

THE PSALTYRION – REVELATION OF THE WELL RECEIVED PRAYER

Abstract

In this study we are proposing to reveal the Psalms as a model for prayers welcomed by God and pleasing to Him. Therefore, we will try to argue the above-mentioned through substantially biblical arguments, starting from the internal structure of Psalms, reaching at the way that Psalms were received by the first Christian communities. Then we will mention and analyze the testimony of the Church Fathers about the way that Psalms were assumed into individual and community prayer program. To distinguish the impact that Psalms had (and are still having) into liturgical life, we will expose their position inside of all Orthodox rituals. Before ending this demarche, we will mention the opinion of the Church Fathers regarding Psalm Book as well as the manner they argue it's frequent use by Christians.



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Introduction

When God reveals Himself to us and He share us His generous gifts, thankfulness surges into our souls. Naturally, we are trying to offer thanks to God so that our words and feelings will be truly welcomed and well received. Is it enough to simply thank God, or should we use a distinct way of addressing Him? We often think that there is no proper way to express our feelings. So, we are maidenly asking God how to pray. If we were one of Christ apostles, we would have had a straight answer from Him. But we are not... so what should we do? How to find such a complex answer without a proper help? So, we should have a competent guide. What could be more appropriate for this if not the one that guided humanity towards Christ?

Thereupon, we should turn to the Old Law to find an answer to our request. The souls of the people who cried for God's name will teach us how to pray, where to search for Him and how to thank Him. The Psalteryon is the book of the Old Testament that

best expresses human needs, sufferings and hopes. In this respect, Nicolae Iorga said: „It is the incomparable writing whose royal brightness serves as vestment for every humble feeling that is not capable of expressing itself through words. There are one hundred and fifty confessions, prayers, hymns and lamentations that reveal the human soul observing itself and searching for the Holy Powers with a humble and frightful enthusiasm.” (Iorga 1925, 375)

From ancient times, the Book of Psalms has had a special place in Jewish and Christian spiritual life. Psalms, the prayer par excellence (Abrudan 1985, 460), had been common in the synagogue worship (Negoiță 1940, 87), and later Christians made use of them either as distinct prayers of the early Christian worship, or as a model for Christological psalms (Nikolakopoulos 2008, 149-50, 155-7). The latter have been created because the coordinates of Jewish-Christian life changed. As time passed by, the Psalteryion became an important part of private worship. Clergymen (Basarab 2005, 164-5), hermits and laymen took up the inner world of psalms, and gave them a special place in daily prayer.

In this study, we will try to identify and analyses the reasons of including psalms in the category of the prayer that God accepts and agrees with. For this purpose, we will use examples from the Holy Scripture and Patristic reflections.

Psalms – famous Old Testament prayers

The revealed content of the Psalteryion is the main reason of accepting it as a collection of prayers. In God's care, the authors of psalms wrote down their thoughts and feelings, which belonged to different stages of spiritual perfection; they were offered to people as models for their own spiritual life. There is not the same thing for the faithful if he uses his own words or the words of the Holy Scripture. The later are coming from God and they carry inside the mark of the Holy Spirit (Abrudan 1985, 455), so they guide man better through word towards the communion with the divine Word. After a careful analysis of the internal structure of Psalms we will see that through them God is teaching us how to pray, so it would be easy for us to learn the main coordinates of a well-received prayer. In the following part of the study, we will try to emphasize the necessary elements and stages of such a prayer; we will offer the most relevant examples:

The recipient must be a known God. When the psalmist prays to God, he has to be sure that God really exists. Even if he hasn't met Him personally or hasn't felt His presence in the depth of his heart, he must have a good reference point. For Jewish

people, the true God was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Consequently, the mere fact of mentioning the name of one of the three patriarchs was enough for proving God's existence ("O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob" – Ps 84:9). Once this aspect was clarified, there was a need of confessing one's faith in this God and accepting Him as a personal God („I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD" – Ps 140:6).

Prayers must begin with blessing and worship ("Blessed be the LORD, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications" – Ps 28:8). This is by no means questionable flattery since God does not need the psalmist's praise. However, it is decent for him to behave nobly. That is why it is necessary for the psalmist to express words of gratitude and consideration towards the Supreme Master before making a request ("Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me" – Ps 66:15, 19).

The psalmist remembers God's endless goodness in order to be sure that his prayer is heard. For this reason, many psalms praise God's merciful acts ("For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that calls upon thee. Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works" – Ps 86:4.7). His goodness is not conditioned by psalmist's acts and the chosen people's history testifies it. Many times God helped the Jews because of covenant between Him and the three patriarchs or because His love towards Moses, David or ones He appreciated. "Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless, he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry: And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies." – Ps 106:43-45).

