

## OBLATE RETREAT - Praying the Psalms: Living in the Divine Current - MASTER NOTES

Ps 92, 72, 95, 120-122 - Sept 23-25, 2022 - Fr. John Paul Le, O.S.B.

### I) 3RD CONFERENCE, SATURDAY AFTERNOON

#### A) The Psalms in General

##### 1) The Psalms

“Our word, psalm, simply transliterates a Greek word, *psalmos*, which in turn translated the Hebrew *mizmor*, a song to be sung with musical accompaniment” (Stuhlmüller 21.19). The psalm is more than just a poem, or a piece of literature. It is meant to be sung and finds its fullest expression in divine worship.

What can we say about the psalms?

Marmion writes, “the soul’s most intense desires, its deepest aspirations, its most pressing and extensive needs find **wonderful forms of expression furnished by the Holy Spirit**” (CIM 314). In praying the breviary, a person learns to express himself or herself in the language of God.

“The **Holy Spirit, who inspired the psalmists**, is always present with his grace to those believing Christians who with good intention sing and recite these songs. It is necessary, however, for each according to his powers, to have ‘more intensive biblical instruction, especially with regard to the psalms’”. (GILH 102). It can be a very beneficial spiritual practice to do our lectio on the psalms. To use it as our own personal prayer.

“Believe me,” Marmion says, “if you recite the breviary without rushing it, the phrases of Holy Scripture which you pronounce will finally become, as it were, a part of yourself” (CIP 271-272).

Though these songs originated many centuries ago in a semitic culture, **they express the pain and hope, misery and confidence** of men of any age and land, and especially sing of faith in God, his revelation and his redemption. (GILH 107).

Whoever prays the psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours does not say them in his own name so much as in the name of the whole body of Christ, in fact in the person of Christ himself. If he keeps this in mind, difficulties disappear, even if while saying the psalms his **own feelings differ from those expressed** by the psalmist: for example, if we find ourselves saying a psalm of jubilation, while we are worried or sad, or saying a psalm of lament, when in fact we feel in good spirits. This may easily be avoided in merely private prayer, when a psalm can be chosen to suit our mood. In the Divine Office, however, even someone saying

the Hour alone is not praying the psalms privately but **recites them in the name of the Church.** (GILH 108).

Say of the Desert Fathers. Can one pray only the psalms of lament when one is sad and the psalms of praise when one is happy? No, when we are sad or happy it is good for us to pray the psalms that do not fit our mood, for it is then, that we recall that we are praying in the name of the Church.

What else can we say about the psalms?

The GILH says, "The **messianic meaning** is made completely manifest in the New Testament; it is in fact declared by Christ our Lord himself when he said to the apostles :'Everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the prophets and in the psalms, has to be fulfilled' (Luke 24 :44)." (GILH 109). Christ is the new Moses and lawgiver, giving us the beatitudes to complete the commandments. The prophets point to Christ. Isaiah foretells the suffering servant who "Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open his mouth; Like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearers, he did not open his mouth" (53:6)

they "*speak to us of Christ*", which Marmion considers as "the highest motive" for the Church's selecting them (398).

**St. Ambrose** on the Psalms from the Liturgy of the Hours (10<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time: Office of Readings)

What am I to say of the grace of **prophecy**? We see that what others hinted at in riddles was promised openly and clearly to the psalmist alone: the Lord Jesus was to be born of his seed, according to the word of the Lord, *I will place upon your throne one who is the fruit of your flesh.*

**In the psalms, then, not only is Jesus born for us, he also undergoes his saving passion in his body, he lies in death, he rises again, he ascends into heaven, he sits at the right hand of the Father. What no man would have dared to say was foretold by the psalmist alone, and afterward proclaimed by the Lord himself in the Gospel."**

"In the Book of Psalms there is profit for all, with healing power for our salvation. There is **instruction** from history, teaching from the law, **prediction** from prophecy, chastisement from denunciation, persuasion from moral preaching. All who read it may **find the cure** for their own individual failings. All with eyes to see can discover in it a complete gymnasium for the soul, a stadium for all the virtues, equipped for every kind of exercise; it is for each to choose the kind he judges best to help him gain the prize.

If you wish to read and imitate the deeds of the past, you will find the whole history of the Israelites in a single psalm: in one short reading you can amass a treasure for the memory. If you want to study the power of the law, which is summed up in the bond of charity (*Whoever loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law*), you may read in the psalms of the great love with which one man faced serious dangers single-handedly in order to remove the shame of the whole people. You will find the glory of charity more than a match for the parade of power.

