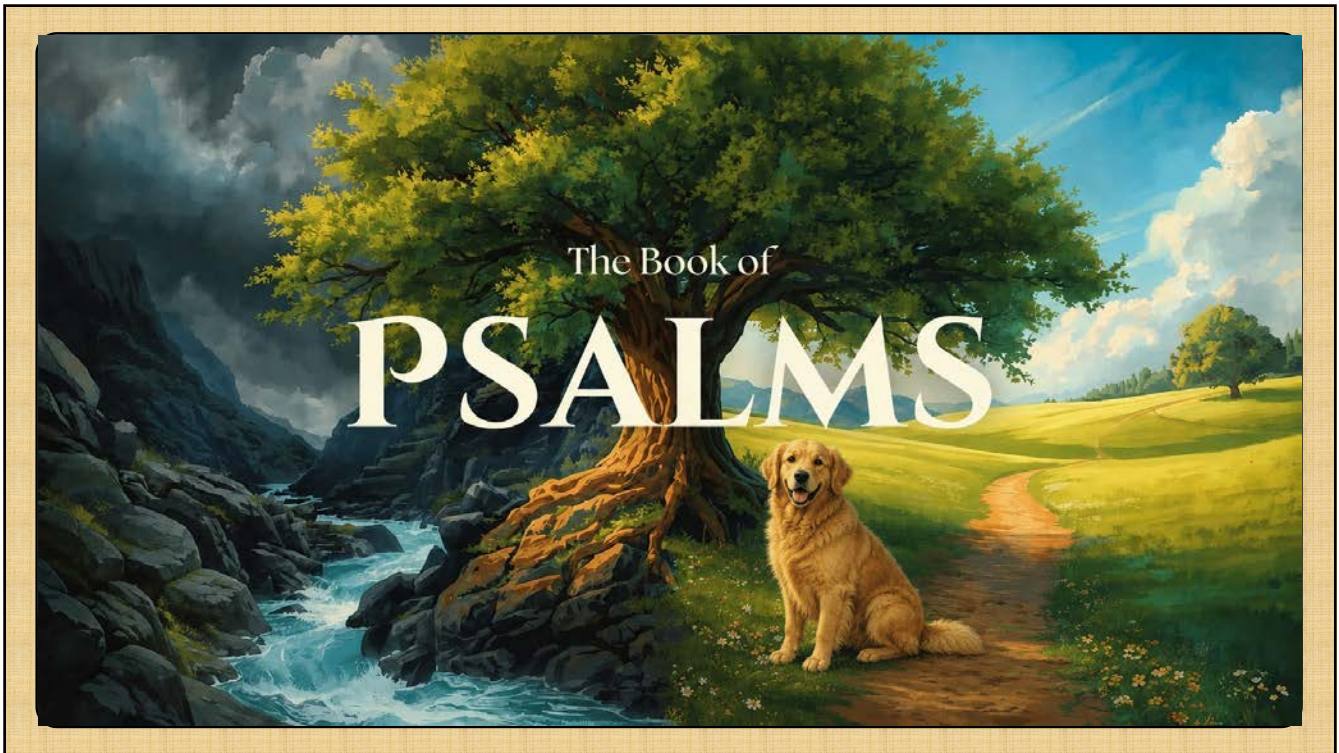




1

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- Overview of the Book of Psalms
- Psalms and Catholic Liturgy
- What is a Psalm?
- Authorship
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2

Overview

- Psalms is the most famous book of poetry ever written. It is the only book of the Bible that is read at almost every Mass. The psalms form the beating heart of the Liturgy of the Hours.
- The Book of Psalms is the longest book of the Bible by chapter count – 150 chapters. The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible by word count.

3

Overview

- Jesus Christ Himself memorized, recited, prayed, and quoted the psalms in key parts of His ministry. The psalms were always on the lips of our Lord Jesus.
- When Jesus enters Jerusalem, He recites the psalms. When He is at the Last Supper, Jesus sings the psalms. On the Cross, Jesus quotes the psalms.
- **Key:** St. Augustine said that Christ is the primary speaker in the psalms, voicing both his own earthly experiences and the cries of His people.