There is a great connection between the psalmist's particular prayer and the communal prayer. The temple was the place where God was present without any doubt. On this account, the raised up hands towards the house of worship indicate a direct relation with The One Whose glory dwells between the Cherubims' wings ("Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle" – Ps 28:2). Gestures that are connected to the communal prayer are very often introduced in psalms. For example, prayer is compared with incense that rises up to the spiritual altar above the sky; moreover, the fact of praying itself is considered an evening sacrifice ("Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" – Ps 141:2).

The prayer time is characterized by rhythm and regularity. At a certain moment, the psalmist says he worships God seven times a day (Ps. 119, 164). Therefore, praying is made “in an acceptable time” (Ps 69:15): it begins in the morning (“My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up” – Ps 5:1), it continues during the day and night (“O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry;” – Ps 88:1-2) and it ends at midnight (“At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments” – Ps 119:62).

The most common form of prayer is addressing God in times of suffering (“Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness” – Ps 143:1). It was a normal thing for the psalmist to ask for God's help when he couldn't find escape. Usually, he cries out desperately in the horrid moments when the seen or unseen enemy takes him on (“Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise; Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me. My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me” – Ps 55:1-5). God answers prayer at once, and this gives hope to the psalmist that no matter what his suffering is, he will find salvation (“Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer” – Ps 4:1).

The psalmist does not hide his spiritual thoughts when praying, but he confesses sincerely. The consequence of direct confession is relief (“I cried unto the LORD with my voice; with my voice unto the LORD did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they prevail laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living” – Ps 142:1-5). This confession also shows the psalmist's familiarity with God and his complete trust.

The psalmist calls on God for His mercy, since he is conscious of his humble state (“O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have

mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long? Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer” – Ps 7:1-4.9). The psalmist asks God for mercy, being conscious of his unrighteous deeds. Even if at times he is morally good, the petition emphasizes God's reward for righteousness (“Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me” – Ps 66:15-19).

Humbleness is the main characteristic of the psalmist's prayer. But for understanding and assuming the nothingness of his being, he wouldn't be appreciated by God (“I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I” – Ps 142:5-6). This may be the reason why the psalmist makes so many references to the weakness and ephemerality of the human being.

Psalmist's prayer comes from the pure heart, from the unsly mind (“Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry, give ear unto my prayer that goeth not out of feigned lips” – Ps 17:1). It is accompanied by fast (“But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom” – Ps 35:12) and by body suffering (“Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as a hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin” – Ps 102:3-6).

Patience combined with the hope of salvation is the culmination of psalmist's prayer. His similar personal or communal experiences give him the certainty that he will be saved from trouble (“I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings” – Ps 40:1-2).

The above-mentioned aspects show how natural praying should be made. To begin with, it is important how one relates to God. Then, His glorification and long-lasting humbleness should not be forgotten. By considering these, the psalmist is saved by God's mercy. Therefore, it is easy to understand why psalms made such a great impact

on posterity. They were integrated in corporate and private prayers, and consequently, they were taken up as revealed prayers of soteriological content.

The neo-testamentary reception of psalms

The first proof of taking up psalms can be found in the New Testament. There are many verses (1 Cor 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16-17 and Jas 5:13) that describe the place psalms had in the Judeo-Christian rite. They had become a fundamental part of the first liturgical forms. According to some exegetes, the psalms mentioned in the Epistles of Saint Paul and in the universal Epistle of Saint James, are not from the Old Testament. They are Christian psalms that were composed following the model and the structure of the Psalms of David. Quoting Max Herzog von Sachsen, the Orthodox theologian Konstantin Nikolakopoulos says: “It is not absolutely necessary and without doubt to identify the religious songs of the Early Church called by Saint Paul psalms, with the Old Testament psalms of David. Not only Saint Paul himself, but also the hymnography and the hymnology of that time offer solid information about the new Christian psalms. These are in connection with the psalms of David.” (Nikolakopoulos 2008, 141)

Professor's Nikolakopoulos opinion is plausible but we should not lose sight of the role that the Psalms of David had in the Early Church's life. If we analyse attentively the New Testament old-testamentary quotes (literal or paraphrased), we will notice that the authors inspired by the Holy Spirit were familiar with those psalms. Almost half (116) of the quotes (283) belonged to the Book of Psalms (Abrudan 1985, 469). We can conclude that the addressees of the new-testamentary writings knew and understood the psalms; psalms had been assimilated because of the communal and private prayers.

Therefore, the Old Testamentary legacy of David was used during the liturgical services of the Early Church, since Christians consider David a prophet and a man in Christ. Davidian psalms represent a bridge between the promises of God and their fulfilment; they are seen as Bible prophecies with Christological connotations. In Christianity, the Christologic/ typologic Old Testament's interpretation, strong related to the relieving of many Old Testament texts into the Christian rite constitutes an irreplaceable *topos*.

At the same time, it is known that early Christians enlarged the cultic material: they created new religious songs destined to liturgical services. After God's incarnation, although the Old Testamentary psalms were not abolished, it was necessary to fill *the liturgical need* of early Christians, in order to express the soteriological dimension.

