divine Majesty and Human Dignity: Two Paradoxes***THE FIRST PARADOX:**

The psalm is framed by an exclamation of wonderment, awe and admiration of the transcendent God who has absolute sovereignty over nature and history.

Paradoxically, the transcendent God is mysteriously present, interacting with human beings in a personal, intimate way:

**How great is your name, O LORD (YHWH) our God ('adonai).**

(Paradoxically)  
**You keep mortals in mind...  
 you care for them.**

**How great is your name, O LORD (YHWH) our God ('adonai).**

**THE SECOND PARADOX**

**What is a human being ('enosh)...  
 a mortal being (ben 'adam)**

The first term for human being indicates someone weak, frail and vulnerable. the second term describes an earthly being, one who is made from the dirt of the earth.

YET, (paradoxically)

**You have made them little less than a god,  
 crowned them with glory and honor,  
 gave them power over the works of your hands,  
 and put all things under their feet.**

Paradoxically, God has made these weak beings little less than the heavenly attendants at the celestial throne, and has crowned them with glory and honor, terms associated with divine and kingly majesty, and given them power over God's own creation.

As if to remind frail and limited humanity that governance is conferred on them by God, the psalm ends with the repeated acclamation of God's grandeur:

**How great is your name, O LORD (YHWH) our God ('adonai).**

\* \* \* \* \*

- What thoughts, feelings and actions flow from the mystery/paradox of God's distance and nearness, of being both Sovereign over all creation as well as our intimate Caregiver?
- What thoughts, feelings and actions flow from the mystery/paradox of humanity's weakness and being crowned with glory and honor, of being a tiny part of creation as well as given stewardship over it?

# *ALLELUIA*



## *PSALMS of PRAISE*

*A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot.  
(St. Augustine)*

*Sing a new song unto the Lord; let your song be sung from mountains high.  
Sing a new song unto the Lord, singing Alleluia!*

## PSALM 113: FEAST DAY PRAISE

Sunday Eve I, Week III

He has cast down the mighty and has lifted up the lowly. (Luke 1: 52)

Psalms 113-118 are known as *Hallel* (praise), regularly recited in Jewish liturgy on major festivals: Passover, Weeks, Tabernacles, and Hanukkah. These psalms are a reminder of the fulsome praise that echoes throughout the centuries, sung as well by Jesus and his disciples. After the Last Supper, “when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” (Matt 26: 30), continuing the prayer of their Passover meal. And we too are exhorted to join in this praise, to “sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs with thankfulness in our hearts to God.” (Col 3: 16)

Psalms of praise are songs “that lift us up, that carry us along, that remind us of the timelessness and the grandeur of God’s creation and space. They seldom project the voice of one individual, so suited are they to the song of jubilation and exuberance that only finds its home in larger communities or congregations....such psalms celebrate the immensity of God’s goodness and love through all the ages of our existence or throughout the inhabited world. They remind us of the great breadth and abundance of the world God created, from the heavens above to the earth below.” (Endres and Liebert, 120-121)

In the Liturgy of the Hours, Psalm 113 is the opening psalm on **Christmas, Ascension, Pentecost, and many other feasts of Christ, the Blessed Mother, and the saints.** Over and over throughout the psalm, praise for the LORD resounds. Psalm 113 begins and ends with *Hallelujia*, followed by an acclamation by the servants of the LORD, probably referring to those who are gathered for worship. God is to be praised in all times and places, “now and evermore,” and from the eastern point of the sun’s rising to the western point of its setting. How fitting that both Jews and Christians celebrate feasts with a psalm that is pure praise.

The God who is exalted over all, “stoops from the heights” and acts with tender compassion. Here the prayer creates a striking image of contrasts: from the highest of heights, God raises up the lowliest of the low, an acclamation that is echoed in the Magnificat. God’s extraordinary care for them is reason for praise from the rising to the setting of the sun. Height and depth, east to west: all times and spaces join in praise: *HALLELUIA!*

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- Either alone or with a partner or group, enlarge the praise of Psalm 113 by adding “alleluia” (sung if possible) after every couplet.
- Notice the antiphon that introduces Psalm 113 (Sunday Evening I, Week III), in ordinary time, as well as for Advent, Lent, and Easter seasons. How do the different antiphons add to the meaning of the psalm?
- Create your own antiphon for different feast days, including your “personal” feasts such as birthday, baptismal anniversary, celebration of vows, etc.

## ***THE MAGNIFICAT: MARY'S PSALM of PRAISE***



One of the best loved prayers in the Christian tradition, Mary's Magnificat is both song and poetry in which she creatively weaves in words and images from ancient Jewish prayers. Echoing the praises of psalmists and prophets, her psalm parallels the hymn of her ancestor Hannah (1 Sam 2: 1-10). As you pray the following verses, imagine how the young Mary of Nazareth would have prayed them prior to the annunciation.

I will bless the LORD at all times,  
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.  
My soul makes its boast in the LORD;

Let the humble rejoice and be glad.  
O magnify the LORD with me,  
And let us exalt his name together. (Psalm 34:1-3)

My soul shall exult in the LORD,  
Exulting in his deliverance. (Psalm 35:9)

O God, from my youth you have taught me,  
And I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. (Psalm 71:17)

Your power and your righteousness, O God,  
reach the high heavens. (Psalm 71:19)

He sent redemption to his people;  
He has commanded his covenant forever.  
Holy and awesome is his name. (Psalm 111:9)

As the heavens are high above the earth,  
So great is his steadfast love  
Toward those who fear him. (Psalm 103:11)

For the LORD is good;  
His steadfast love endures forever,  
And his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100:5)

I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;  
Your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. (Psalm 89:2)

The LORD has become my strength and my might;  
He has become my salvation.