4

Overview

Three fundamental convictions:

1. The psalms are essential to the life and health of the Church, i.e., her life, worship, and health.
2. Jesus Christ is essential to the proper understanding of the psalms.
3. Reading and praying the psalms with Christ is central to a healthy life of ministry and the spiritual life of priests, consecrated sisters, and the baptized. In short, reading and praying the psalms leads you closer to God.

5

Psalms and Catholic Liturgy

- The Book of Psalms served as the official hymnal and liturgical core of ancient Jewish worship in the Jerusalem Temple. The early Christians adopted the book for their prayers and spiritual life.
- The responsorial psalm, read or sung after the first reading, is an integral part of the Mass. It helps the congregation meditate and reflect on the themes of the first reading.
- The Church forbids replacing the responsorial psalm with a secular hymn or alternative song in the Mass.

6

Psalms and Catholic Liturgy

- The psalms form the structural and prayerful core of the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office.
- The Church organizes the psalms into a four-week psalter cycle. Someone praying all the hours daily will cycle through all 150 psalms every four weeks.
- The 150 psalms of the Old Testament are arranged to consecrate the entire day and night to God. Along with psalms, the Liturgy of the Hours weaves canticles (like the *Benedictus* and *Magnificat*) that help hinge morning and evening prayer.

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What is a Psalm?

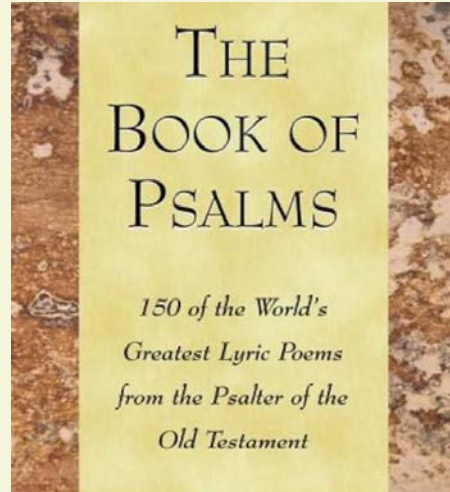
- **What is a Psalm?** A *psalm* is a poem sung to music from a stringed instrument you pluck, such as a harp or guitar. The word *psalm* comes from the Greek word meaning “to pluck” a stringed instrument (1).
- The psalms were written in Hebrew. In Hebrew, *mizmor* [mizz-MORE] means a song or poem sung or chanted to a musical instrument.



8

Broader Composition

- The complete collection of 150 psalms was written over a span of roughly 1,000 years, ranging from the time of Moses (1500 BC or 1200 BC) up to the post-exilic return and rebuilding period (around 400 BC).
- **Key:** The psalms were written largely between 1000 BC to 400 BC.



9

Authorship

- **Who wrote the Psalms?** King David is the primary author of the psalms.
- David wrote about half (70 to 80) of the psalms as a youth and during his reign as king. Hebrew superscriptions link 73 psalms directly to David.
- Around 48 psalms do not list an author.



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Authorship

- About a dozen of the Psalms are from the Sons of Korah, an ancient Israelite choir. They served as gatekeepers, custodians, and musical worship leaders in Jerusalem.
- A choir director appointed by David, Asaph, wrote about 12 Psalms.
- Two Psalms are attributed to Solomon. Moses wrote Psalm 90. Many Psalms are anonymous.



11

Authorship

- The Babylonian exile was 587 – 537 BC.
- Some psalms (e.g., Psalm 137) were written during the Babylonian exile and some after the exile.
- Earliest psalms date from the time of Moses (Psalm 90 – 1200's BC), Psalms of David 900s BC, other psalms trickled in around 400 BC.



