

PSALMS: THE PRAYER BOOK OF JESUS

Session 13: Praying the Psalms



WHY PRAY THE PSALMS?

- **The Psalms teach us how to pray**
 - They give us inspired words for every human experience—joy, fear, anger, repentance, trust, and praise.
 - Through the psalms, we learn to pray *honestly*, not merely piously; *scripturally*, not sentimentally.
- **The Psalms shape our desires**
 - Prayer becomes more than self-expression; it becomes conversion.
 - The psalms reorder the affections and train the will toward God.
- **The Psalms join us to Christ and the Church**
 - Jesus prayed the psalms constantly.
 - They bind individual prayer to the Church's universal and ancient voice.

ANCIENT METHODS OF PSALM PRAYING

- Christians have engaged many methods of praying the Psalms over the centuries. Two we can practice particularly well on our own are:
 - **Lectio divina**
 - **Breath prayer**
- Additionally, we can engage with the Psalms corporately, such as with responsive chanting or with the Daily Office.
- Each is a period of prayerful reflection on the Psalms, not a study.
- However, these forms are not practiced divorced from careful study of the Psalms but are the product of reflection based on a deep saturation in scripture.

LECTIO DIVINA

A fourfold movement for praying with Scripture, especially fitting for psalms.

1. Lectio — Reading

- Read the psalm slowly, aloud if possible.
- Notice repeated words, striking images, emotional tone.

2. Meditatio — Meditation

- Let a word or phrase “shimmer.”
- Ask: *What is God saying to me? What desire is stirred? What resistance arises?*

LECTIO DIVINA

3. Oratio — Prayer

- Respond to God directly: lament, praise, confession, thanksgiving, petition.
- Allow the psalm's language to become your own.

4. Contemplatio — Rest

- A quiet abiding in God beyond words.
- Trust that the Spirit is praying within you.

PSALM 131, *Domine, non est*

O LORD, I am not haughty; *

I have no proud looks.

I do not occupy myself with great matters, *

or with things that are too high for me.

But I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a weaned
child upon his mother's breast; *

so is my soul quieted within me.

O Israel, trust in the LORD *

From this time forth for evermore.

PSALM 23, *Dominus regit me*

The LORD is my shepherd; *

therefore I can lack nothing.

He shall feed me in green pastures *

and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.

He shall refresh my soul *

and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness for
his Name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death, I will fear no evil, *

for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort
me.

You shall prepare a table before me, in the presence
of those who trouble me; *

you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup
shall be full.

Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all
the days of my life, *

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

BREATH PRAYER

Short phrases drawn from the psalms used throughout the day.

- **Inhale:** "The Lord is my shepherd..."
 - **Exhale:** "I shall not want." (Psalm 23:1, KJV)
- **Inhale:** "Though I am sometimes afraid..."
 - **Exhale:** "Yet I put my trust in you." (Psalm 56:3)
- **Inhale:** "O God, make speed to save me..."
 - **Exhale:** "O Lord, make haste to help me." (Psalm 70:1)
- **Inhale:** "You are my defense and shield..."
 - **Exhale:** "And my trust is in your word." (Psalm 119:114)

PSALMS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

- **Keep the psalms close at hand**
 - Pick a psalm for the week—carry it, memorize a line or even the whole psalm, or pray it each day.
- **Pray with the Church**
 - Join in Morning and/or Evening Prayer; let the monthly psalm journey form you.
- **Pair psalms with life-circumstances**
 - When worried: Psalm 46 or 121
 - When repentant: Psalm 32 or 51
 - When grateful: Psalm 103
 - When grieving: Psalm 42–43
 - When joyful: Psalm 98 or 150