

The Revised Grail Psalms

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A Liturgical Psalter

Prepared by
the Benedictine Monks of Conception Abbey

With a Foreword by
Francis Cardinal George, OMI

With an Introduction by
Abbot Gregory J. Polan, OSB



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The Revised Grail Psalms:
A Liturgical Psalter—Gift Edition

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CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS

Prot. n. 172/09/L

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

At the request of His Eminence Cardinal Francis Eugene George, Archbishop of Chicago, President of the Conference of Bishops of the United States of America, in a letter dated January 28, 2009, by virtue of the faculty given to this Congregation by the Supreme Pontiff BENEDICT XVI, we gladly approve and confirm the text of the English-language liturgical Psalter, as it appears in the appended copy, to be used in all future liturgical books.

In printed editions, mention must be made of the *recognitio* granted by this Congregation. Moreover, two copies of the printed text should be forwarded to this Congregation.

All things to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the offices of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, March 19, 2010.

✠ Antonio Card. Cañizares Llovera
Prefect

✠ Joseph Augustine Di Noia, OP
Archbishop-Secretary

FOREWORD

Francis Cardinal George, OMI
Archbishop of Chicago
President, United States Conference of
Catholic Bishops, 2007–2010

On December 4, 1963, the Second Vatican Council issued the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*. In no. 24, the Liturgy Constitution reminds us of the paramount importance of Scripture in the celebration of the liturgy and the need “to promote that warm and living love for Scripture to which the venerable tradition of both Eastern and Western Rites gives testimony.”

With the introduction of the vernacular, the need arose for a faithful and singable translation of the Psalms that could be used as the faithful’s response to the proclamation of the word of God. One of the early texts embraced by the Church for use in the sacred liturgy was the 1963 edition of *The Grail Psalms*, which relied on the translation of the Psalms into French in *La Bible de Jérusalem* (1953). Father Joseph Gelineau’s original work, which set these French texts to chant tones, became the basis for the English version of the Psalms produced in Great Britain by the Ladies of the Grail, a secular religious institute.

While the 1963 Grail Psalter had many virtues, it also had some weaknesses. First, it did not have access to the Latin critical text of Scripture commissioned by Pope Paul VI and known as the *Nova Vulgata*, which was published in 1979. Second, it sometimes

sacrificed accuracy of translation in order to accommodate the musical settings, at times becoming more of a paraphrase than a literal translation. Third, the translation failed at times to preserve the rich imagery and beauty of the Hebrew Scriptures.

As a result of these weaknesses, a revision of the 1963 Psalter became necessary. Furthermore, various sung versions of the psalms that were more paraphrases than faithful translations had been introduced into the liturgy by bishops' conferences in several English-speaking nations to replace the texts of the psalms found in the Lectionary. This situation led the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to propose a thorough revision of the 1963 Grail Psalter that would be based on both the original Hebrew text and the *Nova Vulgata*, and would also be in harmony with the norms of translation found in *Liturgiam Authenticam* (2001).

The revised translation of The Grail Psalms presented now to the Church is more accurate, poetic, and singable. I am confident that communities and individuals will benefit from incorporating these psalms into their daily and liturgical prayer. The Psalms are truly the Church's prayer book, which Jesus himself prayed during his life on earth. Hence, they ought to be an integral part of every Catholic's prayer life.

The Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)* explained the value of reading and praying the Old Testament:

Now the books of the Old Testament, in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by

Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men. . . . These same books, then, give expression to a lively sense of God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers, and in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. Christians should receive them with reverence. (no. 15)

The “wonderful treasury of prayers” mentioned above refers to the Psalms, the Church’s first prayer book. Pope John Paul II explains the efficacy of praying the Psalms by reminding us that

in singing the Psalms, the Christian feels a sort of harmony between the Spirit present in the Scriptures and the Spirit who dwells within him through the grace of Baptism. More than praying in his own words, he echoes those ‘sighs too deep for words’ mentioned by St. Paul (cf. Rom. 8:26), with which the Lord’s Spirit urges believers to join in Jesus’ characteristic invocation: ‘Abba! Father!’ (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). (General Audience, April 4, 2001)

In his excellent book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Pope Benedict XVI says that among the various witnesses throughout Scripture to the singing of individuals and communities in the praise of God, the Book of Psalms becomes the proper source for understanding the importance of sung prayer in Christian worship. As our Holy Father says: “In their prayed poetry, the Psalms display the whole range of human experiences, which become prayer and song in the presence of God.” He then goes on to say: “Quite spontaneously, the Psalter becomes the prayer

book of the infant Church, which, with equal spontaneity, has become a Church that sings her prayers” (p. 139).

