

How to Pray with the Psalms by Kim Padan

Hi everyone, it's Kim. I'm excited to be here to share some thoughts with you today about praying with the Psalms. This was the first idea that came to my mind when Annie and John-Paul first approached me about participating in this prayer conference.

I love praying the Psalms! And I think the reason is two-fold. Number one, I love to sing! And, the Psalms are sung prayer. And so, I grew up singing the Psalms in church. I still sing them and it's something that brings me a lot of joy.

The other reason is that the Psalms are prayers from the heart. They encapsulate or expand over so many different emotions. Psalms of sadness and grief. Psalms of longing. Where are you Lord? Psalms of joy. Shouting with joy and dancing for joy! And cymbals and harps! Psalms of victory! Psalms of penance. The Psalms are a beautiful expression of the human experience.

The Church, in her great love for us and in her great wisdom, has given us the Psalms woven throughout liturgical prayer. So, when we attend Sunday mass or mass throughout the week, there is generally a Psalm response after the first reading. Sometimes it's an old testament canticle but there is some form of a sung response.

And even, in addition to mass, there is another official prayer of the Church: the Liturgy of the Hours (also known as the Divine Office). This is a prayer that I was introduced to many years ago, probably about 20 years ago. And I learned how to pray the Liturgy of the Hours when I was taking some classes in Peoria through the diocese.

I fell in love with this type of prayer and so I would pray Morning Prayer all the time. After my foster kids got off to school, I would sit down (I didn't answer the phone, I didn't do anything) and I just spent my morning in that prayer time.

Now, I don't know what happened but, sadly, I got out of that habit and my book got set aside and it was unused for a long long time. Fortunately, I had opportunity to pray Evening Prayer fairly often at my parish. We often did sung Evening Prayer during Lent or, perhaps, on a particular solemnity such as Pentecost. So, I was still familiar with the general rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours.

And then, a few years ago, almost three years ago I was invited to attend a lay Dominican meeting. And lay Dominicans pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer each day. At least, we're supposed to. I recently made my temporary profession and I'm still working on a lot of my formation and that includes working on the discipline of getting this prayer in every day.

Now, having said all that, there's a lot to figure out with the Liturgy of the Hours that would take me a long time to describe here. There's different ribbons and prayers and feast days and hymns and responses and I don't want to go through all of that.

What I want to mention is that, in a nutshell, there is a 4 week cycle. A "Psalter" is what it's called and each day there are prayers, Psalm responses and a canticle and all of them are for each day; Sunday, Monday and all throughout the week. Morning Prayer, Daytime Prayer, Evening Prayer and these weeks rotate. There are certain, specific, responses for the seasons of the year. Such as, Lent or Advent.

But the Psalms play such a big part of it! I think that's why I love this form of prayer so much. It's also a great way to participate in the prayer of the Church. I'm not able to get to daily mass very often but when I pray the Liturgy of the Hours I'm praying with the worldwide Church. And I think there's something very beautiful and powerful about that.

So, if you're not familiar with this form of prayer, I encourage you; talk with your pastor, see if he or someone else in your parish can instruct you in this. And who knows, maybe a few of you can get together and pray it in community. That's a great thing to do too.

So, getting back to the Psalms, the Psalms are put in the book in different stanzas. And when you're in community you often will have one side read one stanza and the other side will read the next stanza. When you're on your own, you pray all of them yourself. Makes sense!

Reciting the Psalms is perfectly acceptable. There's nothing wrong with that. But, I want to challenge you, just a little bit. And to think about these as the sung prayers that they were meant to be and still are meant to be. Some of you may be saying, "Kim uh, I don't sing that much. You haven't heard me sing and you don't want to hear me sing". Well, I haven't heard you sing but God has.

And, in fact, He's the one that gave you your voice. So, whether your voice is scratchy, or if it's lyrical, whether you can sing on pitch, or not; it doesn't matter. God wants to hear your voice. He wants you to just raise your prayers up to Him. It's a beautiful thing to do.

