

Psalms (1)

I was in the back of a bus touring North Wales. I happened to have a pocket edition of the Psalms with me and I casually started reading Psalm 139. It was one of those grace moments when words which I had read for years suddenly lit up my whole life: *O Lord, you search me and you know me, you know my resting and my rising, you discern my purpose from afar. You mark when I walk or lie down, all my ways lie open to you.*

There and then I knew that this was real prayer, real knowledge and real spirit. I knew then that I wanted to immerse myself in these poems. I wanted to pray them.

My enthusiasm for the Psalms led me to explore their background in order to appreciate them more fully. Basically, the Psalms are a collection of Jewish hymns used for worship and for private prayer. When a hymn book which has only 150 hymns and took about 600 years to be finalized, and when it has been used by people for thousands of years, there must be something special about it!

The Psalms have many authors (including David, Solomon, Asaph etc) and yet they are also revered as having been inspired by God. To in-spire means to be breathed into, and to breathe; these prayers breathe God into us, and their human authors were breathed on by God. They breathe God's Spirit on those who pray them in faith.

I found it fascinating that these hymns have been used by devout Jews for thousands of years; they have been used by the Church for two thousand years and they are still integral

to Jewish and Christian worship and life.

If we have dabbled with any poetry, we will know that there are many forms. Some poetry can be difficult, even obscure. When we are reading poems written thousands of years ago

in ancient Hebrew, it is not surprising that we may need a little help.

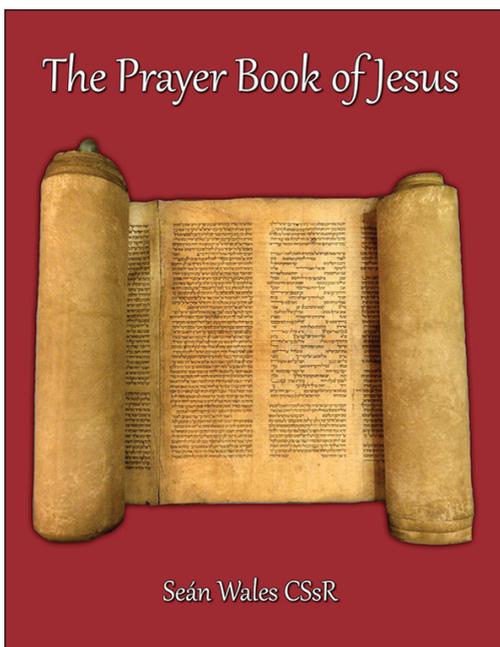
The first problem is language: we depend on translations. Too literal a translation may lose the poetry; too free a translation may miss the meaning.

Another problem is the imagery used so long ago. *"The Bulls of Bashan"* may not mean much to us; *"on Edom I will cast my shoe"* likewise can baffle us. Then there is the violence of that ancient age which creeps into the prayers themselves. The Hebrew poetic habit of repeating ideas and lines (parallelism) can sound odd to us.

Another hurdle is the numbering of the Psalms: there is a Hebrew way of numbering them and a Greek way, the Greek one often being one number behind the Hebrew. Most Bibles today follow the Hebrew numbering.

We should not let these technical obstacles get in the way of using the Psalms. When we hold the Book of Psalms in our hands, we are holding the prayer book of Jesus. Next week we will look at some of these inspired prayers themselves. In the meantime, browse through the Psalms in your Bible, perhaps stay a while with one that inspires you.

[See Redemptorist Pastoral Publications' book about the Psalms by Fr Seán Wales CSsR entitled *"The Prayer Book of Jesus"*. Available from our website www.rpp.org.za or email orders@rpp.org.za]



Seán Wales CSsR

SUNDAY MASS

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON:

O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me! You are my rescuer, my help; O Lord, do not delay.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 55:1-3.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 145.

RESPONSE:

You open your hand, Lord, and you satisfy us.

1. The Lord is kind and full of compassion, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. How good is the Lord to all, compassionate to all his creatures. **R**
2. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. **R**
3. The Lord is just in all his ways, and holy in all his deeds. The Lord is close to all who call him, who call on him in truth. **R**

SECOND READING: Romans 8:35, 37-39.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

Alleluia, alleluia! Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Alleluia.

GOSPEL: Matthew 14:13-21.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON:

You have given us, O Lord, bread from heaven, endowed with all delights and sweetness in every taste.

THE WEEK AHEAD

Live the Word

Mon 3 Aug Liturgy of the Day

Jeremiah 28:1-17; Psalm 119; Matthew 14:22-36

The wounded healer, as Henri Nouwen wrote, is one who draws strength from personal suffering in order to meet others' needs with compassion. In our brokenness and our joy we serve with mercy and hope.

Tue 4 Aug St John Vianney, Pr

Jeremiah 30:1-2.12-15.18-22; Psalm 102; Matthew 15:1-2.10-14.

Time reliably teaches us that all is not in our hands. The power to transform and renew all things and all people belongs to Christ. Place yourself in his hands.

Wed 5 Aug (Dedication of St Mary Major Basilica)

Jeremiah 31:1-7; Jer. 31:10-13; Matt. 15:21-28

God has a plan for our lives – and that is all we need to know. We do not need to know what the plan is – it will unfold in its own time. All we need to do is trust in God, be patient, pray, and follow Jesus.

Thu 6 Aug TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

Daniel 7:9-10.13-14; Psalm 97; Matthew 17:1-9

True transformation is the slow process of coming down the mountain (of our spiritual experience), being strengthened by it, but becoming fully awake to life and the demands of Jesus' call to loving service.

Fri 7 Aug (St Cajetan, Pr)

Nahum 2:1,3; 3:1-3.6-7; Deut. 32:35-36.39-41; Matthew 16:24-28 What brings you more joy – focussing your attention primarily on yourself, or when your attention is on giving and receiving love in a relationship with God that includes others? Love is a choice.

Sat 8 Aug St Dominic, Pr

Habakkuk 1:12-2:4; Psalm 9; Matthew 17:14-20

However small our faith may be (like the mustard seed in today's Gospel), it is powerful and worth nurturing, so that when we do have a proverbial mountain to move, our faith may be up to the task.

Sun 9 Aug 19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1 Kings 19:9.11-13; Psalm 85; Matthew 14:22-33

Faith involves an enormous risk. God calls us to places and situations that we normally would avoid. God calls us out of our sleep to awaken, trust and follow him. Place yourself in God's care.

(KEY: SOLEMNITY; FEAST; Memorial; (Optional Memorial) Pr=Priest)

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