

The Penitential Psalms (Ps 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143)

The three pillars of Lent

- Prayer
- Fasting
- Almsgiving

“Prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” ~ St. Therese of Lisieux

From Pope Francis Lenten Message for 2015:

“As a way of overcoming indifference and our pretensions to self-sufficiency, I would invite everyone to live this Lent as an opportunity for engaging in what Benedict XVI called a formation of the heart (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 31). A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters. And, ultimately, a poor heart, one which realizes its own poverty and gives itself freely for others.”

CCC 2559 “When we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or “out of the depths” of a humble and contrite heart? *humility* is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought,” are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer.

The seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) are a kind of lament in the face of death, illness, harassment, or strife, though they are often prayed by penitents before/after confession, or during times of personal struggle, sacrifice and repentance (e.g., Lent).

In the sixth century, Cassiodorus drew a connection between the seven psalms and the seven traditional methods of forgiveness (baptism, martyrdom, almsgiving, forgiving others, diverting a sinner from his error, abundance of charity and repentance) and that praying them was a useful way for penitents to find grace.

“My God, how I cried to you when I read the Psalms of David, songs of faith, utterances of devotion which allow no pride of spirit to enter in... How I cried out to you in those Psalms, and how they kindled my love for you!” (Confessions IX, iv, 8).

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:10-14

Sources:

Navarre Bible – Commentary on the Psalms

St Augustine’s Sermons on the Old Testament and Expositions of the Psalms

St. Robert Bellarmine’s Commentary on The Book of Psalms

Mary Clark “St. Augustine’s Use of the Psalms”

Psalm 51 "Miserere"

(RSV-2CE)

(Revised Grail Psalms)

<p><i>To the choirmaster.</i></p> <p><i>A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.</i></p>	<p>2 Samuel Ch. 11&12 "Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight?" ~ 2 Sam 12:9</p> <hr/> <p>"I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins." ~ Isaiah 43:25</p> <p>"Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" ~ Acts 3:19</p> <p>"For our transgressions are multiplied before you, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us and we know our iniquities" ~ Isaiah 59:12</p> <p>"I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" ~ Luke 15:18 (Prodigal)</p> <p>"Therefore sin came into the world through one man and death through sin" ~ Rom 5:12</p> <hr/> <p>"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." ~ Is 1:18</p> <p>"For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" ~ Heb 9:13-14</p> <hr/> <p>"For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for from me proceeds the spirit, and I have made the breath of life. Because of the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry, I struck him, I hid my face and was angry; but he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart. I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and repay him with comfort." ~ Is 57:15-18</p> <p>"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren," ~ Luke 22:31-32</p>	<p><i>For the Choirmaster.</i></p> <p><i>A Psalm of David when the prophet Nathan came to him after he had gone to Bathsheba.</i></p>
<p>Have mercy on me, O God, according to your merciful love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!</p> <p>For I know my transgressions, and my sin is every before me.</p> <p>Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.</p> <p>Behold, you desire truth in the inward being; therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart.</p> <p>Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness; let the bones which you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.</p> <p>Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy Spirit from me.* Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.</p> <p>Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodguilt, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.</p>	<p>Have mercy on me, O God, according to your merciful love; according to your great compassion, blot out my transgression. Wash me completely from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.</p> <p>My transgressions, truly I know them; my sin is always before me.</p> <p>Against you, you alone, have I sinned; what is evil in your sight I have done. So you are just in your sentence, without reproach in your judgement.</p> <p>O see, in guilt I was born, a sinner when my mother conceived me. Yes, you delight in sincerity of heart; in secret you teach me wisdom. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be pure; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.</p> <p>Let me hear rejoicing and gladness, that the bones you have crushed may exult. Turn away your face from my sins, and blot out all my guilt.</p> <p>Create a pure heart for me, O God; renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence; take not your holy spirit from me.*</p> <p>Restore in me the joy of your salvation; sustain in me a willing spirit. I will teach transgressors your ways, that sinners may return to you.</p> <p>Rescue me from bloodshed, O God, God of my salvation,</p>	

