

## The Pray More Retreat Study Guide



### **How to Pray with the Psalms**

by Kim Padan

“Blessed be the LORD, who has shown me wondrous love, and been for me a city most secure. Once I said in my anguish, ‘I am shut out from your sight.’ Yet you heard my plea, when I cried out to you.” (Psalm 31:22-23)

### **Reflective Questions/Challenges**

- The Psalms offer us an opportunity to pray on our own, or with a community, or even on our own while simultaneously also praying with the Universal Church (as is the case when you pray the Liturgy of the Hours). Which of these is most appealing to you? In some instances, it's easy to see how God may be calling us to pray more when we look at our preferences and what comes naturally to us; in that way, we can become stronger pray-ers in the ways we most enjoy prayer. Looking at it this way, it can also allow us to work on praying in ways that we find uncomfortable or not as natural. It can be good and fruitful to get out of our comfort zone.
- God gave you your voice, and He wants to hear it. Do you allow yourself the time to speak to Him — to speak up to Him, aloud? Or to sing to Him? If you don't, try to incorporate that more into your weekly prayer. God wants to hear your beautiful voice. You can do this by joining in song at Mass, or by speaking aloud to God in the privacy of your own home.
- Choose a Psalm or a passage of a Psalm, meditate on it, and try to put that psalm into your own words. What does that Psalm mean to you, today, and in your particular situation or circumstance?
- St. Augustine taught that, "if the psalm prays, pray. If it laments, lament. If it rejoices, rejoice. If it hopes, hope. If it fears, fear. For everything which is written here is a reflection of us." There is a Psalm for each of these human emotions, and they reveal God's heart for us. If you're ever in a place where

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you're having a hard time finding the words to pray, look through the Psalms to see whether there is one that vocalizes how you're feeling. If you can't think of the words to say, turn to the Psalms, and choose one that closest matches your experience.

### **The Seven Penitential Psalms (Psalms for Lent)**

Psalm 6:

“Lord, do not reprove me in your anger: punish me not in your rage. Have mercy on me, Lord, I have no strength; Lord, heal me, my body is racked; my soul is racked with pain. But you, a Lord, how long? Return, Lord, rescue my soul. Save me in your merciful love, for in death no one remembers you; from the grave, who can give you praise? I am exhausted with my groaning; every night I drench my pillow with tears. My eye wastes away from grief; I have grown old surrounded by my foes. Leave me, all you who do evil; for the Lord has heard my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord will accept my prayer. All my foes will retire in confusion, foiled and suddenly confounded.”

Psalm 32:

“Happy the man whose offense is forgiven, whose sin is remitted. a happy the man to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, in whose spirit is no guile. I kept it secret and my frame was wasted. I groaned all the day long, for night and day your hand was heavy upon me. Indeed, my strength was dried up as by the summer's heat. But now I have acknowledged my sins; my guilt I did not hide. I said: "I will confess my offense to the Lord." And you, Lord, have forgiven the guilt of my sin. So let every good man pray to you in the time of need. The floods of water may reach high but him they shall not reach. You are my hiding place, a Lord; you save me from distress. You surround me with cries of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will give you counsel with my eye upon you. Be not like the horse and mule, unintelligent, needing bridle and bit, else they will not approach you. Many sorrows has the wicked but he who trusts in the Lord, loving mercy surrounds him. Rejoice, rejoice in the Lord, exult, you just! a come, ring out your joy, all you upright of heart.”

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### Psalm 38:

“O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger; do not punish me, Lord in your rage. Your arrows have sunk deep in me; your hand has come down upon me. Through your anger all my body is sick: through my sin, there is no health in my limbs. My guilt towers higher than my head; it is a weight too heavy to bear. My wounds are foul and festering, the result of my own folly. I am bowed and brought to my knees. I go mourning all the day long. All my frame bums with fever; all my body is sick. Spent and utterly crushed, I cry aloud in anguish of heart. O Lord, you know all my longing: my groans are not hidden from you. My heart throbs, my strength is spent; the very light has gone from my eyes. My friends avoid me like a leper; those closest to me stand afar off. Those who plot against my life lay snares; those who seek my ruin speak of harm, planning treachery all the day long. But I am like the deaf who cannot hear, like the dumb unable to speak. I am like a man who hears nothing in whose mouth is no defense. I count on you, O Lord: it is you, Lord God, who will answer. I pray: "Do not let them mock me, those who triumph if my foot should slip." For I am on the point of falling and my pain is always before me. I confess that I am guilty and my sin fills me with dismay. My wanton enemies are numberless and my lying foes are many. They repay me evil for good and attack me for seeking what is right. O Lord, do not forsake me! My God, do not stay afar off! Make haste and come to my help, O Lord, my God, my savior!”