The Psalms are meant to be sung. The *General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours* makes this same point when it states:

The Psalms are not readings nor were they specifically composed as prayers, but as poems of praise. Though sometimes they may be proclaimed like a reading, nevertheless, because of their literary character, they are rightly called in Hebrew *tehillim*, that is, “songs of praise,” and in Greek *psalmoi*, “songs to be sung to the sound of the harp.” In all the Psalms there is a certain musical quality that determines the correct way of praying them. Therefore, though a psalm may be recited without being sung even by an individual in silence, its musical character should not be overlooked. (no. 103)

At his General Audience on Wednesday, March 28, 2001, Pope John Paul II gave an extended catechesis on the use of the Psalms in Christian prayer, especially in the Liturgy of the Hours, which he recommended that all Catholics pray. In fact, Pope John Paul II calls the Psalter the “ideal source of Christian prayer.” He then goes on to give various approaches to understanding the Psalms. As the pope says:

The first would consist in presenting their literary structure, their authors, their formation, the contexts in which they were composed. It would also be fruitful to read them in a way that emphasizes their poetic character, which sometimes reaches the highest levels of lyrical insight and symbolic expression. It would be no less interesting to go over the Psalms and consider

the various sentiments of the human heart expressed in them: joy, gratitude, thanksgiving, love, tenderness, enthusiasm, but also intense suffering, complaint, pleas for help and for justice, which sometimes lead to anger and imprecation. In the Psalms, the human being fully discovers himself. (no. 2)

While these approaches to understanding the Psalms have great value, the one approach that Pope John Paul II recommended above all was the way the religious meaning of the Psalms can be used in the prayer of Jesus' disciples to understand the mystery of Christ himself. As Pope John Paul II states: "The Fathers were firmly convinced that the Psalms speak of Christ. The risen Jesus, in fact, applied the Psalms to himself when he said to the disciples: "Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Lk 24:44). The Fathers add that in the Psalms Christ is spoken to or it is even Christ who speaks. In saying this, they were thinking not only of the individual person of Christ, but of the *Christus totus*, the total Christ, composed of Christ the Head and his members."

Since the early Christians found the mystery of Christ revealed in the Psalms, it is no surprise that they chose them to be an integral part of the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours. This Christological interpretation of the Psalms is undoubtedly an important way to release the full potential of these beautiful prayers. Yet, the Church is also open to supplementing these prayers with hymns and canticles, which are part of our Christian heritage.

Therefore, let me share with you the conclusion to Pope John Paul II's inspiring catechesis on the Psalms:

By praying the Psalms as a community, the Christian mind remembered and understood that it is impossible to turn to the Father who dwells in heaven without an authentic communion of life with one's brothers and sisters who live on earth. Moreover, by being vitally immersed in the Hebrew traditions of prayer, Christians learned to pray by recounting the *magnalia Dei*, that is, the great marvels worked by God both in the creation of the world and humanity, and in the history of Israel and the Church. This form of prayer drawn from Scripture does not exclude certain freer expressions, which will continue not only to characterize personal prayer, but also to enrich liturgical prayer itself, for example, with hymns and troparia. But *the Book of Psalms remains the ideal source of Christian prayer and will continue to inspire the Church in the new millennium.* (no. 5, italics added)

This new translation of the Psalter by the Benedictine Monks of Conception Abbey will provide the text for our sung prayer for years to come. It is a labor of love on their part and a gift to be cherished by us.

INTRODUCTION TO THE REVISED GRAIL PSALMS

Abbot Gregory J. Polan, OSB
Conception Abbey

The Songs of Israel—The Songs of the Church

In the late 1940s, Father Patrick Cummins, OSB, a monk of Conception Abbey and a scholar and translator of Scripture in his own right, wrote the following definition in the introduction to his own unpublished translation of the Book of Psalms:

What is a psalm? Is it a prayer? A rhythmic prayer? A hymn? An oriental hymn? A Semitic hymn? A Hebrew hymn? The answer to all these questions is an ascending Yes. Hence, if we look at human literature as an ascending pyramid, then that pyramid is crowned by the Psalter. Man is most godlike when he sings to God. And among those who sing to God the Hebrew psalmist stands highest. In universality of sentiment, in keenness of conception, in rhythm of speech, in beauty of imagery, the Hebrew singer has no rivals.