“Book I Pss 1-41 . . . Book II 24-72 . . . Book III 73-89 . . . Book IV 90-106 . . . Book V 107-150” (Stuhlmüller 21.21)

## B) Vigils in General

From Quigley 139-147. “The word *Matins* is derived from *Matuta*, the **Latin name for the Greek goddess of morning**. [Also called the office of Vigils] . . . Origin. . . It derived its name from the vigils or night watches of the soldiers, who divided the night, from six o’clock in the evening to six o’clock in the morning, into four watches of three hours each. **The nightly meetings of the Christians** [due to persecution] came to be called by the name vigils. . . resembled services of the Jewish synagogue in the readings from Scripture, psalm-singing and prayers.”

St. Benedict speaks of vigils thus, “During the winter season, that is, from the first of November until Easter, it seems reasonable to arise at the eighth hour of the night” (8:1). And quoting psalm 118:62 says, “At midnight I arise to give you praise” (16:4).

The Christian Mystery associated with Vigils is Christ in his eschatological dimension. We keep vigil during the night as we prepare for the coming of Christ. If Vigils had to be coupled with a liturgical season, it would be linked with the season of Advent, in which we prepare and await the coming of the savior. For this reason, the nocturnal character of this hour should be held. Christ describes his coming as unexpected and gave us the parable of the ten virgins, who stayed awake and prepared for the coming of the bridegroom with lighted lamps. When will Jesus come? We do not know, but scripture and tradition implies that it will be in the night. Jesus says, “Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Mt 25:13). He calls us to be vigilant, keep watch and stay awake for the Lord will come when we least expect it. The hour of Vigils expresses this eschatological dimension of the Christian mystery.

“The purpose of the Office of Readings is to present to the people of God, and particularly to those who are consecrated to God in a special way, a more extensive meditation on sacred scripture and on the best writings of spiritual authors” (GILH 55). So we have the first and second readings between the two nocturns (sets of psalms).

### 1) Elements

*Domine labia mea aperies. O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will proclaim your praise.* Quigley, “The practice of this beautiful invocation dates from the **time of St. Benedict** . . . taken from the psalm [51] *Miserere*, remind us of God purifying the lips of Isaias His prophet with a burning coal, of how God opened the lips of Zachary to bless God and to prophesy. . . Very appropriately, does the priest reciting [do we who recite] the Divine Office ask God to open his lips, to fortify his conscience, to touch his heart. . .”

The grand silence is sacred and solemn in the monastery, and when we break it, we need God’s help and we ask for His help to use our words wisely and well. The opening explains to us the ultimate purpose of our lips, that is, we were made to proclaim the praises of God. In fact, in heaven we will sing with the angels the endless *Sanctus*. Revelation speaks of the

heavenly worship in these terms, “The four living creatures, each of them with six, wings, were covered with eyes inside and out. Day and night they do not stop exclaiming: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.’” This “holy” of the heavenly liturgy is echoed in the earthly liturgy of the Mass.

We can also think of Christ in the tomb during the office of vigils, for it was in the night that Christ slept the sleep of death and descended to the underworld. The Catechism reads, “Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there” (632). An ancient homily for Holy Saturday as Christ describes the silence of Christ in the tomb,

“there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and Hell trembles with fear. He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, He who is both God and the Son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the Cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone, ‘My Lord be with you all.’ Christ answered him: ‘And with your spirit.’ He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: ‘Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’”<sup>1</sup>

Abbot Jeremy links the words “O Lord open my lips” to Christ in the tomb saying, “This is the incarnate Son addressing his Father in the cusp between dark and light in which he was raised from the dead. It is almost as if the **lifeless corpse of Jesus** in the tomb somehow by his silence ‘**says**’ **these words** and begs his Father to raise him up so that he may sing his praises. But now these words are found on our lips as we begin a new day” (162). Pope Benedict says that the crucifixion is the Word of God made silent. Perhaps, we can infer that the resurrection is the Word of God proclaimed.

We can even think of these words, when God is calling us to proclaim the good news. Let us pray, “O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.”

## C) Psalm 95

### 1) Introduction

A journey, procession - up to the city, arrive at the temple and worship, go back home. \

“for vv 1-5, we are suggesting a **processional** march, beginning at a sacred place . . . vv 6-7 were chanted after the assembly had climbed the mountain of the Lord, **entered the temple** through the ‘Gate Beautiful,’ and were now before the Holy of Holies. As they are prostrate on the ground in adoration, the schola sings: we are the people of his pasture, the sheep of his hand. After a scripture reading and homily . . . the service concluded with a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/loh/lent/holysaturdayor.htm>

warning to **take to heart what had been heard**. Here the temple prophet linked the journey of the people's lives with the march of the Israelites through the Sinai wilderness" (StuhlmueLLer 22.84)

"combines **various journeys** . . . 1) journey of the people **through the desert** in the days of Moses; 2) journey from **exile back to the land**; 3) liturgical journey **into the sanctuary** [priest and minister processing in; symboling the pilgrim Church]; 4) **spiritual journey** from a hardened to an obedient heart; 5) **journey into paradise** and rest with God" (StuhlmueLLer 22.85). And 6) "**Jesus' journey** through life, death and resurrection, till Jesus too, like the people in the psalm arrives at rest before the Holy of Holies" (StuhlmueLLer 22.85).