### Psalm 51:

“Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness. In your compassion blot out my offense. O wash me more and more from my guilt and cleanse me from my sin. My offenses truly I know them; my sin is always before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned; what is evil in your sight I have done. That you may be justified when you give sentence and be without reproach when you judge. O see, in guilt was I born, a sinner was I conceived. Indeed you love truth in the heart; then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom. a purify me, then I shall be clean; O wash me, I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear rejoicing and gladness, that the bones you have crushed may revive. From my sins turn away your face and blot out all my guilt. A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, nor deprive me of your holy spirit. Give me again the joy of your help; with a spirit of fervor sustain me, that I may teach transgressors your ways and sinners may return to you. O rescue me, God, my helper, and my tongue shall ring out your goodness. O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall declare your praise. For in sacrifice you take no delight, burnt offering

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from me you would refuse; my sacrifice, a contrite spirit. A humbled, contrite heart you will not spurn. In your goodness, show favor to Zion: rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will be pleased with lawful sacrifice, holocausts offered on your altar.”

Psalm 102:

“O Lord, listen to my prayer and let my cry for help reach you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Turn your ear towards me and answer me quickly when I call. For my days are vanishing like smoke, my bones bum away like a fire. My heart is withered like the grass. I forget to eat my bread. I cry with all my strength and my skin clings to my bones. I have become like a pelican in the wilderness, like an owl in desolate places. I lie awake and I moan like some lonely bird on a roof. All the day long my foes revile me; those who hate me use my name as a curse. The bread I eat is ashes; my drink is mingled with tears. In your anger, Lord, and your fury you have lifted me up and thrown me down. My days are like a passing shadow and I wither away like the grass.

But you, O Lord, will endure for ever and your name from age to age. You will arise and have mercy on Zion: for this is the time to have mercy; yes, the time appointed has come, for your servants love her very stones, are moved with pity even for her dust. The nations shall fear the name of the Lord and all the earth's kings your glory, when the Lord shall build up Zion again and appear in all his glory. Then he will turn to the prayers of the helpless; he will not despise their prayers. Let this be written for ages to come that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord; for the Lord leaned down from his sanctuary on high. He looked down from heaven to the earth that he might hear the groans of the prisoners and free those condemned to die. The sons of your servants shall dwell untroubled, and their race shall endure before you that the name of the Lord may be proclaimed in Zion and his praise in the heart of Jerusalem, when peoples and kingdoms are gathered together to pay their homage to the Lord.

He has broken my strength in mid-course; he has shortened the days of my life. I say to God: "Do not take me away before my days are complete, you, whose days last from age to age. Long ago you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish but you will remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like clothes that are changed. But you neither change, nor have an end. The children of your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before you."

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Psalm 130:

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice! O let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleading. If you, O Lord, should mark our guilt, Lord, who would survive? But with you is found forgiveness: for this we revere you. My soul is waiting for the Lord; I count on his word. My soul is longing for the Lord more than the watchman for daybreak. Let the watchman count on daybreak and Israel on the Lord. Because with the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption; Israel indeed he will redeem from all its iniquity.”

Psalm 143, 1-11:

“Lord, listen to my prayer; turn your ear to my appeal. You are faithful, you are just; give answer. Do not call your servant to judgment, for no one is just in your sight. The enemy pursues my soul; he has crushed my life to the ground; he has made me dwell in darkness like the dead, long forgotten. Therefore my spirit fails; my heart is numb within me. I remember the days that are past: I ponder all your works. I muse on what your hand has wrought and to you I stretch out my hands. Like a parched land my soul thirsts for you. Lord, make haste and answer; for my spirit fails within me. Do not hide your face lest I become like those in the grave. In the morning let me know your love, for I put my trust in you. Make me know the way I should walk: to you I lift up my soul. Rescue me, Lord, from my enemies; I have fled to you for refuge. Teach me to do your will for you, O Lord, are my God. Let your good spirit guide me in ways that are level and smooth. For your name's sake, Lord, save my life; in your justice save my soul from distress.”