<p>O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise. For you take no delight in sacrifice; were I give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.</p> <p>The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.</p> <p>Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.</p>	<p>"All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the LORD. But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." ~ Is 66:2</p> <hr/> <p>* "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are Sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God." ~ Rom 8:9, 14-16</p>	<p>and then my tongue shall ring out your justice. O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.</p> <p>For in sacrifice you take no delight; burnt offering from me would not please you. My sacrifice to God, a broken spirit: a broken and humbled heart, O God, you will not spurn.</p> <p>In your good pleasure, show favor to Zion; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in right sacrifice, burnt offerings wholly consumed. Then you will be offered young bulls on your altar.</p>
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Commenting on this psalm, Augustine writes:

"I know my sin, says the psalmist. Yes, I know my sin: may you deign to forgive me. We can never assume that the lives we lead are upright and without sin. The recognition of our sins is a sign of the goodness of the lives we are leading. *I know my fault; my sin is always before me.* The person who prays in this way does not concern himself with the sins of others; rather, he examines himself – not in a superficial way, like on blindly searching in the dark, but by deepening in his interior life. He does not forgive himself his own faults, and thus can dare to ask for forgiveness. *My sacrifice is a contrite spirit; a humble and contrite heart, Lord, you will not spurn.* This is the sacrifice that you must offer. Search your heart for the offering pleasing to God. The heart is what must be broken. And do not be afraid that you will lose your heart by chastening it, for the psalm also says: *A new heart create in me, O God.* But for this new heart to be created, the old unclean heart must be destroyed."

***Questions for Reflection:**

Read the story of how Nathan confronted David in 2 Samuel 12: 1-14. Then recall a time you've been confronted with some sin of your own. Were you able to recognize and accept your guilt or did you strive to deny it to others or yourself?

Though Scripture assures us David was forgiven his grave sins of adultery and of causing the death of an innocent man, the child he conceived with Bathsheba died, as the prophet Nathan predicted. That death is presented as the consequence of David's sin. Is God less merciful if he allows us to endure the consequences of our sins?

The prophet Nathan's ministry in this episode of David's life was to confront his King with a hard truth. Today we talk of "speaking truth to power," referring to the responsibility of bringing Gospel values to the marketplace and challenging our leaders when necessary. Do you see this as part of your Christian responsibility? How might you "speak truth to power" in your life or work?

*Questions for reflection are from The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/lent/prayer-resources-for-lent.cfm>

Psalm 6

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments; according to the Sheminith. A Psalm of David.</i></p> <p>O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor chasten me in your wrath. Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am languishing; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is sorely troubled. But you, O LORD – how long?</p> <p>Turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your merciful love. For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?</p> <p>I am weary with my moanings; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief, it grows weak because of all my foes.</p> <p>Depart from me, all you workers of evil; for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. The LORD has heard my supplication; the LORD accepts my prayer. All my enemies shall turn back, and be put to shame in a moment.</p>	<p>“Correct me, O LORD, but in just measure; not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing.” – Jer 10:24</p> <p>:Heal me, O LORD and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for you are my praise.” ~ Jer 17:14-15</p> <p>“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour.” ~ Jn 12:27</p> <hr/> <p>“For Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness.” ~ Is 38:18</p> <hr/> <p>“I will rejoice and be glad for your merciful love, because you have seen my lowliness, you have taken heed of my adversities, and have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy.” ~Ps 31:7-8</p> <hr/> <p>“But he will say, ‘ I tell you, I do not know where you come from: depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!’ There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the propgets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out.” ~Lk 13:27-28</p> <p>“Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God.” Ps 119:115</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>For the Choirmaster. With stringed instruments, upon the Eighth Chord. A Psalm of David.</i></p> <p>O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger; reprove me not in your rage. Have mercy on me, LORD, for I languish. LORD, heal me; me bones are shaking, and my soul is greatly shaken.</p> <p>But you, O LORD, how long? Return, LORD, rescue my soul. Save me in your merciful love. For in death there is no remembrance of you; from the grave, who can give you praise?</p> <p>I am exhausted with my groaning; every night I drench my bed with tears, I bedew my couch with weeping. My eyes waste away with grief; I have grown old surrounded by all my foes.</p> <p>Leave me, all who do evil, for the LORD heeds the sound of my weeping. The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD will receive my prayer. All my foes will be shamed and greatly shaken, suddenly put to shame.</p>
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Psalm 6 is the first of the seven penitential psalms. It expresses a desire for conversion and strong hope for forgiveness.