## 2) From Br. Brody

1. Hebrews, chs. 3 + 4
2. 1 Corinthians, ch. 10
3. St. Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm 94* (note the difference in numbering between the LXX/Latin text and our modern translation of the Hebrew)
4. St. Benedict, *Rule*, Prologue (esp. v. 8ff)
5. Key terms:
  - o "Come" (2x)
  - o "Kneel" (or "weep" in the LXX and Latin texts)
  - o "Today"
  - o "Rest"

Antiphon. "Come, worship the Lord, for we are his people, the flock he shepherds."

Psalm title - "Call to praise God"

Christological text - "Encourage each other daily while it is still today" (Heb 3:13).

<p><b>Come</b>, let us sing our joy to the LORD. Let us acclaim the Rock who saves us!</p>	<p>- come - <b>response to God's</b> invitation. Implies a movement, decision - sing - breaking the silence with praise. - how can Rock save us unless rock is the Savior, Christ.</p>
<p>Let us come into his presence <b>giving thanks</b> and acclaim him with songs of praise!</p>	<p>- presence - sacred space. in tabernacle/Church, we enter into the presence of God. - thanks - gratitude for all he has done. - praise - lauds</p>
<p>The LORD is a mighty God; he is the Great King over all the gods.</p>	<p>- theologically deep; God is all-powerful - king - he has dominion over all things; - Egyptian idols have no power; <b>plagues over other gods</b>. - Christ and image of <b>Flight into Egypt</b>.</p>
<p>The deep places of the world below he holds in his hand, and his are the heights of the mountains.</p>	<p>- place of the dead - care for all creation</p>

<p>The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land fashioned by his hands.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- creator of all things, through Christ the Word</li> <li>- not Deism, clockmaker</li> <li>- Gn 2 – God creating man from the clay. He is close to his creation, not deism.</li> </ul>
<p>Come, <b>bow</b> before him in worship, <b>kneel</b> before the LORD who created us, for he is our God; we are the people he shepherds and the flock of his pasture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- posture important, physical signs. At one monastery, monks bow at this verse.</li> <li>- worship – adoration, God alone</li> <li>- kneel – penitential gesture, awe, reverence</li> <li>- created us – miracle of life</li> <li>- we are his people; he has chosen us</li> <li>- Christ is the Good Shepherd, who lays down life for sheep; leads us to green pastures and running waters; seeking the straying sheep</li> </ul>
<p>If only you would hear his voice <b>today</b>: “Do not be hard of heart as you were in that place of discord,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Listen carefully my son . . . with the ear of your heart” (Holy Rule Prologue 1).</li> <li>- today, one of the strongest liturgical words. Today, the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt. <i>Hodie</i> (Fr. Paschal). Today Christ dies, today Christ is risen.</li> <li>- Pharaoh’s heart was hardened.</li> <li>- importance of listening every day, every hour</li> <li>- Ez 36:26, “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”</li> </ul>
<p>on that day of testing in the desert, when your fathers challenged me, when they tried me</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- testing – and temptation is necessary. St. Antony, “He also said, “Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.” He even added, “Without temptation no one can be saved.”</li> </ul>
<p>even after they had seen the wonders I could do.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- plagues of Egypt, manna and quail.</li> </ul>
<p>“For forty years I loathed that generation; I said: ‘They are a people with hearts gone astray:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- journeying through desert for 40 years.</li> <li>- seeking other things; not loving God with whole heart</li> <li>- “ Who were those who rebelled when they heard? Was it not all those who came out of Egypt under Moses? With whom was he “provoked for forty years”? Was it not those who had sinned, whose corpses fell in the desert? And to whom did he “swear that they should not enter into his rest,” if not to those who were disobedient? And we see that they could not enter for lack of faith.” (Heb 3:16-19)</li> </ul>
<p>these are not the people who acknowledge my dominion.’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- God’s ways are not our ways</li> <li>- trusting in providence of God.</li> </ul>

<p>So, in anger I swore an oath: they will never reach my place of rest.”</p>	<p>- God’s patience wearing thin. He chastises those whom he loves. - rest – promised land, not even Moses entered only Caleb. - <b>“Therefore, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God.”</b> – Rev 4:9</p>

D) *“Gloria Patri”* -

This little prayer indicates the **purpose and end** of the recitation of the Office, the glory of the Holy Trinity . . . This form of doxology, . . . was adopted to **repel Arianism**. . . Some authors quote **St. Ephrem** (+363) as the originator of this much-used formula.” (Quigley).

St. Benedict writes, “As soon as the cantor begins to sing “Glory be to the Father,” let all the monks rise from their seats in honor and reverence for the Holy Trinity” (9:7)

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