The 150 Psalms have been the prayer book of both Jews and Christians from their beginnings as peoples of faith and worship. We can surely affirm that Jesus himself used and prayed the Psalms during his mortal life—in synagogue or temple worship, at home, and in his own personal prayer. The old adage *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (the way of prayer is the way of belief) suggests how significant these 150 prayers have been in the formation

of communities of believers. The Book of Psalms has provided words to bring meaning to people's search for God in all of life's circumstances: in fear or joy, struggle or hope, pain or praise, despair or thanksgiving. Though some of these texts have been in use for more than two millennia, the prayers of the Psalter still 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 their God.

How often in this quest do we find ourselves struggling to find words to express the manifold movements of the human heart! The Psalms provide a way into that unique chamber of the heart where one stands most free and open before God. Often, to our initial surprise, we find ourselves thinking, "The words of the Psalms express my inmost thoughts and feelings better than I could myself. These words say what I am trying to say to God." The character of the Psalms is universal and classic, touching the human heart and giving voice to the most intimate motions of our souls before the One who is both transcendent and immanent, incomprehensible yet alarmingly close. The Psalms take us from the heights of praise to the depths of distress with language that always gives rise to a life-giving hope. They are inspired!

Rightly have the Psalms been called "a school of prayer." As these prayers give voice to so many of the experiences presented in the stories of the Bible, they come to us as words that have already been cried, shouted, and sung by people of faith throughout the centuries. Facing the human struggles of illness,

imminent death, bigger-than-life enemies, and warring nations, the psalmist gave expression to the fears and uncertainties that troubled the present situation. Similarly, the joy of victory, the gratitude for prayers answered, and wonder at the marvels of creation all become part of the praise that is lifted up to the God who rules the world and brings all life into being. The psalmist attests with unshakable conviction that the One and Almighty God who touches every movement of history and each human life is the focus of all praise, the healer of every ill, and the source of all blessing.

The Psalms, then, are the prayer book of the Bible. They express responses appropriate to every situation found on the pages of Sacred Scripture. One need merely look at the lectionary of the Church—or of the Synagogue, for that matter—to see this. In Christian congregations, after hearing and reflecting on the word of God proclaimed in the readings, we answer with the singing of a psalm: our response to the voice of God we have heard speaking to the Church. The words of the psalm echo the words of the reading, and then lift the heart in prayer. As God has spoken to the assembled congregation in the sacred word, so the people, through the psalm, respond to God. Such dialogue lies at the heart of each individual's relationship with God. The Psalms have been an instrument of that dialogue for as long as they have been prayed by people of faith.

To the superlative status of the Psalms as the pinnacle of human literary expression, we may add the observation that the different genres or literary forms found in them give expression to both the wide-ranging life situations and the varying moods

of the person of faith before God. The *hymn* lifts up praise to the God who has created the world and all its wonders. The *lament* brings before God the pain of alienation from God and neighbor, the struggle with doubts and fears, the anger that rises from disgrace and mistreatment, the fear of threatening illness and approaching death, the anguish of personal loss and a community's demise. The *thanksgiving* reminds the community that gratitude must be given to God who hears and answers those in need. The *wisdom* psalms reflect the insight and spiritual understanding that leads to a life lived with faith, hope, and love.

At the beginning of many psalms, unfamiliar expressions like “A *mitzmor* of David, with instrumental music, on the *gittith*,” may sometimes be found. The names of Korah (Psalms 42, 44–49) and Asaph (Psalm 50, 73–83), frequently attached to such expressions, identify two of the musical guilds of the Jerusalem Temple, where the Psalms were originally prayed. Many of these phrases tell us that the Psalms were intended to be sung, often with specified accompaniment. The Hebrew title for the Book of Psalms is *Sepher Tehillim*, which translates “A Book of Sung Praises,” further indicating the manner in which these prayers were to be rendered. Music clothes and elevates a text. It holds a special power to express what often cannot be accomplished in spoken words alone. It gives added expression that not only enhances the meaning but lifts the words to the level of inspiring prayer. This truth provides yet another insight into the profound and inspiring message of the Psalms. They were created to be sung, so as to give the words a second soul.