12

Poetry, Prayers, and Prophecy

- Psalms are **poetry**, **prayers**, and **prophecy**.
- **Poetry**: The Psalms are not poetry as we know poetry that rhymes. The Psalms do not rhyme, even in Hebrew.
- Instead, Hebrew poetry is organized not around sounds (rhymes), but rather around thoughts. Hebrew rhymes by **ideas**, not by syllables or sounds.

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Poetry

- The basic unit of a Psalm is a two-line stanza called a bicola (bi – two) (cola – line).
- The second line either repeats, contrasts, completes, or expands the first line.
- **Key**: The psalms are written in poetry because prose alone cannot fully capture the deep emotional and spiritual range of human experience with God. Poetry engages our feelings, longings, and deepest grief.

14

Poetry

- **Synonymous Parallelism**: The second line **repeats** or reinforces the thought of the first line using different words.

Psalm 24:1

"The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell therein."

- The first line establishes that God owns the planet and everything inside it. The second line repeats the first line – but opens "earth" to "world" and "all its fullness" to "those who dwell therein," meaning both creation and humanity.

15

Poetry

- **Antithetical Parallelism**: The second line **contrasts** directly with the first line.

Psalm 1:6

"For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction."

- The first line states a positive truth or a path of life (e.g., God knowing and protecting the righteous). The second line uses the word "but" to introduce an opposite or contrasting fate (e.g., the wicked will perish). The purpose is to highlight or reveal outcomes from moral choices.

16

Poetry

- **Complementary Parallelism**: The second line **completes, develops,** or **builds** upon the thought of the first line rather than just repeating or contrasting it.

Psalm 23:1

“The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.”

- The first line “The Lord is my shepherd” establishes a foundational truth about God’s role as caretaker and provider. The second line “I shall not want” states the logical consequence and practical result of the first line – because God is the shepherd, one does not lack.

17

Prayers

- The psalms are the breath, the cry of the spirit, of the faithful to God.
- **Terseness**: In Hebrew, there are fewer words than the English translation. There is a lot of theological weight carried in few words.
- **Imagery and Metaphor**: The psalmist does not think in abstract concepts, but in concrete images and pictures. God is a rock, shepherd, shield, warrior, consuming fire, eagle, etc.

18

Prayers

- **Raw Emotion**: The psalmist models honest communication with God, including joy, sorrow, confusion, and anger. The psalms give voice to every human emotion before God, including joy, thanksgiving, deep sorrow, anger, doubt, and fear.
- **Shared Human Experience**: The psalmist pours out his heart during real-life trials, such as flight from enemies, illness, guilt, and national exile.
- **Honest Humility**: Praying the psalms reveals your true heart before God rather than a masked version of yourself.

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Prayers

Types of Psalm Prayers

- **Hymns of praise**: Joyful songs that sing of God's character, majesty, and mighty works in creation or history. Examples include Psalms 8 and 104.
- **Individual lament**: Cries of help in deep distress, which move from pain to trust. The psalmist complains to God. Examples include Psalms 13 and 22.

20

Prayers

Types of Psalm Prayers

- **Thanksgiving Psalms:** Express gratitude for God's direct intervention in response to a specific prayer or situation in need. Examples include Psalms 30 and 118.
- **Royal Psalms:** These psalms focus on the kings of Israel, the sovereignty of God, or prophecies anticipating the ultimate Messianic King. Examples include Psalms 2 and 72.

21

Prayers

Types of Psalm Prayers

- **Imprecatory Psalms:** Intense prayers asking God to judge or punish their enemies. The psalmist seeks justice and vindication. Examples include Psalms 69 and 137.
- **Seven Penitential Psalms:** Expresses deep sorrow, confession of sin; and an appeal for God's mercy and forgiveness. Examples include Psalms 6 and 51.
- **Wisdom Psalms:** Teach practical guidance for living a good, faithful life. Examples include Psalms 1, 37, and 119.

