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"The Psalms open us to prayer"

In his 19 June general audience, Pope Francis continued catechetical cycle on how the Holy Spirit guides the People of God through salvation history, speaking about the Book of Psalms.

06/19/2024

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In preparation for the next Jubilee, I invited the devotion of the year 2024

“to a great ‘symphony’ of prayer.”^[1]
With today’s catechesis, I would like to recall that the Church already possesses a symphony of prayer, whose composer is the Holy Spirit, and it is the Book of Psalms.

As in any symphony, it contains various “movements,” that is, various genres of prayer: praise, thanksgiving, supplication, lamentation, narration, sapiential reflection, and others, both in the personal form and in the choral form of the whole people. These are the songs that the Spirit himself has placed on the lips of the Bride, His Church. All the Books of the Bible, I mentioned last time, are inspired by the Holy Spirit, but the Book of Psalms is also so in the sense that it is full of poetic inspiration.

The Psalms have had a special place in the New Testament. Indeed, there were and still are editions that

contain the New Testament and the Psalms together. On my desk I have an edition in Ukrainian of this New Testament of Psalms from a soldier who died in the war, that was sent to me. And he prayed on the front with this book. Not all the Psalms – and not all of every Psalm – can be repeated and made their own by Christians and even less by modern man. They reflect, at times, a historical situation and a religious mentality that are no longer our own. This does not mean that they are not inspired, but in certain aspects they are linked to a time and a temporary stage of revelation, as is also the case with a large part of ancient legislation.

What most commends the Psalms to our attention is that they were the prayer of Jesus, Mary, the Apostles and all the Christian generations that have preceded us. When we recite them, God listens to them with that

grandiose “orchestration” that is the community of saints. Jesus, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, enters into the world with a verse from a Psalm in His heart: “Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God” (cf. *Heb* 10:7; *Ps* 40:9), and He leaves the world, according to the Gospel of Luke, with another verse on His lips: “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” (*Lk* 23:46, cf. *Ps* 31:6).

The use of psalms in the New Testament is followed by that of the Fathers and the entire Church, which makes them a fixed element in the celebration of the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. “All the Sacred Scripture breathes the goodness of God,” says Saint Ambrose, “but in particular the sweet book of the Psalms,”^[2] the *sweet book* of the Psalms. I wonder: do you pray with the Psalms sometimes? Take the Bible or the New Testament, and

pray a Psalm. For example, when you are a bit sad for having sinned, do you pray Psalm 50? There are many Psalms that help us keep going. Form the habit of praying with the Psalms. I assure you that you would be happy in the end.

But we cannot only live on the legacy of the past: it is necessary to make the Psalms *our* prayer. It was written that, in a certain sense, we must ourselves become the “scribes” of the Psalms, making them ours and praying with them.^[3] If there are Psalms, or just verses, that speak to our heart, it is good to repeat them and pray them during the day. The Psalms are prayers “for all seasons:” there is no state of mind or need that does not find in them the best words to be transformed into prayer. Unlike other prayers, the Psalms do not lose their effectiveness by dint of being repeated; on the contrary, they increase it. Why? Because they are

inspired by God and “breathe” God, every time they are read with faith.

If we feel oppressed by remorse or guilt, because we are sinners, we can repeat with David: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love” (*Ps 51:1*), Psalm 51. If we want to express a strong personal bond with love, let us say: “O God, thou art my God / I seek thee, / my soul thirsts for thee; / my flesh faints for thee, / as in a dry and weary land where no water is” (*Ps 63:1*), Psalm 63. It is not for nothing that the Liturgy has inserted this Psalm in the Lauds of Sunday and the solemnities. And if fear and anguish assail us, those wonderful words of Psalm 23 come to our rescue: “The Lord is my shepherd ... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, / I fear no evil” (*Ps 23:1,4*).

The Psalms allow us not to impoverish our prayer by reducing it

merely to requests, to a continuous “give me, give us...” We learn from the Lord’s Prayer, which before asking for our “daily bread,” says, “Hallowed by thy name; thy Kingdom come, thy will be done.. The Psalms help us to open ourselves to a prayer that is less focused on ourselves: a prayer of praise, of blessing, of thanksgiving; and they also help us give voice to all creation, involving it in our praise.

Brothers and sisters, may the Holy Spirit, who gave the Church Bride the words to pray to her divine Bridegroom, help us to make them resound in the Church today, and to make this year of preparation for the Jubilee a true symphony of prayer.
Thank you!

[1] Letter to Archbishop Fisichella for the Jubilee 2025 (11 February 2022).

[2] Comment on the Psalms I, 4, 7: CSEL 64,4-7.

[3] Giovanni Cassiano, Conlationes, X, 11: SCh 54, 92-93.

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(03/24/2025)