If you like singing, if you like the idea of singing the Psalms but you're not familiar with a lot of music for it, the good thing is in this one volume version there are several different Psalm tones that are written out. On page 1718 there are lots of different notes and it gives you samples of how to sing the phrases of the Psalm. Like 4 phrases and you can just follow the notes. Basically, a lot of these are using one note for most of the phrase and then you just change for the last couple of syllables or last couple of words. It takes a little bit of practice but after a while you get the hang of it.

There are several pages of Psalm tones in this book but, honestly, you don't need to learn all of them. You can learn one, maybe two and then use those throughout the week. Especially if you're praying on your own you don't need to worry about having the rhythm all perfect and all that. Just pick one and become comfortable and familiar with it.

I'm gonna sing a couple of phrases that are in this sample. It's a sample from Psalm 25:

[Begins singing] "Lord make me know your ways, Lord teach me your path. Make me walk in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior."

[Singing continues] That probably sounds kinda familiar. You've heard this type of singing before. It's not that hard. You can put any words to it. Just give it a try, I promise, you'll get the hang of it [singing ends].

I can't believe I just did that! Ha ha! At any rate, I just want you to know that it's that easy! You can put any words to these notes. Not a problem!

So, the notes are in the back of the book, the Psalms are further up front and you might think "I'm going to forget what the notes are". It's okay. Especially if you're just starting this, if you stumble a little bit no one is going to know. The important thing is that you pray from your heart. Sing from your heart! Let the notes kind of flow and whatever happens, happens. I'm sure that God will be pleased.

So, I've got here Wednesday Morning Prayer. I have no idea what day you're listening to this but I'm just going to just sing a couple of sections of Psalm 47 from Wednesday Morning Prayer.

[Begins singing] "All peoples clap your hands, cry to God with shouts of joy. For the Lord the most high we must fear, great king over all the Earth. He subdues peoples under us and nations under our feet. Our inheritance of glory is from Him, given to Jacob out of Love." [Ends singing].

And you can keep going. Again, it's not like you have to sing the Psalms. You certainly don't have to sing all of them but I think of this as a way of connecting with God's people over all the years of the story of our faith, the story of our faith family. I don't know I just find it very beautiful and very special.

There are other settings that you can use. You can find a hymnal from your church, maybe an older hymnal. We recently switched hymnals at our church and I had a copy of my own anyway but some of the Psalms are a little contemporary. They have a little bit more of a modern feel and a modern flow. If that's something that you like, you can find those as well.

A word of caution, some of the modern settings take quite a bit of poetic license with the text. I used to not be bothered by that. Now, it irks me a little bit. But I think the important thing, again, is to pray these Psalms with your heart in the right state. That you're really lifting your prayers up to God. When possible use a setting with the text as close to the actual scriptural text as possible.

Before I go, I am just going to sing two verses, one other Psalm, it's Psalm 100. Psalm 100 is often used in Morning Prayer. It's one of the options to start Morning Prayer but it also comes up in one of the cycles, or one of the Psalters. And this is a more modern settings but I love the tune. I must confess, I absolutely love it. And so, if you have your bible with you open it up to Psalm 100 and you can follow along, at least with a little bit of this.

[Begins singing] "We are His people, the flock of the Lord. We are His people, the flock of the Lord. Cry out with joy to the Lord all you lands, all you lands. Serve the Lord now with gladness, come before Him singing for joy. We are His people, the flock of the Lord." [Singing ends].

I was gonna sing my but my throat got dry! So, instead of scratching my throat on this I just want to give you a little sample of that. Allow the music to enhance your

prayer experience. Pray the Psalms in you bible, in liturgical prayer with the Church at mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, pray with all of your brothers and sisters in the Church!

I hope that you learn how to do this. I hope that you find great joy in it as I have. And I hope to pray with you tomorrow. Bye, bye.