A great number of Christological psalms were created during the New Testament's writing period; psalm verses are occasionally, but concretely mentioned by hagiographic writers (Nikolakopoulos 1996, 154-6).

Patristic mentioning concerning the Psalteryion use in the communal and private prayers of the early Christian period

After the definite split between the Church and the Synagogue, psalms continued to be part of Christian ritual and were used more intensively than before. Apologist Tertullian wrote that during his time (2nd century BC) Christian communities made use of psalms as basic structures of the rite. During a Sunday service, he underlines the following: "While the Scriptures are read and psalms are sung, sermons are delivered and prayers offered, she saw and heard mysteries." (Tertulian 1981, 271)

Apostolic Constitutions, a 3rd century Christian document, presents the same practices: "The reader standing on a height in the middle shall read the Books of Moses and Jesus son of Nave, and of the Judges and Kings, and of Chronicles, after these, those of Job and Solomon and the sixteen Prophets. The lessons having been read by two [readers], another one shall sing the hymns of David and the people answer back the verses. After this, our Acts [the Apostles are supposed to be speaking] shall be read and the letters of Paul, our fellow- worker, which he sent to the Churches." (Tarnavschi 1928, 569)

Oriental Churches had similar customs: Christians kept vigil and sang all the psalms on the eve of a holy day (Simeirea 1968, 206). Saint John Cassian has a broad study on the monastic arrangements of psalm reading. He observes that the monks from the monasteries in the Tebaida region of Egypt read daily 12 psalms at Vespers and at Midnight Office (St. John Cassian 1997, 206). Moreover, there was a custom to read three psalms at the end of the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours in the monasteries of Palestine and Mesopotamia (St. John Cassian 1997, 208).

Clement of Alexandria gives us a much broader insight into the use of psalms. Christians had the custom to sing psalms when they had a meal. It is possible that the custom was established during the agape feasts and has been extended to private life: "And as it is befit- ting, before partaking of food, that we should bless the Creator of all; so also in drinking it is suitable to praise Him on partaking of His creatures. For the psalm is a melodious and sober blessing. The apostle calls the psalm a spiritual song (Eph 5:19)." (Clement of Alexandria 1984, 255-6)

During the time of Saint Ambrose of Milan, the alternative singing custom was introduced in the West (Lesetre 1928). This was owing to the conflict between the Orthodox and Arians. During the night vigil, when Christians from Milan were protecting the church against the Arians, Saint Ambrose advised them to keep vigil and to alternate choral singing. Beside communal and private prayers, psalms were considered useful for the spiritual development of the believers. Apart from using them in prayer, the Church encouraged people to study and meditate on psalms. Spiritual perfection is favored by the frequent use of psalms, due to memorizing and assimilating them. Related to this aspect, Saint Basil the Great says: “A psalm is a safeguard for infants, an adornment for those at the height of their vigor, a consolation for the elders.” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 184) No wonder early Christians knew the Psalteryion by heart and uttered the psalms without ceasing during their daily activities. In this context, Saint Ambrose considers it is unnatural and improper for a Christian to let a single day pass without reciting psalms (St. Ambrose of Milan PL 14, 237). Saint Augustine considered that martyrs, who endure suffering and utter psalms, strengthen their soul accordingly (St. Augustine 1997, 393).

The psalms in the eastern rite

The Psalteryion is the most common book of the Orthodox Church rite; psalm verses are always used during liturgical Services (Neaga 1971, 228). No matter if we take them separately or in kathismata, they enrich and give sense to church services. With the purpose of offering a comprehensive image of the psalms in the rite of the Orthodox Church, we consider it is proper to present in a detailed manner the usage of psalms during the liturgical year. In the first part of this chapter, we will present psalms individually, while in the second part we will present them divided into the 20 kathismata.

A.

Ps 2 – at the First Hour on Holy Friday;

Ps 3 – at Matins;

Ps 4 – at the Great Compline during Great Lent;

Ps 5 – at the First Hour during the year and at Christmas, at Theophany and on Holy Friday during the Royal Hours; verses 7-8 – the Entrance Prayers;

Ps 6 – at the Great Compline during Great Lent;

Ps 9 – at the Baptism of the Jews and during the prayers for sick animals;

Ps 13 – at the Great Compline during Great Lent;

Ps 18 – during Flag consecration prayers;

Ps 19 – at the Tedeum on the opening session of the Holy Synod;

Ps 20 – at Matins, apart from Great Lent; in Penticostarion and at the Tedeum on national holidays;

Ps 21 – at Matins, apart from Great Lent and Penticostarion;

Ps 22 – at the First Hour on Holy Friday;

Ps 23 – at the First Hour at Theophany, at the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharistic orderliness, at the dedication of the church, at the dedication of the Eucharistic vessels (paten, cup, star-cover and spoon), at the married priests and deacons' funeral, at the Baptism of the Jews, at the dedication ceremony of religious schools, during the prayer for those troubled by the evil spirit;

Ps 24 – at the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharistic orderliness;

