

2026-05-10: Importance of the Psalms (Liturgical Theology)

Notes

- How do we answer the "vain repetitions" accusation
 - We value personal prayers
 - But if we leave our personal prayers to ourselves, we will find that we are focused on earthly things and rarely on heavenly or spiritual things
 - The Church gives us the prayers for spiritual things to pray ON TOP of the personal prayers
 - The point of the Lord's words here is to attack the hypocrisy
 - The key word is "vain" not repetitions
 - "vain" = mindless babbling, empty words
 - And He continues by saying "In this manner, therefore pray..." and then gives us a prayer to repeat
- Is the Lord's Prayer a model, or something we repeat? Prayer should be natural not formulaic?
 - Didache Chapter 8
 - Let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week; but ye shall fast on the fourth day, and the preparation day (Friday).
 - Neither pray ye as the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, so pray ye: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us this day our daily (needful) bread. And forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (or, from evil). For Thine is the power and the glory for ever."
 - Pray thus thrice a day.
 - Christ, Himself, repeated prayers
 - Matthew 26:39-44
 - "So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words."
 - If repetition is bad or the problem... He wouldn't have done that!
- Real relationships are more "spontaneous" and not "repetitive" (Romans 8 - Pray by the Spirit, Luke 18 - Pharisee vs Tax Collector)
 - The problem with the Pharisee was his arrogance and self-righteousness... not that he used "ritual prayers"
 - Someone asking God for something isn't going to ask once... he's going to keep asking until he gets what he is praying for

- Parable of the persistent widow - the purpose of the parable is to continue to pray with persistence without losing heart (Luke 18)
 - Persistent friend (Luke 11 - right after the model prayer)
- Repetition is how the heart learns
 - If you love someone, you don't say "I love you" one time and that's it... you keep saying "I love you" every day but the important part is that it's from the heart
- Why did the Church specifically choose the Book of Psalms for daily personal prayer?
 - Christ prayed the Psalms
 - Matthew 27:46 - on the Cross "Eloi Eloi Lama Sebachthanee" (Psalm 22:1)
 - Luke 23:46 - on the Cross "In your hands, I commit My Spirit" (Psalm 31:5)
 - Psalms is the book the Lord quoted the most
 - Christ also attended Synagogue and the worship in the Synagogue was using psalms in the prayer
 - After the Last Supper "When they had sung a hymn, they went out" - Psalms of Hillel
 - Apostles Prayed the Psalms
 - Acts 4:24-26 - Prayer for Boldness
 - James 5:13 - If anyone is cheerful, let him sing psalms (commandment in Scripture!)
 - Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19 - teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
 - 1 Corinthians 14:26 - How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm
- Psalms as a spiritual weapon against demons and darkness
 - David, as a young shepherd, was a musician and would sing the psalms
 - When King Saul had distressing spirits, his servants would look for someone to play the harp to release him
 - "And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play *it* with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him." (1 Samuel 16:23)
 - We are in constant warfare against demons... they are always fighting us and the Psalms are a weapon against them
 - Fr Joshua tells a story when he was young in Egypt and there was a priest with the gift of exorcism and they brought him someone who was demon possessed. So he said "before we start praying for this man, I want everyone to take an Agpeya and pray the psalms - so that when the demon leaves this man, he is afraid to approach any of you." and Abouna rushed to grab the nearest Agpeya
- Fixed times of prayer
 - St Paul commands to pray without ceasing... but how many can start here? Most people forget to pray at all, let alone without ceasing
 - The fixed times are a starting point... when I excel in them, it will start to push my unceasing prayer
 - The routine begins the relationship, and the rhythm becomes the heartbeat of unceasing prayer

- Acts 3:1 - Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*.
- Acts 10:9 - The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour.
- How does repetition help someone in recovering from addiction
 - Psalms create structure
 - Addiction thrives in CHAOS - having structure for prayer; praying in certain hours - this creates STRUCTURE
 - Chaos - lose routine, lose sleep rhythm
 - Alcoholic doesn't say "I'm gonna start drinking at 6pm..." no - whenever he feels lonely, he drinks
 - Pornography doesn't say "I'm gonna do it from 4pm-4:15pm" no - whenever he feels stressed, he does it
 - Video game addiction - missing meals, missing sleep, etc.
 - Pills, marijuana, etc. - binging some days, crashing some days... no pattern; no structure
 - CHAOS moves inside the person
 - Chaos removes accountability - do whatever you want to do whenever you want to do it
 - Psalms give words to express emotions
 - Addicts have emotions that are difficult to express so instead of expressing, they try and numb the emotions (with using, watching, drinking, etc.)
 - Fear of relapse, fear of exposure, fear of the future
 - Psalm 34: "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears."
 - Psalm 27: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"
 - On the one hand, these are the words of God - the Holy Spirit inspired these words, and the Holy Spirit will work in the person saying these words
 - On the other hand, these are the words of King David - so I'm not the first one to feel this fear, and actually God answered his prayer and delivered him from this fear
 - Anger at themselves, anger at God, anger at people around them
 - Guilt
 - Shame
 - Hopeless
 - Psalm 50: "Create in my a clean heart, O God" - "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." - "Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me."
 - God can cleanse me! He can forgive me!
 - Embarrassment
 - There are many who desire to pray, and they stand to pray and realize they have nothing to say... they have the desire, they took the initiative and came up empty... "God, I'm sorry, forgive me..." run out of words. Psalms!
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- Repetition of the Psalms rewires the heart and breaks old habits
 - Addiction builds mental pathways - neuroplasticity
 - When I repeat the psalms, I am rewiring my brain
 - Recovery is not just abstaining from bad habits, but to make changes in multiple areas - difficult, but essential
 - Building new habits
 - Breaking patterns
 - Before I look at social media I'm going to pray the psalms. Out of habit, I forget... but as soon as I remember, put the social media down and pray the psalm. It's not too late
 - Someone who drinks at night... he starts to say I'm gonna pray 11th hour in the evening once it starts to get dark. After some time of doing this, night becomes the time when I pray, not the time when I drink
 - Certain times I get triggered... before that time comes, I will pray psalms

Resources:

- Healing Power of Psalms: Repetitive Prayer that Breaks Addiction
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VI42osHVclY&t=264s> - Fr Joshua Guirguis

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