Learning and Praying the Psalms from Memory

*You already know more Scripture than you think you do.*

* **Find a translation that is congenial to you**, one approved by the Church, of course.
  + If you use the *Grail* translation from the *Liturgy of the Hours*, go online and find the *Revised Edition*. It has needful changes to bring the translation into conformity with the Hebrew. It’s online for free. (*The Book of Psalms. The Grail.*  USCCB. St. John’s Seminary <http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@books1/Bible_OT/19_01-79_grail_ps_1-79.htm> ) The web page indicates that the Psalter includes links only to psalms 1- 24 but *all* the psalms are posted, even the imprecatory psalms; just scroll to find your psalm.
  + Another reason not to rely solely on the *Liturgy of the Hours* is that the breviary entirely omits the imprecatory psalms. This was done for pastoral reasons. The editors hoped that this edition of the Divine Office would attract laymen and did not want to put the stumbling block of imprecatory verses in their path. Entire psalms omitted are 58 (12vv), 83 (19vv), and 109 (31vv). In addition, 61 individual verses have been dropped from other psalms. Psalm 63, for example, has three more verses (10 – 12) than appear in the LoH.
  + The USCCB has published the *Revised Grail* translation of the Psalter in a single volume, *The Abbey Psalms and Canticles*. It is authorized by the USCCB for optional liturgical use in the United States and available at Ascension Press. It includes all of the psalms and all of the canticles from the Divine Office. <https://ascensionpress.com/products/the-abbey-psalms-and-canticles>.
  + You may wish to learn some of the psalms from more than one translation. For example, we pray psalms 120 – 128 every single day; it is almost impossible *not* to have them memorized as they appear in the *Liturgy of the Hours.* The same can be said for the Morning and Evening Prayer psalms and canticles of Sunday, Week I. You may know some in Latin or from the Douay-Rheims translation . . .
  + Of interest to former Episcopalians, the Vatican has approved the 1928 Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* Psalter from Miles Coverdale’s 1534 translation for use by Catholics in the Anglican Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter in the United States.
* **The Penitential Psalms:** Since we’re the Confraternity of *Penitents*, why not start by praying the seven Penitential Psalms into your memory: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143? It’s 111 verses. You probably already know the 19 verses of Psalm 51 so, that leaves only 92 verses remaining. At only one verse a day, you could have them all in three months. Think of how great it would be to have these in your mind and heart during Lent next year!
* **Find a commentary** on the psalms as an adjunct to your *lectio divina* and meditation.
  + In 2022, Ignatius Press published *The Book of Psalms* in their *Ignatius Study Bible.* The translation of the Bible is the Original RSV CE. Edited by Scott Hahn, Curtis Mitch, and Dennis K. Walters, it is clear, organized, and intelligible. Study questions at the back reinforce the material in the commentary.
  + Commentaries from the Early Church Fathers, Robert Bellarmine’s and others are available online.
  + Great for Lent is St. John Fisher’s *Exposition of the Seven Penitential Psalms* in modern English with an introduction by Anne Barbeau Gardiner from Ignatius Press.
* **Pray the psalms in a group or with a partner**. Fr. Tuscan recommends this as most helpful. Perhaps a portion of your chapter meeting could be given over to this. Assign perhaps 8 verses per month (just two per week!) and pray them from memory along with your CfP prayers.
* **Singing** is another aid to memory.
  + *The Revised Grail Psalter* mentioned above is also issued as *The Revised Grail Psalter - Singing Version: A Liturgical Psalter*. Available on Amazon.
  + The 1932 edition of Winfred Douglas’ ***The Plainsong Psalter*** has been re-issued in a handsome 8 x 10 soft cover edition. The rules of pointing can be applied to any text.
* **Pray** before you approach the psalms. Here are some suggestions:
  + **Prayer of St. John Chrysostom**

Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart that I may hear your word, and understand and do your will, for I am a sojourner upon the Earth.  
Hide not your commandments from me, but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of your Law.  
May your holy Word penetrate my heart, and serve for my restoration, enlightenment, sanctification, and for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of life everlasting.  
For you are the light of those who lie in darkness, and from you comes every good deed and every gift. Amen.

* + **Simple prayer from www.tuko.co.ke**

Gracious Lord, may I come to know, love, and understand you better through your Holy Word. May the Holy Spirit enlighten my mind, enkindle a greater love for you and others in my heart, and guide me in applying your Word to my life. Amen.

* + **An old favorite in modern language:**

Almighty God, you pour out upon us the spirit of grace and supplication. Deliver us, when we come near to you, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with steadfast thoughts and kindled affections, we may worship you in spirit and in truth, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

* ***Learning* and *retaining* are two different things.** For example, I worked through Psalm 102 in a single month by memorizing just one verse per day. But it took about six months of frequent repetition before I could recite it fluently.
  + **Retention** requires repetition. Don’t be surprised or discouraged if what you thought you had memorized last week, or even yesterday, disappears from the barn and you have to chase it. Just keep after it, and it will stick. I try to recite about 100 verses a day, calmly, attentively, and prayerfully. It’s okay to peek if your mind betrays you.
* **Be consistent.** Set aside a portion of your regularly scheduled prayer and/or Scripture study time for allowing the psalms to be prayed in you. If you can, allot a full half hour – perhaps at the tabernacle before Mass. Then take a few minutes in the afternoon to go over the material.
* **Be patient.** This is not a race nor is it a contest. The whole Psalter is nothing but *prayer.* Approach these texts as *Lectio Divina.* You want to *pray* the psalms into your memory as you lovingly encounter Our Lord in His holy Word.

May God prosper your endeavor to keep his Word in your heart.