As songs of the early Church, the Psalms were not merely prayer, however; they were prophecy as well. In Luke's account of the risen Christ appearing and speaking to his disciples in Jerusalem, the text reads, "[Jesus] said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Lk 24:44 NAB). The authors of the New Testament use the Psalms extensively to speak of the mystery of Christ as the Messiah, the Anointed One.¹ For them, the Psalms held a key to understanding Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. And as the early Church began to develop its liturgical year, annually celebrating the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, the *messianic* psalms played a substantial role in unfolding that great mystery of faith.

In Praise of the 1963 Grail Psalms

Perhaps the most significant change to emerge from the Second Vatican Council, a change that touched the life of every worshiper in the Roman Catholic Church, was the restoration

¹ Several salient passages in which the New Testament authors quote the Psalms are: Mt 21:9//Mk 11:9//Lk 19:38//Jn 12:13 quotes Ps 118:26; Mt 21:42//Mk 12:10-11//Lk 20:17 quotes Ps 118:22-23; Mt 22:44//Mk 12:36//Lk 20:42-43 quotes Ps 110:1; Mt 27:46 quotes Ps 22:2; Jn 19:24 quotes Ps 22:19; Jn 19:36 quotes Ps 34:19; Acts 2:34-35 quotes Ps 110:1; Acts 4:25-26 quotes Ps 2:1-2; Heb 1:5 quotes Ps 2:7; Heb 1:6 quotes Ps 97:7; Heb 1:7 quotes Ps 104:4 (LXX); Heb 1:8 quotes Ps 45:7-8; Heb 1:10-12 quotes Ps 102:26-28; Heb 1:13 quotes Ps 110:1; Heb 2:6-7 quotes Ps 8:5-7.

of the vernacular to the liturgy. For centuries, Catholics had been used to hearing the Mass and the Divine Office read and sung in Latin. As the faithful began to celebrate the Mass in English, the need arose for new and inspiring texts and chants that would engage and encourage the participation of worshipers.

One of the most successful of these new liturgical texts was *The Grail Psalms*. Introduced in England in 1963 by the Ladies of the Grail (a secular religious institute), these texts had originally been translated into English from the Psalms of the French *Bible de Jérusalem*. Some of these had been effectively set to chant tones by Rev. Joseph Gelineau, SJ, who had collaborated on the revision of those texts for *La Bible de Jérusalem* in 1953. Father Gelineau had become interested in preparing French texts of the Psalms with reference to the ancient Hebrew rhythmic patterns—specifically for singing. His efforts had become known to Rev. Dom Albert Derzelle, OCSO, Prior of Caldey Abbey in Wales, who in turn made them familiar to the Ladies of the Grail, expressing the hope that Father Gelineau’s success might be reproduced in an English version of the Psalms. The Grail assembled a team consisting of two Hebrew scholars, Rev. Gall Schuon, OCSO, of Scourmont Abbey (Chimay, Belgium) and Rev. Hubert Richards, priest of the Archdiocese of Westminster; musical and liturgical expert Rev. Dom Gregory Murray, OSB, of Downside Abbey; and Philippa Craig of The Grail, whose task was to be (in her own words) the “Englishing” of the translation. The resulting texts were an instant success; they proved remarkably sensitive to the requirements of choral recitation and chanting, were adaptable to the exigencies of

different musical settings, and were expressed in words and phrases that were easy to comprehend. For priests, monks, nuns, and religious, whose lives included the daily celebration of Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours (usually referred to as the Divine Office in former times), such a translation of the Psalms in English was essential for a smooth transition to the new forms of the liturgy. Possessing all these qualities and more, the 1963 Grail Psalms became a primary vehicle for Christian prayer; over the years since, they have come to shape the worship and spiritual life of countless communities and individuals in the English-speaking world.

The liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council also encouraged people of every state in life—laity as well as priests and religious—to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. This was after all “the public prayer of the Church,” a repository of great spiritual riches from which all the faithful might benefit. The 1963 Grail Psalms opened the door for many people to become more familiar with the language and imagery of the Bible in a way that was inviting, enriching, and satisfying. As one colleague in the field of Scripture studies asserted, “Over the years of their use, The Grail Psalms have become to Catholics what the King James Version of the Bible has been to Protestant Churches.”