“When we are faced with weakness and sins, with our mistakes – even though, by God’s grace, they be of little account – let us turn to God our Father in prayer and say to him, ‘Lord, here I am in my wretchedness and frailty, a broken vessel of clay. Bind me together again, Lord, and then, helped by my sorrow and by your forgiveness, I shall be stronger and more attractive than before!’ What a consoling prayer, which we can say every time something fractures this miserable clay of which we are made”
~ St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 94-95

Questions for Reflection:

St. Paul says that God “proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). So why do we keep thinking that God will love us only when we stop sinning?

On the other hand, does knowledge of God’s unconditional love mean we needn’t worry about sinning? Is the destructiveness of sin related to the effects it has on God or to the effects it has on us?

Besides petitionary prayer, there are prayers of praise, thanksgiving, adoration, etc. Does a prayer of petition, asking for mercy and the forgiveness of sin, seem to you like a lower, less enlightened form of prayer? How can you combine petition and praise?

Psalm 32

<i>A Psalm of David. A Maskil.</i>		<i>Of David. A Maskil.</i>
<p>Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.</p> <p>When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.</p> <p>I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; then you forgave the guilt of my sin.</p> <p>Therefore let every one who is godly offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me, you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with deliverance.</p> <p>I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, Which must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not keep with you.</p> <p>Many are the pangs of the wicked; but steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!</p>	<p>"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." ~ Prov 28:13</p> <p>"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." ~ 1 Jn 1:8-9</p> <hr style="border: 1px solid black;"/> <p>"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." ~ 2 Cor 5:18-19</p> <p>"David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.'" ~ 2 Sam 12:13</p> <hr style="border: 1px solid black;"/> <p>"He reached from on high, he took me, he drew me out of many waters." ~ Ps 18:16</p> <hr style="border: 1px solid black;"/> <p>"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools." ~ Prov 25:28, 26:3</p> <p>"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness. For we all make many mistakes, and if any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also. If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies." ~ James 3:1-3</p> <p>"Rejoice in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!" ~ Ps 33:1</p>	<p>Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is remitted. Blessed the man to whom the LORD imputes no guilt, in whose spirit is no guile.</p> <p>I kept it secret and my frame was wasted. I groaned all day long, for your hand, by day and by night, lay heavy upon me. Indeed, my strength was dried up as by the summer's heat.</p> <p>To you I have acknowledged my sin; my guilt I did not hide. I said, "I will confess my transgression to the LORD." And you have forgiven the guilt of my sin.</p> <p>So let each faithful one pray to you in the time of need. The floods of water may reach high, but such a one they shall not reach.</p> <p>You are a hiding place for me; you keep me safe from distress; you surround me with cries of deliverance.</p> <p>I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will fix my eyes upon you.</p> <p>Be not like horse and mule, unintelligent, needing bridle and bit, or else they will not approach you.</p> <p>Many sorrows has the wicked, but loving mercy surrounds one who trusts in the LORD.</p> <p>Rejoice in the LORD; exult, you just! Ring out your joy, all you upright of heart!</p>

This is the second penitential psalm in which the church celebrates the happiness of a person who is conscious that his sins have been forgiven by God after confession.

"Shall I remind you of the different paths of repentance? For there are many, each distinct and different, and they all lead to heaven. The first way of penance consists in the accusation and acknowledgement of sin: *First, confess your sins, and you will be justified.* For this reason the psalmist says: *I said: 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin.* Therefore, if you condemn in yourself the deed by which you have offense, the confession will obtain your pardon before the Lord; for the one who condemns his offense makes it more difficult for himself to commit that sin again. Ensure that your conscience is always alert: it will be your private prosecutor, and then there will be no one else to accuse you before the tribunal of God. This is the first and best path of penitence. There is another way, too, of no

lesser value than the first, which consists in forgiving the offenses that have been committed against us by our enemies, so that, by keeping a tight rein on our anger, we will forget the faults of our brothers. By acting in this way, the debts we ourselves have incurred before God will likewise be forgiven. That, then, is the second way to make atonement for our sins. For if you pardon the faults of others-says the Lord-your father in heaven will pardon your faults." ~ St. John of the Cross, *De diabolo tentatore*, 6

Questions for Reflection:

Fewer Catholics today avail themselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Why do you think that is? If the psalmist's experience is typical, the floodgates of grace open once we admit and repent our sins. What would help you be more open to the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Do you think talk of sin is helpful or is it better to speak instead of God's love and mercy? Does one make sense without the other?

