

***Week Two***  
***Complaining to God***  
***Psalms of Lament***

**Preliminary Remarks**

- A good Translation of the Psalms: *The Psalm: Songs of Faith and Praise: The Revised Grail Psalter with Commentary and Prayers*, by Gregory J. Polan, OSB. Paulist Press.
- A good App for the Liturgy of the Office: *DivineOffice*.
- A common experience in the Christian life is the apparent absence of God's presence. At such moments we ask: "where is God? Has God forgotten? Doesn't God care?"
- Many Christians feel guilty when they experience such feelings. Questioning the presence of God seems to be a lack of faith. And so, there is a temptation not to utter these questions in a public way.
- The Psalms, however, are filled with prayers of complaint and lament. There is no hesitation to question and ask where God is. The act of complaining and lamenting to God is an act of faith inasmuch as it presupposes God can help. Most laments end with words of praise and thanksgiving in anticipation of what God will do.
- There are two kinds of laments: laments of an individual and laments of the community.
- The identity of the individual remains hidden because the psalm is not limited to just one person.
- In the community laments, the lament is the lament of God's people, the chosen people, the people of Israel, especially the community that lived at the time of the Babylonian Exile, Israel's great national disaster.
- Since there are so many laments in the psalter, I will deal with only a few of them.

**Psalm 13**

- This short psalm is a good example of a lament.
- The opening verses ask the same questions three times, "how long?"
- The following verses petition God for help and provide a reason for this petition.
- The concluding verses are words of trust and praise.
- Who is speaking this psalm? Prayed in the light of the paschal mystery we are hearing the words of the suffering Christ and the members of his Church.
- What does the psalm teach us about God? There are moments when we experience God's absence; but the absence of God is only what we perceive.

**Psalm 22**

- Psalm 22, along with Psalm 31 and 69, is one of the three great psalms used to describe Jesus's crucifixion and death.
- Jesus spoke the opening words of this Psalm from the cross.
- The Psalm begins with three laments followed by a hymn of praise.
- The first lament (vv. 2-6) begins with the cry "My God, my God, ...."
- The second lament (vv. 7-12) describes the utter abasement of the one who suffers.

- The third lament (vv. 13-22) describes the enemies that surround the one who suffers.
- In the midst of each of these laments there is a moment when the suffering individual appeals to God, see vv. 4, 10, 20.
- The psalm concludes with a promise of praise and thanksgiving because the sufferer is confident God will deliver him (vv. 23-32).
- Who is speaking? For the Christian community, these are the words of Christ.
- What does the Psalm teach about God? God does not abandon his elect.

### **Psalm 88**

- Psalm 88 is recited every Friday at Night Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours.
- It is a lament that does not end in praise or thanksgiving and seems bereft of hope. But the manner in which the psalm begins indicates that the one who suffers in praying to the One who can save: “O Lord and God of my salvation.”
- Notice the frequent references to the grave, the tomb, the death, death.
- The psalm ends, “Friend and neighbor you have taken away: my once companion is darkness.
- Who is speaking? In the light of the paschal mystery, the church hears the word of the crucified Christ.
- What does the psalm say about God: that even in our darkest hour, God remains the God our salvation because God rescued his Christ from death.

### **Psalm 44**

- Psalm 44 is the lament of a community that asks God what has happened. Why did this national disaster come about?
- The Psalm begins by recount God’s past deeds of salvation (vv. 2-9).
- The Psalm then describes how God has rejected his people (vv. 10-17).
- The Psalm complains that the people have not forgotten God (vv. 18-23).
- The Psalm appeals to God to arise (vv. 24-27).
- Who is speaking? Whereas the original speaker of the psalm was Israel, in the light of the paschal mystery we can now hear the voice of Christ suffering body, the church.
- What does the Psalm teach about God? Although there are moment when we do not know why the community suffers; its suffering are joined to the sufferings of Christ.

### **Psalm 74**

- Psalm 74 begins with an extended lament (vv. 1-11). It appears God has cast off his people forever. God temple has been destroyed and God has not acted.
- This lament is followed by a reminder of God’s past deeds of salvation in creation and the history of his people (vv. 12-23). These past deeds are an assurance that God will act again.
- Who is speaking? Although the original speaker was the people of Israel, in the light of Christ’s death and resurrection we hear the voice of the church in times of suffering and persecution.
- What does the psalm teach about God: Despite our present suffering, what God has done in the past is an assurance of God’s future salvation.

## **During the Coming Week**

Read these Psalms for your Moring Prayer

Sunday	63 & 149
Monday	5 & 29
Tuesday	24 & 33
Wednesday	36 & 47
Thursday	57 & 48
Friday	51 & 100
Saturday	92 & 117