

The Major Categories of the Psalms

Dear parishioners, in my first article on the Psalter, we saw that the five books of the Psalms were composed with reference to the Torah. The Jewish people used to say: “The Torah teaches how to live, and the Psalms teach how to pray.” Through the Psalms, believers have shared their experiences with God, expressing joy, suffering, repentance, trust, adoration, hope, and much more.

For the most thorough study of the Psalter, theologians group the Psalms into several major literary and spiritual categories.

I- Psalms of Praise

Psalms of praise glorify God for His greatness, power, creation, and holiness. Believers make no requests of God; instead, they contemplate and praise Him as God the Creator, the King who reigns over all the earth, and the Holy God whose majesty surpasses all things.

Psalms of praise include Psalm 8, Psalm 19, Psalm 29, Psalm 103, and Psalms 145–150.

Psalm 150 declares: “All creation is invited to praise God: instruments, songs, dance, and the breath of life.”

II- Psalms of Supplication or Lament

In these Psalms, believers cry out to God in times of suffering, fear, injustice, sickness, and persecution. Supplications may be individual or communal.

Psalms of supplication include Psalms 3, 13, 22, 42, and 130. Psalm 22 says: “My God, why have You forsaken me?” Jesus Christ quotes this psalm on the Cross.

III- Psalms of Thanksgiving

In these Psalms, believers express gratitude to God after deliverance, healing, victory, or protection. Thus, God hears, restores, and saves them.

The Psalms of Thanksgiving are Psalms 18, 30, 32, 116, and 138.

Psalm 18 declares: “Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer”

IV- Penitential Psalms

These Psalms express repentance, the confession of sin, and a desire for forgiveness. The penitential psalms are 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. Psalm 51 is among the best-known. After David’s sin, he cries out: “Have mercy on me, my God.”

V- Wisdom Psalms

These Psalms teach how to live according to God’s will. They sometimes resemble proverbs and wisdom literature. These Psalms shape moral conscience, biblical wisdom, and daily faithfulness.

The Wisdom Psalms are Psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, and 119.

Psalm 1 declares: “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.”

VI- Royal Psalms

These concern the King of Israel, chosen by God; kingship is under divine protection and subject to God’s rule.

The Royal Psalms are Psalms 20, 21, 45, 72, and 110. Several of these psalms are interpreted as foretelling the Messiah. For example, Psalm 110 says, “You are a priest forever.”

VII- Messianic Psalms

These Psalms foretell the Messiah, Christ's suffering, his kingship, and his victory. The Messianic Psalms are 2, 22, 69, 110, and 118.

Psalm 2 declares: “I will proclaim the decree of the Lord. He said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’”

VIII- Psalms of Trust

In these Psalms, even though believers face danger, they do not hesitate to express their total faith in God.

The Psalms of trust are Psalms 23, 27, 46, 91, and 121. Psalm 23 is well known: “The Lord is my shepherd.”

IX- Historical Psalms

These recall the history of salvation, including the Exodus, the wilderness period, the Covenant, and God’s faithfulness. The purpose of these Psalms is to teach believers to “remember the works of God.” Israel must never forget to pass on the Law.

The historical Psalms are Psalms 78, 105, 106, and 136.

Psalm 78: “He commanded our ancestors to hand it down to their descendants, that a generation still to come might know it, children yet to be born.”

X- Pilgrimage Psalms

In these Psalms, the historical context indicates that pilgrims would go up to Jerusalem for the festivals, as the city is situated on high ground. These are the “Songs of Ascent.” The Pilgrimage Psalms are Psalms 120–134.

Psalm 122 declares: “I rejoiced when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’”

XI—The Imprecatory Psalms

These call for God’s judgment on enemies. At first glance, these psalms may seem violent. However, they reflect genuine suffering, a longing for justice, and the act of entrusting judgment to God. Therefore, these psalms must be interpreted in light of the Gospel, mercy, and the spiritual battle against evil.

The Imprecatory Psalms are Psalms 35, 69, and 109.

Psalm 35 declares: “Oppose, O Lord, those who oppose me”

To summarize, believers of old laid out their experiences before God in the Book of Psalms. Our lives today are not so different from those of the past; we must therefore continue to praise God through the Psalter.

Thank you to each of you who faithfully read the parish bulletin. I look forward to sharing another article with you soon.

Your brother,

Frantzcy Mahotiere, Parochial Vicar