Do you approach God with confidence or temerity (i.e., recklessness, unreasonable)?

Psalm 38

The psalmist cries out four times to the Lord (verses 1, 9, 15, 22). The first time he asks not to be punished and tells the Lord about all the suffering he is going through. The second, he appeals to the Lord to notice his pain (v. 9), which is made worse by the indifference of his friends and by harassment from his enemies. In the third plea, he tells God how much he trusts him and he confesses his sin. The fourth and last plea is an urgent cry for help. The psalm opens and closes with entreaties, but for the most part it is an assertion of trust in the Lord.

This is the third penitential psalm, which invites the Christian to keep on confessing sin to God, not because he fears that God might punish him by way of illness or some other misfortune, but that because he feels remorse and a loss of inner peace on account of sin, and, above all, because he can see the effects of sin in the sufferings of our Lord who, though blameless, bore man's sin on his shoulders.

~ Navarre Bible Commentary on Psalm 38

Questions for Reflection:

"Today, we don't speak so graphically about sin. We tend to psychologize it, even explain it away. We see ourselves more as victims than as sinners; as wounded, misunderstood nice-guys and gals who are doing the best we can. We don't sin; we just make mistakes." – From USCCB Reflection

Do you agree that sin is often psychologized? What are the negative effects of such an approach?

In what ways is the quality of God's mercy watered down if we don't recognize the full extent of our own sinfulness?

The Lord's Prayer exhorts us to forgive as we are forgiven. Do you find it easier to ask for mercy or to give it?

Psalm 38

<i>A Psalm of David, for the memorial offering.</i>		<i>A Psalm of David. For a Memorial.</i>
<p>O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor chasten me in your wrath! For your arrows have sunk into me, and your hand has come down on me.</p> <p>There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.</p> <p>My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. For my loins are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am utterly spent and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart.</p> <p>Lord, all my longing is known to you, my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart throbs, my strength fails me; and the light of my eyes-it also has gone from me. My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my kinsmen stand afar off.</p> <p>Those who seek my life lay their snares, those who seek my hurt speak of ruin, and mediate treachery all the day long.</p> <p>But I am like a deaf man, I do not hear, like a mute man who does not open his mouth. Yes, I am like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth are no rebukes.</p> <p>But for you, O LORD, do I wait; it is you, O LORD my God, who will answer. For I pray, "Only let them not rejoice over me, who boast against me when my foot slips!"</p> <p>For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever with me. I confess my iniquity, I am sorry for my sin.</p> <p>Those who are my foes without cause are mighty, and many are those who hate me wrongfully. Those who render me evil for good are my adversaries because I follow after good.</p> <p>Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!</p>	<p>"For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me." ~ Job 6:4</p> <p>"Why will you still be struck down, that you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they are not pressed out, or bound up, or softened with oil." ~ Is 1:5-6</p> <p>"O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens." ~ Ez 9:6</p> <hr/> <p>"You have put me in the depths. Of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep." ~ Ps 88:6</p> <p>"He has put my brethren far from me, and my acquaintances are wholly estranged from me. My kinsfolk and my close friends have failed me; the guests in my house have forgotten me; my maidservants count me as a stranger; I have become an alien in their eyes. I call to my servant, but he gives me no answer; I must beseech him with my mouth. I am repulsive to my wife, loathsome to the sons of my own mother. Even young children despise me; when I rise they talk against me. All my intimate friends abhor me, and those whom I loved have turned against me." ~ Job 19:13-19</p> <p>"And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance and saw these things." ~ Lk 23:49</p> <hr/> <p>"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." ~ Is 53:7</p> <p>"Lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him'; lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your merciful love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation." ~ Ps 13:4-5</p> <hr/> <p>"They beset me with words of hate, and attack me without cause. In return for my love they accuse me, even as I make prayer for them. So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love." ~ Ps 109:3-5</p> <p>"Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help." Ps 22:11</p> <p>"You have seen, O LORD; be not silent! O Lord, be not far from me!" ~ Ps 35:22</p> <p>"As for me, I am poor and needy; but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!" ~ Ps 40:17</p>	<p>O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger; reprove me not in your rage. For your arrows have sunk deep in me; your hand has come down upon me.</p> <p>There is no soundness in my flesh because of your anger: there is no health in my limbs because of my sin.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>All my frame is burning with fever; there is no soundness in my flesh. I am spent and utterly crushed, I cry aloud in anguish of heart.</p> <p>O LORD, all my longing lies before you; my groans are not hidden from you. My heart throbs, my strength is spent; the very light has gone from my eyes.</p> <p>Friends and companions stand aloof from my pain; 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.</p> <p>But I, like someone deaf, do not hear; like someone mute, I do not open my mouth. I am like one who hears nothing, in whose mouth is no defense.</p> <p>But in you, O LORD, I hope; it is you, LORD my God, who will answer. I pray, "Let them not gloat over me, exult if my foot should slip."</p> <p>For I am on the point of falling, and my pain is always with me. I confess that I am guilty; and I am grieved because of my sin.</p> <p>My wanton enemies live on and grow strong, and many are my lying foes. They repay me evil for good, and attack me for seeking what is good.</p> <p>Forsake me not, O LORD! My God, be not far from me! Make haste and come to my help, my LORD and my salvation!</p>