There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous;  
The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;  
The right hand of the LORD is exalted. (Psalm 118:14-16)

The LORD satisfies the thirsty,  
And the hungry he fills with good things. (Psalm 107:9)

The LORD raises the needy from the dust,  
lifts the poor from the ash heap. (Psalm 113: 7)

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,  
And saves the crushed in spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
But the LORD rescues them from them all. (Psalm 34:18-19)

He has remembered his mercy and faithfulness to the house of Israel.  
All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God. (Psalm 98:3)

\* \* \* \* \*

Select a word or phrase that you can envision Mary of Nazareth praying.  
What significance would the prayer have had for her? What significance  
does it have for you?

**PSALM 136: THE GREAT HALLEL**

Monday evening, Week IV

In Jewish liturgy, Psalm 136 is known as the Great Hallel, a psalm of praise celebrating God's eternal love. The psalm was most likely written to be recited antiphonally with the assembly responding to each acclamation by declaring God's eternal loving kindness (*chesed*), over and over in a rhythmic hymn of praise. The opening verses of the psalm see God's *chesed* manifest in all of creation. In the repeated response, the first Hebrew word (*ki*), may be understood either as the reason for giving thanks, thus translating the response as "for God's love is eternal," or as an emphatic term, giving the translation of "indeed God's love is eternal." Whichever interpretation is given, the litany naturally leads to a sense of awe and confidence in God's abiding care.

All of God's wondrous deeds in creation serve as prelude for God's wondrous deeds in history acclaimed in the second part of the psalm. Indeed, God's saving actions in all of the events associated with the exodus are a kind of new creation effected for the benefits of the chosen people. The psalmist's recounting of God's *chesed* in bringing the people out of Egypt with a powerful outstretched hand, dividing the sea in two so Israel could pass through its midst has made Psalm 136 a fitting prayer for the celebration of Passover where it is incorporated into the Seder. It is also a prayer of the Easter Vigil celebrating Jesus' new Passover, another sign of God's abiding *chesed*.

We give thanks to you, LORD, for you are good, **for your *chesed* endures forever.**

We give thanks to you, the God of gods,

    We give thanks to you, the Lord of lords,

You alone work wonders,

    In wisdom you made the heavens,

You set the earth firm on the waters,

    You made the great lights,

the sun to rule in the day,

    moon and stars to rule the night...

With mighty hand and outstretched arm,

    You split the Sea of Reeds in two,

Let Israel pass through the middle...

You led your people through the desert...

You gave their land as a birthright,

    A birthright to your servant Israel.

You kept us in mind when we were humbled,

    And rescued us from our enemies.

You provide food for all living creatures,

..... We give thanks to you, God of heaven, **for your *chesed* endures forever.**

\* \* \* \* \*

- After praying the Psalm, add your reflection on God's *chesed*, as manifest in God's word, in creation, in Jesus, in your own life, and in history.
- Choose different English words for the *chesed* litany, e.g. mercy, lovingkindness, abiding compassion.
- Celebrate God's lovingkindness by creating your own Dayeinu: It would have been enough.

## ***PSALM 150: A NOISY SONG OF PRAISE***

The 150 psalm psalter is divided into five books, each book ending with a brief doxology, appropriate finales for the prayer books of divine praise (Ps 41: 14; 72: 18-20; 89: 53; 106: 48). Psalm 150, richer than the preceding doxologies, brings the whole psalter to a close with a grand hymn of praise, a dramatic conclusion to the book of praises. The last four psalms, extending from Psalm 146-150, together form a grand hymn of praise. Each of the psalms begins and ends with the Hebrew word “*Halleluia*,” inviting the whole congregation to praise the LORD. !” These framing halleluias and repeated calls to praise express the essence of the whole psalter. Whether the psalms are laments, historical recitals, hymns of thanksgiving or prayers of penitence, those who pray the psalms are to join all of creation in an unending and confident hymn of praise.

All living beings and the whole orchestra join in loud acclamation of God. The musical instruments include the trumpet (*shofar*), blown by the priests or religious leaders for liturgical celebrations, as were the lute and harp. The timbrel, played at dances and in processions, was played by women. Strings, pipes, and cymbals complete the orchestral ensemble, as both women and men rejoice in God’s powerful deeds and greatness.

*Hallelujah.*

Praise God (*hallelu*) in His holy place  
praise him (*halleluhu*) in the vault of His power.

Praise Him (*halleluhu*) for his mighty acts,  
praise him (*halleluhu*) as befits His astounding greatness.

Praise Him (*halleluhu*) with the ram-horn blast,  
praise Him (*halleluhu*) with the lute and the lyre.

Praise Him (*halleluhu*) with timbrel and dance,  
praise Him (*halleluhu*) with strings and flute..

Praise Him (*halleluhu*) with sounding cymbals,  
praise Him (*halleluhu*) with crashing cymbals.

Let all that has breath  
praise Yah! (*tehallal-Yah*)

*Hallelujah.* (translation Robert Alter)

\* \* \* \* \*

Let all that has breath praise Yah! Add to the praises with “earth songs” such as pattering of rain and roaring of thunder and crackling of fire; include animal praises such as baaa and buzz and bleat and bray, bark and growl and yip. Let all creation sing joyful praise. Compose your own noisy song of praise!

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