What are the qualities that distinguish the 1963 Grail Psalms? For many Catholics, who may have known little of the Bible in English, The Grail Psalms became an avenue into understanding and appreciating the whole of the Old Testament. Hearing of God, who was for his people both victorious warrior and gentle shepherd, the One who hears our single voice in prayer and who

calls us to live faithfully—this made clear how intimate was the relationship each person shares with God. Simple expressions like “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:11), “Create a pure heart in me, O God” (Ps 51:12), “Mercy and faithfulness have met, justice and peace have embraced” (Ps 85:11), “Friend and neighbor you have taken away; my one companion is darkness” (Ps 88:19), and “O Lord, you search me and you know me; you know my resting and my rising” (Ps 139:1–2a)—all these expressions continue to resonate in the hearts of many, bespeaking their own prayer to God. Such phrases lend themselves to effortless recall, becoming the very fabric of our interior life.

The “sprung rhythm” in which *The Grail Psalms* were composed made them easy to recite in common (that is, in a group setting) and easy to sing as chant.² Setting aside the stricter expectations of more formal poetic conventions, this rhythmic style imitates regular speech patterns more closely. Sprung rhythm possesses in vocal use something both natural and beautiful, a quality of simplicity and regularity one finds in reading through the lines of a Grail psalm. The very ebb and

² Sprung rhythm imitates natural speech patterns, designating a certain number of major accents per line, while having an unfixed number of unstressed syllables, with no more than four syllables between each foot. Gerard Manley Hopkins, the nineteenth-century British poet and Jesuit priest, is said to have coined the expression, calling it “the most natural of things” in spoken poetry. A series of psalm tones, based on the Gregorian and Ambrosian modes, were developed by Fr. Joseph Gelineau, SJ, allowing *The Grail Psalms* to be sung in a recitative manner that clothes the text inspiringly and respects its sprung rhythm.

flow of the lines make these psalms conducive to prayer and reflection. And importantly, these rhythmic patterns bear a notable similarity to those in which the Hebrew Psalms were composed—a similarity that is still evident today when they are prayed aloud in the Synagogue.

The language used in the 1963 Grail Psalms was easily understood by the person in the pew; no background in scriptural theology was needed to understand the general import of the text. At the same time, its poetic quality and beauty could also inspire the sensitive reader to ponder on further levels these simple yet profound and noble expressions of faith. It gave those who prayed it a language steeped in the inspired word, language for petition, praise, thanksgiving, confidence, hope, courage, faith, sorrow, human struggle before God, and love of God, neighbor, and creation. It gave people a form for their own internal conversation with God.

Why a Revision of the 1963 Grail Psalms?

The excellent qualities of the 1963 Grail Psalms might give rise to the question “Why make a revision?” There are several compelling reasons. As with anything that has generated such positive appreciation, there are also negative criticisms to be made. While the rhythmic quality and consistency in *The Grail Psalms* merits praise, the sometimes strict adherence to these rhythmic patterns too frequently forced its translators to *paraphrase* the text rather than translate it literally. Our revision maintains the sprung rhythm while at the same time striving for

a more authentic translation of many paraphrased lines, in keeping with the principles set forth in *Liturgiam Authenticam*, the document published in 2001 by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments as a guide for the translation of liturgical texts. Those who have prayed the 1963 Grail Psalms for many years will find great similarities in this revision, but they will also encounter some very different expressions of language in the newly translated elements.

Furthermore, considerable strides have been made in biblical scholarship since the 1950s and early 1960s, when The Grail translations were produced. We have come to a better understanding of many of the rhetorical devices used by the Hebrew psalmists, and these insights have been incorporated into the revision. Our understanding of the literary genres and patterns of thought found in the Psalms has also developed greatly; this too enables us to translate these ancient texts with greater accuracy.

And while building on the good and inspiring elements of the first edition has the potential to provide continuity for those who have prayed The Grail Psalms during these past five decades, we must be cognizant of those who will use this Psalter in the future as the Church continues to renew her liturgy. For the rising generations who will celebrate the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours, it is our genuine hope that this revision of The Grail Psalms will be an effective vehicle for prayer, contemplation, and interior renewal of heart. Even as it seeks to present more authentic renderings of the ancient texts, it also hopes to provide more inclusive forms of expression—forms that are often truer to the original Hebrew than were the 1963 Grail Psalms. We dare to hope that

the movement of Divine Providence is discernible in the fact that this translation was presented to several national episcopal conferences for consideration as a Liturgical Psalter just as the 2008 Synod on the Word and Its Teaching and Mission for the Church completed its meetings and discussions. If this revision of the 1963 Grail Psalms helps to forward the renewal that the Synod was convened to address, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

What Is Distinctive about a Liturgical Psalter?