Psalm 102

A prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.

Hear my prayer, O LORD;
let my cry come to you!
Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress!
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in the day when I call!

For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.
My heart is struck down like grass, and withered;
I forget to eat my bread.
Because of my loud groaning
my bones cling to my flesh.
I am like a vulture of the wilderness,
like an owl of the waste places;
I lie awake,
I am like a lonely bird on the housetop.
All the day my enemies taunt me,
those who deride me use my name for a curse,
For I eat ashes like bread,
and mingle tears with my drink,
because of your indignation and anger;
for you have taken me up and thrown me away.
My days are like an evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

But you, O LORD, are enthroned for ever;
your name endures to all generations.
You will arise and have pity on Zion;
it is the time to favor her;
the appointed time has come.
For your servants hold her stones dear,
and have pity on her dust.
The nations will fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings of the earth your glory.
For the LORD will build up Zion,
he will appear in his glory;
he will regard the prayer of the destitute,
and will not despise their supplication.

Let this be recorded for generation to come,
so that a people yet unborn may praise the LORD:
that he looked down from his holy height,
from heaven the LORD looked at the earth,
to hear the groans of the prisoners,
to set free those who were doomed to die;
that men may declare in Zion the name of the
LORD,
and in Jerusalem his praise,
when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to worship the LORD.

He has broken my strength in mid-course;
he has shortened my days.

“Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to
my cry; hold not your peace at my tears!”
~ Ps 39:12

“Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious
to me and answer me! You have said, ‘Seek
my face.’ My heart says to you, ‘Your face,
LORD, do I seek.’ Hide not your face from me.
Turn not your servant away in anger, you
who have been my help. Cast me not off,
forsake me not, O God of my salvation!”
~ Ps 28:7-9

“My skin turns black and falls from me, and
my bones burn with heat.” ~ Job 30:30

“My tears have been my food day and night.”
~ Ps 42:3

“He comes forth like a flower, and withers;
he flees like a shadow and continues not.”
~ Job 13-2

“Shake yourself from the dust, arise, O
captive Jerusalem” ~ Is 52:2

“And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together, for the
mouth of the LORD has spoken.” ~ Is 40:5

Prayer of someone afflicted who is weary and pours out his trouble to the LORD.

O LORD, hear my prayer,
and let my cry come to you.
Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress.

Turn your ear toward me;
on the day when I call,
speedily answer me.