Ps 25 – at the Great Compline during Great Lent; at the Third Hour during the year;

Ps 26 – at the dedication of the church, at the dedication of the Eucharistic vessels (Censer, antidoron vase, spear, cruets for wine and water); verses 6-12 – during the prayer of the washing of hands before the beginning of the Proskomedia;

Ps 27 – at the First Hour at Theophany, at the tonsuring of rasophors, at the Baptism of the Jews, during the reception of the schismatic into the Orthodox Church, during the prayer for those troubled by the evil spirit;

Ps 28 – during Flag consecration prayers;

Ps 29 – at the Third Hour at Theophany, at the Baptism of the Jews, at the blessing and dedication of church's bells;

Ps 30 – at the Mid-Hour of the Third Hour;

Ps 31 – at the Great Compline during Great Lent;

Ps 32 – at the Mid-Hour of the Third Hour; during the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism (when hands are being washed);

Ps 34 – at Vespers during Great Lent; at Typika of Christmas Eve and Theophany Eve, if there is no liturgical service, at the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, apart from the period of Penticostarion, at the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great and at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, at the Baptism of the Jews, at the Tedeum for the beginning of the school year in theological schools;

Ps 35 – at the Third Hour on Holy Friday;

Ps 37 – at the Tedeum on the opening of the Church National Assembly, of the Eparchial Assembly etc;

Ps 38 – at Matins;

Ps 42 – at the Third Hour at Theophany, at the Baptism of the Jews;

Ps 44 – at the First Hour at Christmas and at the dedication of the Most Holy Theotokos icons; verses 4-6 – at the dedication of flags;

Psalms 46 – at the First Hour at Christmas and at the Mid-Hour of the First Hour;

Psalms 51 – at the Great Compline and at the Small Compline; at everyday, Saturday and Sunday Midnight Office, at Matins, apart from the Bright Week, at the Third Hour at Christmas, at Theophany and on Holy Friday, during the Sacrament of Holy Confession, of the Eucharist and of the Holy Unction, during the Small Blessing of the Water; during the Akathist Hymn dedicated to the Mother of God, to Our Lord Jesus Christ and to Holy Trinity, during the first and second Small Supplicatory Canon to the Holy Theotokos, during the prayers for the persons who are on the point of dying, at the funerals of the laity, of infants, of married priests and deacons, during the prayer for those troubled by the evil spirit; during periods of infectious diseases and epidemics (plagues, cholera), during the prayers to Holy Trinity and all saints, during the prayers uttered at the beginning of the foundation of a church, during the tonsuring of rasophors, during the tonsure to the Great Schema, during the morning prayer, at the beginning of the Menaion and Octoechos canons for the worship of saints;

Psalms 54 – at the Sixth Hour during the year and on Holy Friday;

Psalms 55 – at the Sixth Hour during the year;

Psalms 56 – at the Mid-Hour of the Sixth Hour;

Psalms 57 – at the Mid-Hour of the Sixth Hour;

Psalms 61 – at the Mid-Hour of the Third Hour;

Psalms 63 – at Matins;

Psalms 65 – at Saturday Midnight Office, during the New Year's Eve Tedeum, during the Tedeum on the beginning of the period of sowing, during drought prayers;

Psalms 66 – at Saturday Midnight Office;

Psalms 67 – at Saturday Midnight Office, at the Third Hour at Christmas, at the Baptism of Lutherans;

Psalms 68 – at Saturday Midnight Office and during the prayers for those troubled by the evil spirit;

Psalms 69 – at Saturday Midnight Office, at the Ninth Hour on Holy Friday and during the prayers against floods;

Psalms 70 – at Saturday Midnight Office, at the Mid-Hour of the Sixth Hour, during the Great Compline and Small Compline, at the Ninth Hour on Holy Friday, in the haunted house orderliness, during the prayers for the persons who are on the point of dying; during the prayers for the sick (with the spear in the hand), during the blessing and the dedication of the bell;

Psalms 72 – at the Sixth Hour at Christmas;

Psalms 74 – at the Sixth Hour at Theophany;

Psalms 77 – at the Sixth Hour at Theophany;

Psalms 84 – at the Ninth Hour during the year, during the prayers uttered at the beginning of the foundation of a church, at the dedication of the church;