A Liturgical Psalter takes into consideration the way the Psalms have actually been used in the Church's liturgy through the centuries. While the Book of Psalms was originally written and prayed in Hebrew, it is important to remember that the early Christian church's Bible, both Old and New Testaments, was in Greek. The New Testament authors who quoted the Old Testament did so from the Septuagint—the Greek Bible that was the first translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In their reflection on the meaning of the Messiah, the Christ, they delineated in the Septuagint the unfolding of the meaning of this great mystery of faith. They read the Psalms as one part of the prophetic word explaining the coming of Christ, his mission, his teaching, his life, death, and resurrection. These reflections and insights were incorporated into the liturgy and also taken into consideration as the texts of Scripture were later translated by St. Jerome into the Latin Vulgate.

A Liturgical Psalter considers these historical circumstances in its translation of the biblical texts. Thus the primary source of

the translation remains the Hebrew Bible, the Masoretic Text, but at certain junctures, both the Greek Bible (the Septuagint) and the Latin Bible (the Vulgate) are considered as sources bearing on the translation. Following the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI commissioned a group of Benedictine monks to prepare a Latin critical text of the Scriptures that would be used for the text of the *Missale Romanum*; this text is known as the *Nova Vulgata*, which has been consulted in the translation of *The Revised Grail Psalms*.

An example of this approach may be illustrative. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews affirms the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ by quoting Psalm 8:5, “What is man that you should keep him in mind, the son of man that you care for him?” In the original Hebrew setting of its composition, the psalm verse refers to the human person as the pinnacle of God’s creation. But when this text is quoted in the liturgy as a reference to Christ (at Christmas, for example, when the Church celebrates the mystery of the Incarnation), it is important (after the example of the Epistle to the Hebrews) that the praying Church see and understand the psalm as a reference to Christ. Thus in this liturgical context the Septuagint is used for rendering the text.

The hope is that this method will provide greater continuity between the texts we hear proclaimed at the liturgy and the psalms we chant to enhance our interior reception of those texts. The variety of translations used in our liturgical celebrations has sometimes served to obscure the connection between the readings and the corresponding psalms. We hope that our attention to the ways the Psalter is translated for specific use in

the liturgy will clarify this connection. It is important to note that, while the preparation of this text belongs to a few individuals, it remains ultimately a document of the whole Church, and thus is subject to the Church's judgment "in order to maintain the tradition of interpretation that is proper to the Latin Liturgy" (*Liturgiam Authenticam*, no. 24). The text of this revision has been carefully examined by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, who are the final redactors of this work.

We have also created a "Singing Version" of *The Revised Grail Psalms*. This edition indicates the accents of the sprung rhythm for recitation and chanting of the Psalms.

A Word for Those Unfamiliar with the Book of Psalms

Every day, people are becoming acquainted with the Psalter for the first time. Some have told me that, when they first heard or read from the Book of Psalms as a child or adolescent, they did not understand it and never felt drawn back to it. Others are aware of the Psalms but simply have not read or prayed seriously with them. Yet interest in this biblical book of 150 prayers continues to grow.

One way to become acquainted with the Psalter is through seeking effective ways to express our human need for God. We find ourselves in different situations in life that compel us to communicate our situation to the Lord. As we come to realize that all blessing comes from God, we experience the need to lift up words of praise and thanks to God. In moments of sadness, disappointment, frustration, and even anger, the Almighty is the

One to whom we turn in hope of a reversal of our present situation. Turning to the Psalter to give expression to our need before God is a good way to become familiar with the prayers that people of faith have used for centuries both in their private prayer and in liturgical celebrations.

Below is a short list of different circumstances that frequently lead a person to prayer. For each of these, we suggest corresponding psalms to give appropriate expression to these circumstances. We hope that this might facilitate for the newcomer to the Psalms the opening of new avenues of satisfying and enriching prayer. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but rather to present some of the best-known and most frequently used Psalms under familiar headings; some psalms are listed more than once.