For my days are vanishing like smoke;
my bones burn away like a furnace.
My heart is withered and dried up like the grass.
I forget to eat my bread.
Because of the sound of my groaning,
my skin clings to my bones.

I have become like a vulture in the desert,
like an owl among the ruins.
I lie awake and I moan,
like a bird alone on a roof.
All day long my foes revile me;
those who deride me use my name as a curse.

I have eaten ashes like bread,
and mingled tears with my drink.
Because of your anger and fury,
you have lifted me up and thrown me down.
My days are like a fading shadow,
and I wither away like the grass.

But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever,
and your renown is from age to age.

You will arise and take pity on Sion,
for this is the time to have mercy;
yes, the time appointed has come.
Behold, your servants love her very stones,
are moved to pity 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 Sion,
he will 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;
The LORD looked down from his holy place on
high,
looked down from heaven to the earth,
to hear the groans of the prisoners,
and free those condemned to die.

<p>“O my God,” I say, “do not take me from here in the midst of my days, you whose years endure throughout all generations!”</p> <p>Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end. The children of your servants shall dwell secure; their posterity shall be established before you.</p>	<p>“For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my deliverance will be for ever, and my salvation to all generations.” ~ Is 51:8</p> <p>“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.” Heb 13:8</p>	<p>May the name of the LORD be proclaimed in Sion, and his praise in Jerusalem, when peoples and kingdoms are gathered as one to offer their worship to the LORD.</p> <p>He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has shortened my days. I say: “My God, do not take me away before half of my days are complete, you, whose days last from age to age.</p> <p>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, and they change. But you are the same, and your years do not end.”</p> <p>The children of your servants shall dwell untroubled, and their descendants established before you.</p>
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The Church uses the fifth penitential psalm to please for forgiveness on her own behalf. St. John of the Cross uses this psalm to comment on the implications for the spiritual life of the transitory nature of this world:

“The spiritual person must purify and cast this vain joy into the shadows by acknowledging that all that is beautiful in the world and everything else in nature is of this earth, that it comes from dust and will return to it; that gracefulness and wit, too, are but the smoke and air of this world; and, if one is not to fall into the sin of vanity, one must see and value them for no more than what they are worth. Rather should the spiritual person turn to God, and rejoice in the One who is so perfectly present in all that is beautiful and graceful, in a ways infinitely beyond all created things. As Davis says, *They will perish, but He will endure; they will all wear out like a garment and only He will remain unchanged forever.* Therefore, if the spiritual person does not always find his joy in God, he will always be false and deceived; for that saying of Solomon [Sir 2:2] follows this phrase from the psalm when, speaking of the joy of creatures, it says: *I said to joy: ‘Why do you allow yourself to be deceived in vain?’* – that is, *Why do you allow your heart to be drawn to creatures?’* ~ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 3, 21, 2

Questions for Reflection:

Do you ever turn to the Lord with the kind of open, honest and passionate pleading we see in this Psalm? Do you trust God enough to storm heaven’s gates with your prayers?

A requisite for praying the Penitential Psalms is an awareness of our sinfulness. Can you look honestly in the mirror admitting what you see? If that is challenging, can you be patient with yourself and ask God for the gift of trust?

When you pray, do you focus more on the chasm between your sin and God’s goodness or on the ocean of God’s mercy vs. your need?

Psalm 130, "De profundis"

