



By Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers

Wellsprings of Prayer

Living Our Ordination Promise in the Psalms

“Do you resolve to maintain and deepen the spirit of prayer that is proper to your way of life and, in keeping with this spirit and what is required of you, to celebrate faithfully the Liturgy of the Hours with and for the people of God and, indeed, for the whole world?” To this question, while standing in front of the bishop at our diaconal ordination, we answered “I do.” In doing so, we promised to pray the Divine Office as part of our commitment to the Church as public and permanent icons of Christ the Servant.

If you were not accustomed to using the breviary before formation, praying Morning and Evening Prayer can be challenging – especially during certain liturgical seasons, and on feast days and solemnities. We are accustomed to hearing the responsorial psalms at every Mass, but praying with them every day is a different matter.

When I prayed the psalms with Benedictine monks as a fourteen year-old high school freshman, it made an immediate connection to my soul. I felt them...deeply. They spoke to me personally and I have been praying them ever since.

Even though the Psalms are over two-thousand years old, “they retain a freshness that enables them to speak with poignancy to each succeeding generation, drawing those who read them into the quest for the deepest purpose of human life: to abide in the presence of God...The Psalms provide a way into that unique chamber of the heart where one stands most free and open before God” (The Revised Grail Psalms: A Liturgical Psalter, xii-xiii).

If you have been praying the Liturgy of the Hours for a while, you will begin to “hear” the psalms differently. The integration of life experiences over the years, together with the feelings and emotions they evoke, become palpable in the Psalms and we begin to see ourselves and our story in each strophe. The Psalms be-

come facilitators of a lifelong spiritual journey of deepening faith and intimacy with Christ and the Church.

Composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and ultimately pointing to Jesus (“All that is written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled,” Luke 24:44), the Psalms are poems or songs of praise (in Hebrew, they are referred to as “A Book of Sung Praises”). They have “a

musical quality that...even when a psalm is recited and not sung or is said silently in private, its musical character should govern its use.” (General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours, 103) The purpose of the praying the psalms, then, is to raise the mind and heart to God.

*The Psalms become facilitators
of a lifelong spiritual journey...
with Christ and the Church*

Here are a few helpful insights that may deepen your love of the Divine Office in fulfillment of your ordination promise:

1. The psalms should become wellsprings of prayer. Take time to memorize your favorite psalms.
2. When praying, recite the psalms slowly and prayerfully, or pause during private recitation to reflect on a particularly powerful strophe that spoke personally to you.
3. “It is by singing the Psalms, by meditating on them, loving them, using them in all the incidents of our spiritual life, that we enable ourselves to enter more deeply into that active participation in the liturgy, which is the key to the deepest and truest interior life.” (Thomas Merton, *Praying the Psalms*, 9)

The Psalms intimately connect us to the heart of God. Through these powerful prayers of praise and thanksgiving, let us continually seek the face of the Lord and yearn for him. **TD**

DEACON HAROLD BURKE-SIVERS serves at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Portland, Oregon.