

Lent with Jesus: Praying the Psalms

Meeting together these 7 weeks will hopefully help each of us experience our union with Jesus Christ and his solidarity with us, His Body, as we study and pray the **7 penitential Psalms of Lent** under his leadership. *Picture Jesus as our worship leader.*

I started praying Psalms using the Daily Office lectionary in 1999, when I continued my following of Christ (which had started in 1965) in the Anglican way. In brief, at **first** I looked for all the ways each psalm was—right, all **about me**—my thoughts, feelings, and experiences that seemed like the psalmist's. I found comfort in finding Psalm verses and images that resonated with my own life experience. I learned from the psalmist's example, and God mercifully blessed my self-referenced reading and praying of the Psalms. Graciously, God understands that human pain compresses hearts before it enlarges them.

My psalm journey continued as I read and studied psalms in their Old Testament context of God's covenant with Israel, in Torah and tabernacle, in Kingship and Temple. I learned more about Hebrew lyric poetry, its parallelism and imagery, and its literary forms.

I learned that Jesus and serious Jews of his time had the whole Psalter memorized and that Jesus' words and the whole New Testament were sprinkled with quotes from Psalms. I began to bring my deepening understanding of my life "*in Christ*," my union with him, to my reading and praying of Psalms. Birds live in the air, fish live in the water, and Christians live *in Christ*. Not only does Jesus live in us ("...Christ in you, the hope of glory," Col 1:27), but we also live *in him*. Our intimate spiritual living union with Christ is mentioned repeatedly in the New Testament. We are united with him, incorporated into him. *We do not pray on our own; we pray in Christ and he prays in us.*

If he takes us with him in his prayer, if we are privileged to pray along with him, if he lets us accompany him on his way to God and teaches us to pray, then we are free from the agony of prayerlessness. But that is precisely what Jesus Christ wants to do. He wants to pray with us and have us pray with him, so that we may be confident and glad that God hears us.

(Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*, p. 11)

Most recently, as I consider how Jesus prayed these psalms in his earthly life, I hear his voice in them now. Praying the psalms in the Risen Christ not only empowers us to pour out our hearts to God, but also Jesus, by His Spirit, takes our disordered hearts and begins reordering them by His desires, yearnings, tears, and joys as *He leads us in praying with Him and His body*. Yes, Jesus our Lord and Savior leads us and is in solidarity with us even in our confession and

repentance. He showed this when he insisted on being baptized by John even though he was without sin. (John 3:14-15)

Lent is a penitential season of repentance, of changing and turning away from whatever doesn't fit with God's ways for us. It's a reminder of our mortality and limited humanity. It's a time of humble realization of and regret for our thinking, speaking, and acting that doesn't make space for God or acknowledge God's sovereign presence. (See the BCP pp. 542-552 for liturgy.)

Lent is a journey that leads to Easter, to the celebration of Christ's resurrection, His victory that makes death a passage (a Passover, a *Pascha*) into the Kingdom of Heaven. Lent is a time to ask God, "How is my discipleship, my apprenticeship to Jesus, progressing?" We slow down in Lent to allow God to draw us to know and love him, to soften our hearts and open them for communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Praying the psalms, especially the **7 penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143)** for Lenten repentance, keeps our necessary dialogue with God open and makes a space for us to listen and to respond to His Word with our own laments, complaints, confessions, cries for help, and praises for assurance of His protecting, guiding Presence.

Let's pray these psalms in Christ, with and for one another, modeling Jesus' solidarity with human suffering and sin.