1. A Morning Prayer—Psalms 3, 5, 63, 143
2. An Evening Prayer—Psalms 130, 141
3. A Night Prayer—Psalms 4, 91, 134
4. Praise of God—Psalms 8, 66, 104, 135, 136, 145, 148, 150
5. Thanksgiving to God—Psalms 30, 34, 92, 111, 116, 118, 138
6. Prayer for Upright Living—Psalms 1, 15, 24, 37, 112
7. Prayer for Forgiveness—Psalms 32, 51, 80, 86
8. Longing for Union with God—Psalms 12, 27, 42, 63, 139
9. The Vanity of Human Life—Psalms 39, 49, 73, 90
10. Laments to Life's Struggles—Psalms 22, 25, 31, 40, 90
11. Confidence in God—Psalms 4, 16, 23, 25, 46, 131, 139
12. Hymns about the Messiah—Psalms 2, 23, 45, 89, 110, 132
13. Prayer in Old Age—Psalms 71, 90, 139
14. Historical Psalms—Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136
15. Prayer in Times of Danger—Psalms 7, 28, 35, 38, 54, 56, 140

The Liturgy of the Hours has been of particular significance in the Church's formal use of the Psalms as prayer. But the Church has always intended that the formal recitation of the Psalms be a source of inspiration for personal prayer as well. An integral element of the practice of *lectio divina*, the slow and reflective reading of Scripture, is to pray directly from the biblical text. We do this in the liturgy when, after the proclamation of Scripture and a short period for silent reflection, the congregation sings a responsorial psalm. The psalm serves as the prayer of the community, responding to the voice of God heard in the biblical reading, but we can certainly make use of the same method when we pray the Psalms by ourselves: reading the text of the psalm, reflecting on it, and then lifting up to God our own words that arise from our meditative encounter with the text.

Reading and praying in this manner—placing the texts of the Psalms at the heart of our prayer—we are formed in the spirit of the Bible's own prayer book. Whether in community liturgical prayer or in prayer of the heart alone in one's room, these ancient prayers of the Synagogue and the Church have taught generations of faith-filled people the way of redemption as it is lived out in everyday life. Their universal message continues to inspire people to open wide their hearts to a God whose word to us is "ever ancient, ever new" (St. Augustine). The Psalms become our daily companion in prayer and our daily conversation with the living God, who has created us for just that purpose.

Acknowledgments

When this work of the revision of the 1963 Grail Psalms was undertaken at the request of the United States Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy in 1998, we had no idea how extensive an effort would be required to bring it to a successful conclusion. The International Commission for the Preparation of an English Lectionary (established by the Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia, with the approval of the Holy See) expressed interest in the adoption of *The Revised Grail Psalms* for use in their new lectionary, so members of that body were consulted extensively in the preparation of the final text; their biblical expertise brought theological richness, poetic beauty, and pastoral sensitivity to our rendering. The work of the monks of Conception Abbey involved in producing the work beyond translation included proofreading, musical considerations, and computer layout, as well as suggestions to improve felicity of expression in both grammar and syntax of both the text and ancillary documents. And finally, it is worth noting that the monks of Conception Abbey prayed *The Revised Grail Psalms* for several years before the text was finalized, engaging them with heart and soul, and offering suggestions for improvement and words of encouragement for what we hoped would eventually emerge as yet one more contribution from the Benedictine Order to the ongoing growth and development of the Church's liturgy.

*Book One
of the Psalter*

Psalm 1

- ¹ Blessed indeed is the man
who follows not the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the path with sinners,
nor abides in the company of scorners,
- ² but whose delight is the law of the LORD,
and who ponders his law day and night.
- ³ He is like a tree that is planted
beside the flowing waters,
that yields its fruit in due season,
and whose leaves shall never fade;
and all that he does shall prosper.
- ⁴ Not so are the wicked, not so!
For they, like winnowed chaff,
shall be driven away by the wind.
- ⁵ When the wicked are judged they shall not rise,
nor shall sinners in the council of the just;
- ⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the just,
but the way of the wicked will perish.