22

Prayers

- When reading the psalms, it is helpful to understand the voice of “who” is speaking. Who is the “I” speaking?
- **Father**: It may be the Father speaking to the Son: *“Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for an inheritance, and as your possession, the ends of the earth”* (Ps. 2:8).
- **Christ**: Sometimes, it is Jesus praying: *“My God, I call by day, but you do not answer; by night, but I find no relief”* (Ps. 22:3).

23

Prayers

- When reading the psalms, it is helpful to understand that there are changes of voice in “who” is speaking.
- **Mystical Body**: The Church, the Body of Christ, is praying: *“Lord, I cried to you; hasten to me”* (Ps. 141:1).
- **Individual Believer**: Christ prays in the individual believer: *“For I know my transgressions; my sin is always before me”* (Ps. 50:5).

24

Prophecy

- The psalms speak of Christ before Christ, yet they also speak about the historical present moment.
- The psalms present profound Messianic themes, and theological expectations that point forward to Jesus Christ and the ultimate kingdom of God.
- **Key:** A Christological (Christ-centered) reading of the psalms is key to their understanding. In other words, the psalms point to Christ's life, suffering, prayer, and eternal reign.

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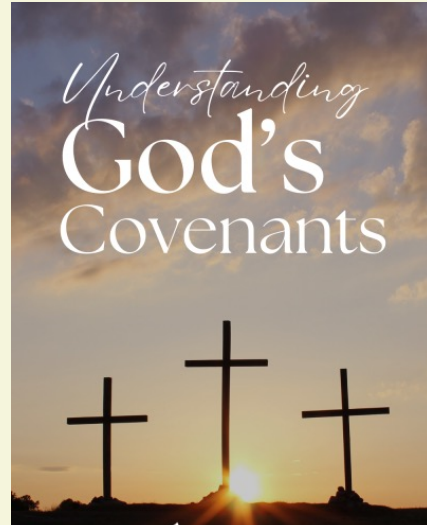
Prophecy

- **Messianic Lineage and Reign:** Passages like Psalm 2 and Psalm 89 predict an anointed King from David's line who will rule all nations.
- **Suffering and Crucifixion:** Psalm 22 details the specific imagery of suffering, isolation, and pierced hands and feet that mirror the crucifixion.
- **Resurrection and Exaltation:** Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 look past David to a Holy One who will not see corruption and will sit at God's right hand.

26

God's Plan of Salvation

- God wants to make us a part of His family. He wants to elevate us from being a creature to a child of God.
- God builds and expands His family through a progressive series of relational covenants that span from creation to the New Covenant in Jesus Christ.
- **Covenant**: A family bond sealed with an oath (11).



27

God's Plan of Salvation

- **Adamic Covenant**: The foundational arrangement between God and humanity. They are promised life, communion, and blessing from God.
- Their disobedience brought about guilt, shame, suffering, followed by spiritual and physical death, a curse on the ground, and painful toil.



28

God's Plan of Salvation

- **Noahic Covenant:** God's unconditional promise to Noah, his family, and all living creatures never to destroy the earth again with a global flood.
- This covenant expands God's family from marriage (Adam and Eve) to a little family with children.



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God's Plan of Salvation

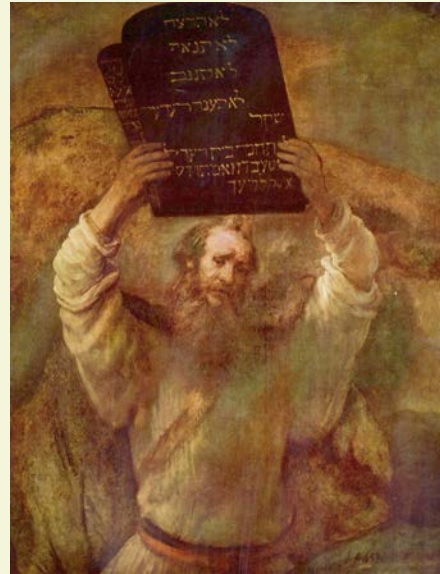
- **Abrahamic Covenant:** God's promise to Abraham to make of him a great nation, a great name, and a worldwide blessing.
- This covenant sets the stage for God expanding His family through Abraham's family to eventually encompass the whole world.