- Ps 85 – at the Ninth Hour during the year;
- Ps 86 – at the Ninth Hour during the year, inclusively when the Royal Hours are read (at Christmas, at Theophany, on Holy Friday);
- Ps 87 – at the Ninth Hour during the year, during the prayers uttered at the beginning of the foundation of a church;
- Ps 88 – at Matins and during periods of infectious diseases;
- Ps 89 – at the dedications of Jesus Christ and the Great Feast Days icons;
- Ps 90 – at the Ninth Hour during the year;
- Ps 91 – at the Sixth Hour during the year and at Christmas, at Theophany and on Holy Friday during the Royal Hours, during the Great Compline, during the house blessing prayers, at the funerals of the laity and of infants, during the requiem;
- Ps 92 – at the Mid-Hour of the First Hour;
- Ps 93 – at the Mid-Hour of the First Hour, at the Ninth Hour at Theophany, during Proskomedie when the priest covers the paten with the Holy Gifts, during the blessing of the liturgical vestments and of the Holy Table clothes;
- Ps 99 – during the dedication of the new Crosses and Crucifixes;
- Ps 101 – at the First Hour during the year and during the new house blessing prayers;
- Ps 102 – at Great Compline during Great Lent;
- Ps 103 – at Matins and at Typika, apart from Great Lent;
- Ps 104 – at Vespers;
- Ps 107 – during the new ship and boats blessing prayers;
- Ps 109 – at the Third Hour on Holy Friday;
- Ps 110 – at the Ninth Hour at Christmas;
- Ps 111 – at the Ninth Hour at Christmas;
- Ps 113 – at the Mid-Hour of the Ninth Hour;
- Ps 114 – at the Ninth Hour at Theophany;
- Ps 116 – during the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist;
- Ps 117 – at Matins;
- Ps 118 – during the Tedeum on thanksgiving to God for his blessing;
- Ps 119 – at daily Midnight Office, at the funerals of the laity, of married priests and deacons and of monks;
- Ps 121 – at daily and Saturday Midnight Office;
- Ps 122 – during the prayers uttered at the beginning of the foundation of a church; during the Panagia in monasteries on important days;
- Ps 123 – at Matins;
- Ps 127 – during the prayers uttered at the beginning of the foundation of a church;
- Ps 128 – during the Sacrament of Matrimony, at the dedication of the group of artisans' flag;

Ps 130 – at Matins;

Ps 132 – at Sixth Hour at Christmas, during the Tedeum on the birthday of the Patriarch, of the metropolitan or of the bishop; during the prayers uttered at the beginning of the erection of a church, during the blessing of the new Tabernacle;

Ps 133 – during the dedication of the liturgical attires (Sticharions, Epitrachelion, Phelonion, zone and cuffs), during the dedication of the church and during the dedication of the Antimension; verse 2 - during the prayer uttered while putting on the epitrachelion;

Ps 134 – at daily and Saturday Midnight Office;

Ps 138 – at the Mid-Hour of the Ninth Hour;

Ps 139 – during the dedication of the icon of saints, during all Akathist Hymns apart from the one to Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Annunciation Akathist Hymn;

Ps 140 – at the Sixth Hour and at the Mid-Hour of the Ninth Hour;

Ps 141 – at Matins;

Ps 142 – at Matins;

Ps 143 – during Great and Small Compline, at Matins, during the Holy Unction, during the Small Blessing of the Water, during the first and the second Paraclis of the Most Holy Theotokos, during the Akathist Hymn to Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Annunciation Akathist Hymn, during the prayers uttered at the beginning of the erection of a church; during the prayer for those troubled by the evil spirit, during the prayers for the persons who are on the point of dying;

Ps 144 – during the dedication of the soldier flag;

Ps 145 – at Vespers during Great Lent, during common meals in monastic communities, during the Panagia in monasteries on important days, during the dedication of the church;

Ps 146 – at Typika;

Ps 148 – at Matins (at Lauds) and during the blessing and the dedication of the church's bells;

Ps 149 – at Matins (at Lauds);

Ps 150 – at Matins (at Lauds), during the Great Compline and during the blessing and the dedication of the church's bells (Negoiță 1940, 114-64).

B.

Kathisma I – at Matins during the year and sometimes on Sundays, on the Eve of a Great Feast or on the Eve of the celebration of a Polyeleos Saint; only the first part is sung in this case (Happy are those who do not follow...); at Wednesday Matins during Great Lent, apart from the Holy Week;

Kathisma II – at Sunday Matins during the year, on the 5th Wednesday of Great Lent, on Wednesday at the First Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent;

Kathisma III – at Sunday Matins during the year, at the First Hour on the 5th Wednesday of

Great Lent; on Wednesdays at the Third Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent;

Kathisma IV – at Monday Matins during the year, at the Third Hour, on the 5th Wednesday of Great Lent, on Wednesday at the Sixth Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent;

Kathisma V – at Monday Matins during the year, at the Six Hour on the 5th Wednesday of Great Lent, on Wednesday at the Ninth Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent;

Kathisma VI – at Monday Vespers in the following period: the Sunday of Saint Thomas, – September 21st , December 21st – until and including January 14th , in the two weeks between the Sunday of the Prodigal Son and Forgiveness Sunday; at Monday Matins in the following period: September 22nd – December 20th , January 15th – the Saturday before the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, on Mondays during Great Lent, on the first, second, third, fourth and sixth Thursday of Great Lent; at Ninth Hour on the 5th Wednesday of Great Lent;

Kathisma VII – at the 5th Wednesday Vespers in Great Lent; at Tuesday Matins during the year, apart from Great Lent, on the first, second, third, fourth and sixth Thursday of Great Lent; at Sixth Hour on Monday in Great Lent;

