

Psalms of Thanksgiving

Although some psalms of petition end with a thanksgiving, there are some psalms that express this sentiment almost entirely, alongside fulsome praise of God.

Again, some reflect the collective thanks of the nation (Ps.33, 65-68, 107) others the joy of the individual (Ps.18 which is the same as 2 Sam.22 - David's thanksgiving for his rescue from Saul, 21 - a King's coronation thanksgiving, 30, 34, 40, 116, 118, 124, 138, 144). **We**, too, must never forget to give thanks to God.

Psalms 65: "Praise is rightfully yours .. vows to you shall be rightfully fulfilled, for you answer prayer"

Psalms 66: "Sing psalms to the glory of his name ..I will bring burnt offerings to your house, I will fulfil my vows .. that I pronounced when I was in trouble"

Psalms 138: "I thank you Yahweh with all my heart, for you have listened to me"

Royal Psalms (e.g. Ps.2, 21, 72, 110)

These psalms were composed for the enthronement of the King. They have a clear Messianic character which caused them to be quoted in the New Testament.

Psalms 2: I myself have anointed my King on Zion my holy mountain .. You are my son, today I have fathered you"

Psalms 110: "Yahweh declared to my Lord, take your seat at my right hand, I have made your enemies your footstool .. You are a priest for ever, of .. Melchizedek"

Pilgrimage Psalms (Ps.84, 95, 120-134)

These reflect the joy of the people as they travel to the Temple for the great feasts. Are **we** equally joyful before we worship?

Psalms 122: "I rejoiced that they said to me let us go to the house of Yahweh .. I will pray for your well-being"

Psalms 134: "Praise Yahweh .. all who minister in the house of the Lord .. lift up your hands in the sanctuary"



Psalms Praising the Law (e.g. Ps.1, 37, 49, 119)

Real peace only comes by following God's will and obeying the commandments

Psalms 1: "Blessed is he who rejects the path of sinners, who delights in the Law"

Psalms 119: "Blessed are they whose way is blameless, who walk in the Law"

Psalms Remembering Israel's History (e.g. Ps.78, 105 - 106)

Psalms 78: "My people, listen to my teaching .. unfold the mysteries of the past ..what our ancestors told us .. be sure to tell their own children ..put their trust in God, never forgetting his deeds.. always keeping his commandments"

Our Catholic Faith

9. An Introduction to the Book of Psalms

- Singing to God



Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think the psalms were so important in the life of the Jewish people?
2. How are some of the psalms used by the New Testament writers?
3. What, in particular, do we learn from psalms 8 and 23?

What are Psalms?

A Psalm is a religious lyrical poem that is meant to be sung to music i.e. as a song or hymn. In ancient times, the music would be from any combination of harp, lyre, flute, lute, trumpet, cymbals, pipes (Ps.150). There are several examples of biblical psalms



e.g. the Song of Moses after the crossing of the Red Sea (Exod.15), the Song of Deborah and Barak after the victory over Jabin, the king of Canaan (Judges 5). But, the penchant of the Israelite for their use is most clearly seen in the collection of 150 psalms that make up the Book of Psalms. As Psalm 92 states **“It is good to give thanks to Yahweh, to make music for your name Most High”**

Types of Psalms

There are many different ways in which the psalms may be grouped: principally these may be according to their core **content** or their special **use**

Grouping According to Content: These are mainly as follows:

1. Psalms of Praise to God (and the Kingship of Yahweh)
2. Psalms of Petition and Penance (Community or Individual)
3. Psalms of Thanksgiving

Grouping According to Use

1. Royal Occasions
2. Pilgrimage to the Temple
3. To Teach Appreciation of the Law
4. To Teach and Recall Israel’s History with God



Psalms of Praise (e.g. Ps.46 - 48, 93, 96 - 100, 103 - 106, 135 - 136, 145 - 150)

These are beautiful songs expressing man’s wonderment at God and his marvellous works **“It is good to sing psalms to our God, how pleasant to praise him”** (Ps.147). They are a lesson to **us all** that God should always and everywhere be worshipped **for his own sake**, that is what we were all created for.

Psalm 8: “Yahweh our Lord, how majestic your name .. I look up at your heavens shaped by your fingers, at the moon and the stars, what is humanity that you spare it a thought, the child of Adam that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god”

Psalm 33: “Shout for joy you upright .. give thanks to Yahweh on the lyre .. sing to him a new song .. by the word of Yahweh the heavens were made, by the breath of his mouth all their array .. let all who dwell in the world revere him”

Within this category of psalms are some that may have celebrated the **Kingship of Yahweh** on special feast days (Ps. 47, 93, 96-99)

Psalm 96: “Sing a new song to Yahweh, sing to Yahweh all the earth .. worthy of all praise.. let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad .. Yahweh is King!”

Some psalms simply express praise and confidence in God

Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd there is nothing I shall want ..though I should walk in the valley of darkness there is nothing I should fear .. goodness and love will follow me .. you prepare a table for me .. I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever”



Psalms of Petition and Penance

These are songs pleading for God’s help and assistance in the face of some trial or disaster. These often include an expression of confidence in God’s mercy and either a plea of **innocence** or an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and **guilt**.

A. Community Petitions (e.g. Ps. 60, 74, 80)

Psalm 44: “Yet now you have abandoned us and humiliated us .. you hand us over like sleep to the slaughter .. all this has befallen us though we had not forgotten you nor been disloyal to your covenant .. wake, Lord .. do not abandon us for good .. ransom us as your faithful love demands”

Psalm 106: A national confession of guilt when in exile in Babylon, asking for forgiveness “Like our ancestors we have sinned, we have acted wickedly, guiltily .. save us, Yahweh our God, gather us from amongst the nations”.

B. Individual Petitions

Some are prayers for help while pleading innocence (Ps.7 below, 17, 26, 35) some acknowledge guilt (Ps.25 below, 38, 51, 130, 143, but the majority just reflect total reliance and trust when making their prayer for assistance (Ps.3 - 5, 13, 22 below, 28, 31, 42 - 43, 54 - 57, 59, 63 - 64, 69 - 71, 86, 102, 140 - 143).

Psalm 7: Yahweh, my God, I take refuge in you, save me from all my pursuers and rescue me .. judge me, Yahweh, as my uprightness and integrity deserve”

Psalm 25: “Adoration I offer, Yahweh, to you my God. Let not my enemies gloat over me .. do not hold my youthful sins against me .. let my sin, though great, be forgiven .. relieve the distress of my heart, spare a glance for my misery and pain”

Psalm 22: quoted several time in the Passion narrative “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me .. he trusted himself to Yahweh, let Yahweh set him free .. do not hold aloof for trouble is upon me and no-one to help me .. I can count every one of my bones .. they divide my garments and cast lots for my clothes .. Yahweh come quickly to my help”

