

Catholic Faith Corner

Understanding, Teaching, and Living the Faith

Sea of Galilee at Sunrise

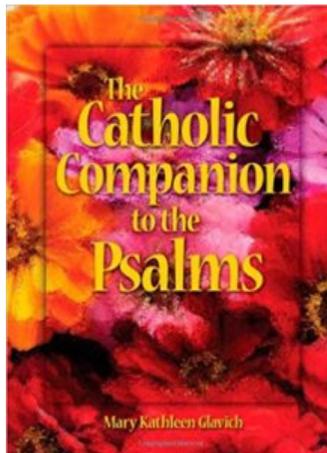


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Why Pray a Psalm at Mass?

by KATHLEEN GLAVICH, SND on [OCTOBER 18, 2017](#)
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At every Mass we pray or sing a psalm after the first reading. A psalm is a prayer-song taken from the Old Testament and attributed to King David, who, as you know, played the harp. I thought of blogging about psalms today because we are in the month of the Holy Rosary, a devotion that is rooted in the Psalms. Originally people prayed the 150 psalms. Having them memorized was even the requirement for joining some communities. The many illiterate people were at a disadvantage. But then some creative person started praying 150 Our Fathers as a substitute for the psalms and thus began the paternoster beads, the forerunner to our rosaries. The psalms

were an integral part of Hebrew worship and the prayers of Jesus and Mary. They are also appropriate for our worship and our personal prayer life. Because they express our every emotion, we can find a psalm to pray when we are glad, sad, mad, or have been bad. Being in Scripture, the ultimate source of the Psalms is God. They are his love songs to us and the songs he wishes us to sing to him. They contain such tender verses as these: "If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of



Mary Kathleen Glavich, SND

I'm a Sister of Notre Dame, of Chardon, Ohio, the author of seventy-plus books on religious education and spirituality, including a novel, *The Fisherman's Wife: The Gospel According to St. Peter's Spouse*. I enjoy giving talks and am a pastoral associate at St. Dominic Church.

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the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast” (Psalm 139:9-10).

Basically, the psalms are all prayers of praise. When we pray them, we do what we were created to do: glorify God. Many psalms are laments, that is, they look to God for help in a trying situation. They are timeless as they complain about sickness, old age, and a friend’s betrayal. In Psalm 13, we bewail, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” and repeat “How long, O Lord?” three times. This reminds me of Pope Francis’s advice that in prayer we should talk to God as our friend and boldly demand, “Do something!” What if we personally are not in trouble? Why pray a lament? Because when we pray, we pray with and in the name of the universal Church, we can pray on behalf of someone who is in trouble or a dire world situation.

Some psalms might feel uncomfortable praying certain “cursing” psalms. The psalms grew out of a violent, warring culture, and so some call down God’s wrath on enemies. This kind of language repels us peace-loving Christians. But we can take “enemies” to be our sins and evil tendencies, evil in the world, Satan, or a dread disease. And then, as the Jewish people did, we look trustingly to God to conquer those enemies.

The psalms are Hebrew poetry, an aspect I appreciate as a former English teacher. They are filled with exquisite figures of speech: God lovingly gather and saves our tears in a bottle, he knit me together in my mother’s womb, and as a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for God. Even the curses are creative: “Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime” (Psalm 58:8). The psalms are full of repetition, which make them singable. Many of our hymns are psalms set to music. Often Hebrew poetry repeats lines using synonyms or repeats ideas in different words.

Dorothy Day once said, “My strength returns to me with my morning cup of coffee and reading the psalms.” May you too find strength in claiming the psalms as your own!

If you would like more information on the psalms, I recommend my book *The Catholic Companion to the Psalms*.

What is your favorite psalm or psalm verse? Why? When do you like to pray it?



About Sister Kathleen Glavich, SND

Jesus ordered us to make disciples of all nations and teach them. Mary Kathleen, a Sister of Notre Dame from Chardon, Ohio, responds to this call through writing, speaking, giving retreats, and teaching. Her motto, adopted from Eddie Doherty’s gravesite, is “All my words for the Word!”

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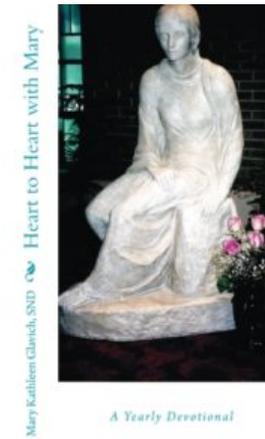
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Featured Book

Totally Catholic! A Catechism for Kids and Their Parents and Teachers

Do you wish you had a simple, child-friendly summary of what Catholics believe? This book took first place in the Association of Catholic Publishers awards 2014 in the category of Children's Books. It can be purchased from Pauline Books and Media or from me. (\$14.95)

A Heavenly Book

Do you believe in angels? Most people do. The Catholic Companion to Angels offers heavenly facts about these majestic creatures, confirming that you can turn to them for help. Uniquely, The Angels comes with three covers (statue, stained-glass, or painting). Choose the one you like best.

Available from ACTA Publications and me.
(\$10.00)

My First Novel!

The Fisherman's Wife is the story of St. Peter's spouse, the long-suffering but delightful woman who puts up with Peter and his obsession with the itinerant preacher named Jesus. Through her we meet Peter, Jesus, and other biblical characters. In Capernaum she witnesses Jesus' healings and hears his words. The book is based on the Gospels, legends, and what is known about first-century Jewish women. The rest is sheer imagination. Order directly from me FOR AN AUTOGRAPHED COPY at kglavich@ndec.org.

A Bit of Humor

A Slow Student During indoor recess, the third and fourth graders were playing school. Taking part in the game, the teacher, Sister Janet, sat at a child's desk. Adam, who was playing the teacher, came up to her and asked, "And just how many years have you been kept back?" (from "Why Is Jesus in the Microwave?")

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