Kathisma VIII – at Tuesday Matins during the year, apart from Great Lent; at Sixth Hour on Monday in Great Lent apart from the Holy Week;

Kathisma IX – at Tuesday Vespers in the following period: the Sunday of Saint Thomas, – September 21st , December 21st , until and including January 14th; in the two weeks between the Sunday of the Prodigal Son and Forgiveness Sunday; at Tuesday Matins in the following period: September 22nd – December 20th , January 15th – the Saturday before the Sunday of the Prodigal Son and on Holy Tuesday; on Thursday at the First Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent; on the 5th Thursday at the Third Hour, on Monday at the Ninth Hour in Great Lent, apart from the Holy Week;

Kathisma X – at the 5th Monday Vespers of Great Lent; at Tuesday Matins in Great Lent, apart from the 5th week, on Wednesday Matins apart from Great Lent; at the Third Hour on first, second, third, fourth and sixth Thursday of Great Lent; at Sixth Hour on the 5th Thursday of Great Lent;

Kathisma XI – at Wednesday Matins during the year, apart from Great Lent; at Tuesday Matins in Great Lent; on Thursday at the Sixth Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent; at Ninth Hour on the 5th Thursday of Great Lent;

Kathisma XII – at Wednesday Vespers in the following period: the Sunday of Saint Thomas, – September 21st , December 21st – until and including January 21st; in the two weeks between the Sunday of the Prodigal Son and Forgiveness Sunday; on the 5th Thursday of Great Lent, at Tuesday Matins in Great Lent, apart from the Holy Week; at Third Hour on Holy Tuesday; on

Thursday at Ninth Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent.

Kathisma XIII – at Thursday Matins during the year, apart from Great Lent, on Friday in Great Lent, on the 5th Tuesday of Great Lent; on Tuesday at the First Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent; at Sixth Hour on Holy Tuesday.

Kathisma XIV – at Thursday Matins during the year, apart from Great Lent, on Friday in Great Lent, on Holy Wednesday, at the First Hour on the 5th Tuesday of Great Lent; on Tuesday at the Third Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent.

Kathisma XV – at Thursday Vespers in the following period: the Sunday of Saint Thomas, – September 21st , December 21st – until and including January 14th ; in the two weeks between the Sunday of the Prodigal Son and Forgiveness Sunday; at Thursday Matins in the following period: September 22nd – December 20th and January 15th – the Saturday before the Sunday of the Prodigal Son; on Friday during the Great Lent, apart from the Holy Week, on Holy Wednesday, at Third Hour on the 5th Tuesday of Great Lent, on Tuesday at Sixth Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent.

Kathisma XVI - at Saturday Matins during the year, on Holy Wednesday; at Sixth Hour on the 5th Tuesday of Great Lent, on Tuesday at Ninth Hour in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent.

Kathisma XVII – at Saturday Matins during the year, and at Sunday Matins in the following period: the Sunday of Saint Thomas, – September 21st, December 21st – until and including January 14th; in the two weeks between the Sunday of the Prodigal Son and Forgiveness Sunday, in case there is no Great Feast or the celebration of a Polyeleos Saint; on Sunday during the Great Lent, apart from Palm Sunday, when Polyeleos is sung;

Kathisma XVIII – at Friday Matins in the following period: the Sunday of Saint Thomas, – September 21st , December 21st – until and including January 14th; the Sunday of the Prodigal Son and the Forgiveness Sunday; on the 5th Friday of Great Lent; on Monday to Friday inclusive, in the following period: September 22nd, December 20th , January 15th and the Saturday before the Sunday of the Prodigal Son; on Monday to Friday inclusive in the first, second, third, fourth and sixth week of Great Lent; on the 5th Friday of Great Lent, on Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday and Holy Thursday; at Ninth Hour on the 5th Tuesday of Great Lent;

Kathisma XIX – at Vespers on the 5th Tuesday of Great Lent; at Friday Matins during the year, apart from Great Lent, on the first, second, third, fourth and sixth Wednesday of Great Lent; at the Third Hour on Friday in Great Lent and on Holy Wednesday.

Kathisma XX – at Friday Matins during the year, apart from Great Lent and the Bright Week, on Wednesday during the Great Lent apart from the Holy Week; at the Sixth Hour in Great Lent apart from the Holy Week, and on Holy Wednesday (Dragomir 1981: 213-9).

The order of psalm-reading programme that is to be followed during the week is: at Saturday Vespers – kathisma I. At Sunday Matins – kathismata II, III and XVII. At Sunday Vespers no

kathisma is to be read. Kathisma I is read in case of Great Feast. At Monday Matins – kathismata IV and V; at Monday Vespers, kathisma VI. At Tuesday Matins – kathismata VII and VIII; at Tuesday Vespers, kathisma IX. At Wednesday Matins – kathismata X and XI; at Wednesday Vespers, kathisma XII. At Thursday Matins – kathismata XIII and XIV; at Thursday Vespers, kathisma XII. At Friday Matins – kathismata XIX and XX; at Friday Vespers, kathisma XVIII. At Saturday Matins – kathismata XVI and XVII (Abrudan 1985, 470).