Psalm 2

- 1 *W*hy do the nations conspire,
and the peoples plot in vain?
- 2 They arise, the kings of the earth;
princes plot against the LORD and his Anointed.
- 3 “Let us burst asunder their fetters.
Let us cast off from us their chains.”
- 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the LORD derides and mocks them.
- 5 Then he will speak in his anger,
his rage will strike them with terror.
- 6 “It is I who have appointed my king
on Sion, my holy mountain.”
- 7 I will announce the decree of the LORD:
The LORD said to me, “You are my Son.
It is I who have begotten you this day.
- 8 Ask of me and I will give you
the nations as your inheritance,
and the ends of the earth as your possession.
- 9 With a rod of iron you will rule them;
like a potter’s jar you will shatter them.”

- ¹⁰ So now, O kings, understand;
take warning, rulers of the earth.
- ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear;
exult with trembling, pay him your homage,
- ¹² lest he be angry and you perish on the way,
for suddenly his anger will blaze.

Blessed are all who trust in God!



Psalm 3

- ¹ *A Psalm of David as he is fleeing from his son Absalom.*
- ² How many are my foes, O LORD!
How many are rising up against me!
- ³ How many are saying about me,
“There is no help for him in God.”
- ⁴ But you, LORD, are a shield about me,
my glory, who lift up my head.
- ⁵ I cry aloud to the LORD.
From his holy mountain he answers me.

6 *Psalm 4*

6 I lie down, I sleep and I wake,
for the LORD upholds me.

7 I will not fear even thousands of people
who are ranged on every side against me.

Arise, LORD; save me, my God,
8 you who strike all my foes on the cheek,
you who break the teeth of the wicked!
9 Salvation belongs to the LORD;
may your blessing be on your people!



Psalm 4

1 *F*or the Choirmaster. With stringed instruments.
A Psalm of David.

2 I called, the God of justice gave me answer;
from anguish you released me, have mercy and hear
me!

3 Children of man, how long will my glory be
dishonored,
will you love what is futile and seek what is false?

- 4 Know that the LORD works wonders for his faithful
one;
the LORD will hear me whenever I call him.
- 5 Tremble, do not sin: ponder on your bed and be still.
- 6 Offer right sacrifice, and trust in the LORD.
- 7 “What can bring us happiness?” many say.
Lift up the light of your face on us, O LORD.
- 8 You have put into my heart a greater joy
than abundance of grain and new wine can provide.
- 9 In peace I will lie down and fall asleep,
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.



Psalm 5

- 1 *F*or the Choirmaster. With flutes. A Psalm of David.
- 2 To my words give ear, O LORD;
give heed to my sighs.
- 3 Attend to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God.

8 *Psalm 5*

- 4 To you do I pray, O LORD.
In the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead and watch before you.
- 5 You are no God who delights in evil;
no sinner is your guest.
- 6 The boastful shall not stand their ground
before your eyes.
- 7 All who do evil you despise;
all who lie you destroy.
The deceitful and those who shed blood,
the LORD detests.
- 8 Yet through the greatness of your merciful love,
I enter your house.
I bow down before your holy temple,
in awe of you.
- 9 Lead me, LORD, in your justice,
because of my foes;
make straight your way before me.
- 10 No truth can be found in their mouths,
their heart is all malice,
their throat a wide-open grave;
with their tongue they flatter.

- ¹¹ Declare them guilty, O God.
Let them fail in their designs.
Drive them out for their many transgressions,
for against you have they rebelled.
- ¹² All who take refuge in you shall be glad,
and ever cry out their joy.
You shelter them; in you they rejoice,
those who love your name.
- ¹³ It is you who bless the just one, O LORD;
you surround him with your favor like a shield.



Psalm 6

- ¹ *For the Choirmaster. With stringed instruments,
upon the Eighth Chord. A Psalm of David.*
- ² O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger;
reprove me not in your rage.
- ³ Have mercy on me, LORD, for I languish.
LORD, heal me; my bones are shaking,
- ⁴ and my soul is greatly shaken.

But you, O LORD, how long?

5 Return, LORD, rescue my soul.

Save me in your merciful love.

6 For in death there is no remembrance of you;
from the grave, who can give you praise?

7 I am exhausted with my groaning;
every night I drench my bed with tears,
I bedew my couch with weeping.

8 My eyes waste away with grief;
I have grown old surrounded by all my foes.

9 Leave me, all who do evil,
for the LORD heeds the sound of my weeping.

10 The LORD has heard my plea;
the LORD will receive my prayer.

11 All my foes will be shamed and greatly shaken,
suddenly put to shame.

