



Year of the Word

Psalms speak to the heart of faith

By Claudia C. Neira

Most people's encounter with the psalms may be limited to the one recited during Mass right after the first reading, when we are invited to sing or recite a response to a psalm. Perhaps we give little thought to these psalms, but they are more than a mere intermission between readings. The great beauty of the psalms is that they are expressions of faith that come from the heart of the people of God and reflect the different junctures of their lives: joy, thanksgiving, sadness, depression, or celebrating special events. Psalms are honest reflections of the heart directed to God, who the psalmist encounters in a personal relationship.

E. Glenn Hinson's essay "Six Ways to Pray" briefly notes that the psalms have been regarded as a form of prayer through history. St. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God." Hinson says that the desert fathers adopted psalm-saying or psalm-chanting as their chief mode of prayer. Benedict of Nursia in 529 designed schedules that allow monks to pray all 150 psalms in one week. Even to this day, praying the psalms is an important part of the daily prayer of the church found in the Liturgy of the Hours.

Psalms can be a great training instrument to learn how to pray to God. First, we find that the psalms are honest. Psalms express what is in the hearts of the author. There are specific forms of psalms.

Psalms of lament reflect suffering, despair, pain, hopelessness and anguish. These psalms can be brutally honest. They communicate crisis; they are bold, tough, and intended to open to God their deepest pain and despair.

The psalm of praise or thanksgiving offers praise to God in the midst of divine absence and presence. This type of psalm shouts the goodness of the Lord toward a person or community. God listened to his faithful pleading, and the response is to offer him honor and glory.

Royal psalms describe the king as God's representative ruling over the kingdom that God has established. These texts offer hope and encouragement for faith. Wisdom psalms seek to pass on wisdom for living.

Psalms teach us that in our relationship with the Lord we must be honest. Be not afraid to express the feelings in your heart! Nothing give more pleasure to the Lord that to hear his people speak to him openly and with their heart, with sincerity and with frankness. When you find yourself lacking the right words, go to the psalms, drawing from them the inspiration to speak to the Lord with open honesty. God listens and responds to prayer that comes from the heart. God does not judge prayer based on literary structure but on the honesty found in the heart of the faithful, and the psalms are the perfect example of this form of honesty in prayer.

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The Year of the Word 2007

Psalms of Praise	
General	Psalms: 29, 33, 68, 100, 103, 105, 111, 113, 114, 115, 117, 134, 135, 139, 145, 146, 147, 149, 150
Creation	Psalms: 8, 19, 65, 104, 148
Enthronement	Psalms: 47, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99
Zion	Psalms: 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122
Entrance Liturgy	Psalms: 15, 24
Prophetic	Psalms: 50, 81, 82
Trust	Psalms: 23, 81, 82
Thanksgiving	Psalms: 30, 34, 41, 66, 92, 116, 118, 138, 67, 75, 107, 124, 129, 136
Psalms of Lament	
Individual	Psalms: 3-7, 9-11, 13, 16-17, 22, 25-28, 31, 35-36, 38-40, 42-43, 51-52, 54-57, 59, 61-64, 69-71, 77, 86, 88, 94, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140-143
Community	Psalms: 12, 14, 44, 53, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 106, 108, 123, 126, 137
Royal	Psalms: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144
Wisdom	Psalms: 1, 32, 37, 49, 73, 78, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133