30

God's Plan of Salvation

- **Mosaic Covenant:** An agreement God made with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai after freeing them from slavery to Egypt.
- God's blessing and peace in the land depended on the people keeping the law; disobedience brought punishment and exile.
- Fulfills God's promise of a great nation.



31

God's Plan of Salvation

- **Davidic Covenant:** An unconditional promise made to King David, establishing an eternal royal dynasty and kingdom through his lineage.
- David's ruling authority and throne will endure forever. His descendants will rule indefinitely.
- Fulfills God's promise of a great name (royal dynasty).



32

Psalms and God's Salvation

Sinai	Zion
The Pentateuch (Torah) is the first five books of the Bible.	The psalms are arranged in five books. The psalms are the "Torah of David."
The Torah is the Law of the Mosaic Covenant.	The Psalms are the new Torah, the Law of the Davidic Covenant.
Mount Sinai is closely associated with Moses – establishes the 12 tribes, a holy nation of Israel.	Mount Zion is closely associated with King David – the temple and an international kingdom.
The Mosaic Law and 10 Commandments are given at Sinai in silence.	The Psalms become the center of hymns and praise at Zion. There is constant praise 24/7.
Key: Moses and the Law of the Torah are closely associated.	Key: David and the psalms are closely associated.

33

God's Plan of Salvation

- **God's Family in Decline:** Following King Solomon, Israel experiences a civil war and begins a 400-year decline leading to exile (like Adam and Eve removed from the garden).
- The Jewish people look to place their hope in a new righteous King, a new era, and building a new temple.
- God's family experiences decline.



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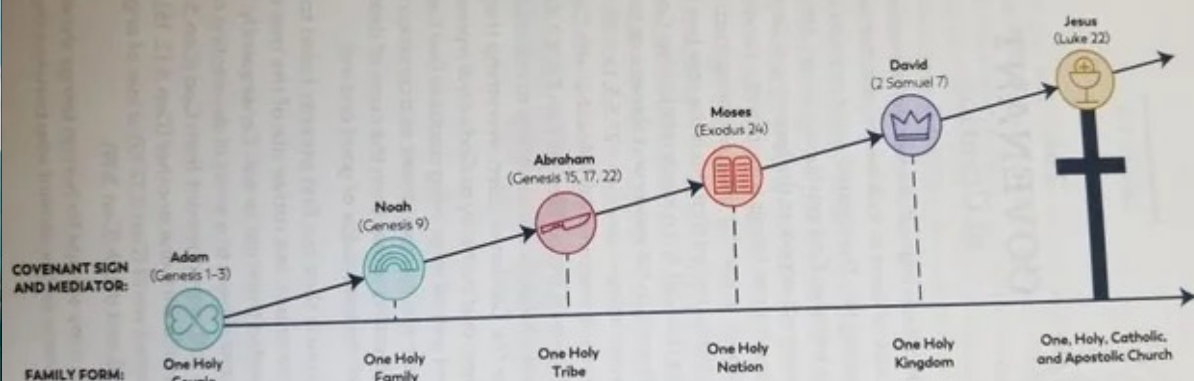
God's Plan of Salvation

- **Jesus Christ:** Our Lord establishes the definitive, eternal covenant through His paschal mystery – His life, death, Resurrection, and ascension.
- The new covenant is celebrated and perpetuated in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass.
- Fulfills God's promise of worldwide blessing.