<p><i>A Song of Ascents.</i></p> <p>Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!</p> <p>If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared.</p> <p>I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the LORD more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.</p> <p>O Israel, hope in the LORD!! For with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.</p>	<p>"Let your ear be attentive, and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant which I now pray before you day and night for the sons of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Yes, I and my father's house have sinned." ~ Neh 1:6</p> <p>"Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place." ~ 2 Chron 7:15</p> <p>"Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger for ever because he delights in mercy." ~ Mic 7:18</p> <p>"It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'" ~ Is 25:9</p> <p>"She will bear a son, and you shall call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ~ Mt 1:21</p> <p>"For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds." ~ Titus 2:11, 13</p>	<p><i>A Song of Ascents.</i></p> <p>Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice! O let your ears be attentive to the sound of my pleadings.</p> <p>If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, LORD, who could stand? But with you is found forgiveness, that you may be revered.</p> <p>I long for you, O LORD, my soul longs for his word. My soul hopes in the LORD more than watchmen for daybreak.</p> <p>More than watchmen for daybreak, let Israel hope for the LORD. For with the LORD there is mercy, in him is plentiful redemption. It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.</p>
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An important part of the temple liturgy was taken up with entreaty for the Lord's forgiveness; this was usually accompanied by atonement offerings (Lev 14-15). The psalm, whose main theme is hope in divine forgiveness, is fulfilled with the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ. His very name, Jesus, means that God will redeem his people from their sins (Mt 1:21; Lk 1:68). The Church prays the sixth penitential psalm to express her trust in Christ the Redeemer, and she has recommended its use before Mass to stress the need for purification prior to approaching the holy sacrifice of the altar, a sacrifice of thanksgiving and atonement. ~ Navarre Bible Commentary on Psalm 130.

Questions for Reflection:

In a letter he wrote from prison, Oscar Wilde quotes these words of Goethe:

'Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
Who never spent the midnight hours
Weeping and waiting for the morrow,—
He knows you not, ye heavenly powers.'

Do you agree that knowing sorrow is necessary for a full, mature relationship with God?

In what ways has sorrow deepened your own relationship with the Lord?

Can we genuinely repent our sins if we have not truly recognized the darkness they bring into our lives and into the world?

What helps you to find the hope in God's mercy that the psalmist describes so palpably here?

Psalm 143

A Psalm of David.

Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my supplications!
In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!
Enter not into judgment with your servant;
for no man living is righteous before you.

For the enemy has pursued me;
he has crushed my life to the ground;
he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.
Therefore my spirit faints within me;
My heart within me is appalled.

I remember the days of old,
I meditate on all that you have done;
I muse on what your hands have wrought.
I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.

Make haste to answer me, O LORD!
My spirit fails!
Hide not your face from me,
lest I be like those who go down to the PIT.
Let me hear in the morning of your merciful love,
for in you I put my trust.
Teach me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.

Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies!
I have fled to you for refuge!
Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God!
Let your good spirit lead me on a level path!

For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life!
In your righteousness bring me out of trouble!
And in your steadfast love cut off my enemies,
and destroy all my adversaries,
for I am your servant.

"Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."
~ Eccles. 7:20

"Yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no flesh be justified." ~ Gal 2:16

"My spirit is broken, my days are extincy, the grave is ready for me." ~ Job 17:1

"He has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago." ~ Lam 3:6

"You gave your good Spirit to instruct them, and did not withhold your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst."
~ Neh 9:20

A Psalm of David.

O 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 in your sight no one living is justified.

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 desolate 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.

O LORD, make haste and answer me,
for my spirit fails within me.
Do not hide your face from me,
lest I become like those
who go down into the grave.

In the morning, let me know your loving mercy,
for in you I place my trust.
Make me know the way I should walk;
to you I lift up my soul.

Rescue me, O LORD, from my foes;
to you have I fled for refuge.
Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God.
Let your good spirit guide me
upon ground that is level.

LORD, save my life for the sake of your name;
in your justice, lead my soul out of distress.
In your mercy make an end of my foes;
destroy all those who oppress my soul,
for I am your servant.

Psalm 143

This is the seventh penitential psalm; it acknowledges the sinful state of all mankind.

“Pray with me now to our Lord: *doce me facere voluntatem tuam, quia Deus meus es tu* (Ps 143:10), ‘Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.’ In short, our lips should express a true desire on our part to respond effectively to our Creator’s promptings, striving to follow out his plans with with unshakable faith, being fully convinced that he cannot fail us. If we love God’s will in this way, we shall come to understand that the value of our faith lies not only in how clearly we can express it, but also in our determination to defend it by our deeds – and we shall act accordingly” ~ St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 198.

Questions for Reflection:

Do you feel comfortable asking God to “put an end to your foes?” Does such a prayer contradict Jesus’ injunction to “Turn the other cheek?”

We know Jesus prayed the Psalms, and he certainly had enemies. Can you imagine him praying these words?”

Do you believe, as the Psalm suggests, there is a connection between the sin and the distress, conflict, and opposition in our lives?