The Psalteryion – a book of prayer in the view of Church Fathers and Christian writers

One of the main reasons that determined the frequent use of Psalteryion by Christians was the varied content of psalms, as far as thoughts and feelings are concerned. They reproduce faithfully the inner struggle, everyday dilemmas, pain, suffering or extreme happiness; that is why believers took up psalms naturally. According to Saint Athanasius the Great, in the Psalter “you learn about yourself; you find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble is, you can select from the book a form of words to fit it” (St. Athanasius the Great PG 17, 20-28). This diversity of the inner movements that Psalms describe helps the reader to learn verses by heart and to have a longing for God.

Considering Psalms as *a honeycomb for an inner man*, Cassiodorus motivates, using telling examples, the human familiarity with these biblical texts: “Some psalms endowed with health-giving instruction lead luring and stormy spirits into a bright and most peaceful way of life; other Psalms are promising that God is to become visibly man for the salvation of believers, and will come to judge the world; some of Psalms warn us to wash away sins with tears, and to atone for faults with alms; at another they express amazed reverence in sacred prayers; at another the power of the Hebrew alphabet gives them profundity; they proclaim the saving outcome of the passion and resurrection of the Lord, they show deep devotion through the weeping of those who make lamentation; in some of them, their repetition of verses reveals certain mysteries to us; at another they are remarkable for the mounting climax of their song. In short, happily espousing divine praises are rich abundance, indescribable longing, and astonishing depth. The believing mind cannot get too much of it once it has begun to be filled with them.” (Cassiodorus 1990, 24).

Apart from the soteriological aspect of psalms, Cassiodorus also brings into

discussion their social aspect. He considers psalms establish equilibrium between people. Moreover, they give royal dignity to the poor and to the humble. God's Self-revelation has nothing to do with social class or intellectual knowledge. Purity of the soul is of importance. The Book of Psalms becomes in this way "the language of the hidden powers which makes the proud man small before the humble and a royal subject for poor people." (Cassiodorus 1990, 24)

The Church Fathers agree with the two above-mentioned opinions, signaling also new aspects that allows the using of Psalms by more and more Christians (Gherasim Timuș 1896, 37). We mention Saint Basil the Great's famous view from introduction to *Homilies on the Psalms*; the majority of Romanian versions of Psalteryion come together with this quotation: "Any part of the Scriptures you like to choose is inspired by God. The Holy Spirit composed the Scriptures so that in them, as in a pharmacy open to all souls, we might each of us be able to find the medicine suited to our own particular illness [...]. But the Book of Psalms contains everything useful that the others have. It predicts the future, it recalls the past, it gives directions for living, and it suggests the right behavior to adopt. It is, in short, a jewel case in which all the valid teachings have been collected in such a way that individuals find proper remedies for their cases." (St. Basil the Great 1986, 182-3)

Saint Basil the Great motivates through a new method the agreeable and formative aspect of the psalm structure. In this sense, Christians use psalms in a fruitful way: their spiritual illnesses are cured and their faith is strengthened. Although it is difficult to assume dogmatic teaching, the harmony and joy of psalm-singing overcomes this impediment. Saint Basil says: "When the Holy Spirit saw that the human race was guided only with difficulty toward virtue, and that, because of our inclination toward pleasure, we were neglectful of an upright life, what did He do? The delight of melody He mingled with the doctrines so that by the pleasantness and softness of the sound heard we might receive without perceiving it the benefit of the words, just as wise physicians who, when giving the fastidious rather bitter drugs to drink, frequently smear the cup with honey. Therefore, He devised for us these harmonious melodies of the Psalms, that they who are children in age, or even those who are youthful in disposition, might to all appearances chant but, in reality, become trained in soul. For never has any one of the many indifferent persons gone away easily holding in mind either an apostolic or prophetic message but they do chant the words of the Psalms, even in the home, and they spread them about in the market place [...]. Oh! the wise invention of the

teacher who contrived that while we were singing we should at the same time learn something useful; by this means, too, the teachings are in a certain way impressed more deeply on our minds. Even a forceful lesson does not always endure, but what enters the mind with joy and pleasure somehow becomes more firmly impressed upon it.” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 183)

The Book of Psalms helps the believer to overcome any passion. Men utter stichus in-spired by the Holy Spirit that are remedies through their own nature; we consider this aspect a good argument for the psalms' healing nature. However, their moral content offers many examples of overcoming sin. Many times, the author begins his prayer from the depths of sin and death, but in the end, he finds communion with God. In this respect, Saint Augustine says psalms “annihilate passions, do away with angry, teach moderation.” (Timuș 1896, 37); Cassiodorus claims that psalms embrace the bright word that heals the suffering heart (Cassiodorus 1990, 24). Saint Basil the Great is more precise: “It heals the old wounds of the soul and gives relief to those recent. It cures the illnesses and preserves the health of the soul. It brings peace, soothes the internal conflicts, calms the rough waves of evil thoughts, dissolves anger, corrects and moderates profligacy.” (St. Basil the Great 1986, 183)