35

Covenant Structure of Salvation History



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Psalms Fun Facts

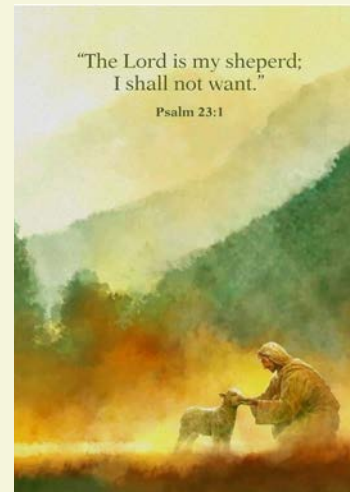
- Scholars divide the psalms into five smaller books to mirror the books of the Torah.
- Psalm 90 is widely considered the oldest psalm, written by Moses around 1450 – 1500 BC.
- Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible, containing only two verses.



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Psalms Fun Facts

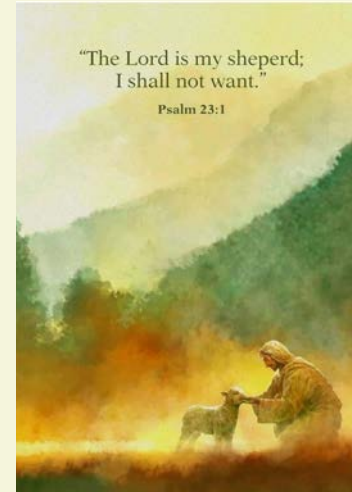
- Psalm 118 is the exact middle chapter of the entire Bible.
- Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses, where groups of eight verses start with each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.



38

Psalms Fun Facts

- About 40 percent of the psalms are laments, expressing deep sorrow, pain, and honesty alongside joyful praise.
- In the Jewish tradition, the Book of Psalms is called *Tehillim*, which means "Praises."
- The psalms are the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament, and the most commonly used in the Church's lectionary.



39

Five Books of the Psalter

Book	Explanation
Book I	Introduction and Laments of David (Ps 1-41)
Book II	The Rise of the Davidic Kingdom (Ps 42-72)
Book III	Fall of the Davidic Kingdom (Ps 73-89)
Book IV	Reflections on the Fall of the Kingdom and Exile (Ps 90-106)
Book V	Rejoicing and Restoration of the Temple (Ps 107-150)

40

Saints' Quotes

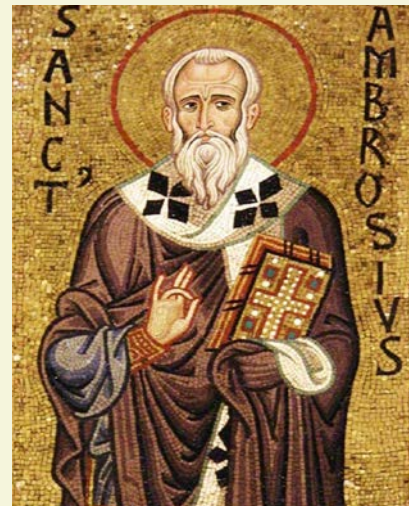
- **St. Basil the Great**: A psalm drives away demons, summons the help of angels, furnishes arms against nightly terrors, and gives respite from daily toil.
- **St. Augustine**: The Psalms echo with the voice of Christ and His Church; for if the whole Christ speaks, He speaks in the psalms, whether He speaks in the head or in the body.



41

Saints' Quotes

- **St. Ambrose**: While all of Scripture breathes the divine Spirit, the book of the Psalms is like a wondrous medical clinic for the soul, where we find a remedy suited to every spiritual wound.
- **St. Athanasius**: Whereas most of Scripture merely speaks to us, the book of the Psalms acts as a mirror for the person who sings them. He reads and perceives his own emotions, and he receives them and utters them as if they were written specifically for him.



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Next Time

- We will look at the first book of the Psalter.
- **Book I**: Psalms 1 – 41
 - Nearly all attributed to King David
 - Book begins at a low point
 - Dominated by individual lament or personal struggle
 - David running from Saul, and wrestling with sin and sickness

