Come into the Word
with sarah christmyer

PRAYING THE SEVEN PENITENTIAL PSALMS

Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143[1]

The seven penitential psalms have for centuries provided Christians with a powerful source of prayer and reflection during Lent. Together they invite us to recognize our sin; express our sorrow to God and ask His forgiveness; and experience the healing touch of His merciful love.

The traditional practice is to pray all of these Psalms together, either daily or on Fridays. Another practice, because there are seven of them, is to pray one each Friday (or one daily each week leading up to Holy Week). It's also possible to pray them for intentions related to the seven capital ("deadly") sins. Following are some suggested ways to pray:

When praying all seven psalms together:

- Begin with an antiphon such as this:

  Incline Thine ear, O Lord, and show us mercy, for we are sinners before Thee.

- Say the *Glory Be* between each psalm:

  Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

- Close with the antiphon you began with.

When praying just one psalm:

- Begin with an antiphon such as the one above, and end with the *Glory Be.*

To pray these psalms for intentions related to the seven capital sins:

- Substitute the appropriate antiphon (see list, page 2).

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[1] The Septuagint (Greek) numbering of these psalms, which is followed in some Bible translations, is 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142. In modern Catholic Bibles that follow the Masoretic (Hebrew) numbering system, the Greek numbers may be shown in brackets next to the Hebrew numbers as in the list above. If you are not sure which your Bible follows, check to see whether Psalm 50 or 51 begins "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love." That is the penitential psalm known as the "Miserere."

To incorporate *lectio divina* into your prayer and better recognize where you have sinned, express your sorrow, and ask forgiveness:

Pray: *Incline Thine ear, O Lord, and show me mercy, for I am a sinner before Thee.*

1. **Read** the Psalm all the way through several times. At least once, read it out loud.
2. **Reflect** on the same psalm: read it slowly, lingering where your heart draws you.
3. Consider these questions, writing your answers in a journal if desired:
   - What stands out to you in this Psalm?
   - What do you hear God saying to you, personally?
4. **Respond:** What will you do about what you have heard? Pray about it.
5. **Rest** in his presence.

Close with the *Glory Be*.

To pray with these psalms for intentions related to the seven capital sins:

Say the following antiphons before the psalms as indicated:

- **Psalm 6** *From the sin of pride, O Lord, deliver me.*
- **Psalm 32 [31]** [1] *From the sin of avarice, O Lord, deliver me.*
- **Psalm 38 [37]** *From the sin of envy, O Lord, deliver me.*
- **Psalm 51 [50]** *From the sin of wrath, O Lord, deliver me.*
- **Psalm 102 [101]** *From the sin of lust, O Lord, deliver me.*
- **Psalm 130 [129]** *From the sin of gluttony, O Lord, deliver me.*
- **Psalm 143 [142]** *From the sin of sloth (acedia), O Lord, deliver me.*

Close with the *Glory Be*.

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