If psalm reading disintegrates passions, it seems naturally that they defeat the ones who do their best to excite men's passions. Therefore, demons are annihilated because of psalms. The Church Fathers say that these holy words drive away and put a cease to demons (St. Ephraim the Syrian PG 3, 37); the fear caused by the evil presence is also defeated. Moreover, even if man utters psalms mechanically, without keeping his attention, the anti-demonical effect is kept. When one disciple of Saint Barsanuphius asked his confessor what to do when he utters stone heart prayers, the elder told him: “Even if you don't hear the prayer, demons hear it and tremble. So, don't stop praying and uttering psalms! And step by step, God will transform your heart from stone to flash.” (Sf. Barsanuphius and John 2005, 629-30)

Uprooting demons brings about intimacy with angels and with God. According to Saint Ephraim the Syrian, Psalmody is “the work of the Angels, the commonwealth of heaven, spiritual incense”. The man who utters psalms “joins the choir of the Angels” and sits in a place where “there God is, with the Angels.” (St. Ephraim the Syrian PG 3, 37)

Psalms generate communion with God and with the Heavenly powers; and this makes people to be united. Reading or singing psalms brings peace and quietness

between people. For Saint Augustine, they are “the calmness of the soul, the sign of peace, the forming of friendship (Timuş 1896, 37)”; according to Saint Basil the Great, psalms “form friendships, unites those separated, conciliates those at enmity. Who, indeed, can still consider him an enemy with whom he has uttered the same prayer to God? So that psalmody, bringing about choral singing, a bond, as it were, toward unity, and joining the people into a harmonious union of one choir, produces also the greatest of blessings, charity.” (St. Basil the Great 1987, 183)

Therefore, it does not matter if psalms are sung or read, or if they are uttered in communal or individual prayers. Psalms are “a treasure that nobody can rob, the best soul adornment for the emperors and for the simple ones, for those who rule and for those who are ruled, for soldiers and for those who are not soldiers, for the wise and for the uneducated, for monks and for bishops, for priests and for the laity, for those who live on earth or on an island, for agricultures and shipmen, for the elder and for the young; in short, for everyone, no matter the age, the mood, the wish or if it is done in private or in common.” (Eftimie Zigabenu and Nicodim Aghioritul 2006, 30)

In conclusion, Church Fathers say that everyone could take advantage of the psalms' benefits, regardless of social class and age. The time and place of prayer are not that important: when psalms are memorized, they can be uttered anywhere (“at home, at the market, at Church, on the way, everywhere”) and anytime. Saint Gregory of Nyssa wrote in a letter about the life of his sister Macrina who used to read psalms daily at different times of the day: “When she rose from bed, or engaged in household duties' or rested, or partook of food' or retired from table, when she went to bed or rose in the night for prayer, the Psalter was her constant companion, like a good fellow traveler that never deserted her.” (Sf. Grigorie de Nyssa 1993: 52)

In the end, we will mention what Saint Ephraim the Syrian said when he gave advice to the believers to utter psalms unceasingly; he emphasized the importance that psalms have in Christian spiritual life: “Say many things to God and few to humans. If you stretch out your hand to work, let your mouth sing psalms and your mind pray. Let psalmody be continually on your mouth.” (St. Ephraim the Syrian PG 3, 37)

Conclusions

In this study we outlined the arguments in favor of psalms being genuine models of prayer that is welcomed by God and pleasing to Him. First of all, we mentioned the coordinates of the inner dimension of psalms. We indicated the background and the

conditions of praying, taking into consideration both the rigorous relation to God and the inner state of he who prays. Then, starting from the New Testament, we analyzed the manner in which psalms were taken up as prayers by early Christian communities. The patristic evidence we exposed emphasized various aspects of the use of psalms in common and individual prayers inside Church rites. Christians began to assimilate psalms as manifestations of their own soul, regardless of the context in which they were used: together with other scripture texts inside the rite, during the vigil by the monks, in daily life by ordinary Christians.

Then, we presented the use of every psalm and kathisma in liturgical rites in order to show the impact psalms had in the Eastern Orthodox rite. No service is celebrated without uttering psalms or at least some stichus; moreover, they are used frequently. In the last part of the study, we exposed some of the testimonies of our Church Fathers and religious writers. They had a special attachment to the Psalter. Because of its revealed content and because of their diversity, Christians, regardless of their social class and age, have always seen the Book of Psalms as the expression of an intimate aspiration to God. Our intention was to reveal some arguments for the importance and place of the psalms in Christian life. They sustain inner purity, the defeat of passions and the intimacy with angels and with God.

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