



NATIONAL  
**Eucharistic  
Revival**

**Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass  
Do This in Remembrance of Me, Part 16:  
Responsorial Psalm  
by FR. LUKE SPANNAGEL**



Sing a joyful song unto the Lord! As the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states, “After the First Reading follows the **Responsorial Psalm**, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and which has great liturgical and pastoral importance, since it fosters meditation on the Word of God” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 61). (The “P” in the word “Psalms” is silent, so it sounds like “Salms.”)

According to the Glossary in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a Psalm is “A prayer in the Book of Psalms of the Old Testament, assembled over several centuries; a collection of prayers in the form of hymns or poetry. The Psalms have been used since Jesus’ time as the public prayer of the Church.” There are 150 Psalms altogether, varying in length from very short (Psalm 117 has only two verses) to incredibly long (Psalm 119 has 176 verses!).

### **For Every Condition and Time**

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* indicates that the Responsorial Psalm should be sung, and that if “the Psalm cannot be sung, then it should be recited in a way that is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the Word of God” (*GIRM*, no. 61). We typically repeat a refrain in between the verses. The refrain gives a brief line for meditation, summarizing a theme of a particular Psalm. Speaking of the Psalms, the *Catechism* states, “Prayed and fulfilled in Christ, the Psalms are an essential and permanent element of the prayer of the Church. They are suitable for men of every condition and time” (*CCC*, no. 2597).

Speaking of the use of Psalms in earlier times, the *Catechism* notes, “The Psalms both nourished and expressed the prayer of the People of God gathered during the great feasts at Jerusalem and each Sabbath in the synagogues. Their prayer is inseparably personal and communal; it concerns both those who are praying and all men” (*CCC*, no. 2586). The Psalms still have great value for us as well. “Whether hymns or prayers of lamentation or thanksgiving, whether individual or communal, whether royal chants, songs of pilgrimage or wisdom-meditations, the Psalms are a mirror of God’s marvelous deeds in the history of his people, as well as reflections of the human experience of the Psalmist [the person writing the Psalm]. Though a given psalm may reflect an event of the past, it still possesses such direct simplicity that it can be prayed in truth by men of all times and conditions” (*CCC*, no. 2588).

### **Jesus Prayed the Same Words**

Charles Belmonte reminds us to sing the Psalms with faith and joy, recalling the exhortation of St. Paul: “St. Paul recommends that the faithful gathered waiting for the coming of the Lord sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles (see Col 3:16). The heart shows its joy by singing. Thus St. Augustine says rightly, ‘to sing belongs to lovers.’ There is also the ancient proverb: ‘One who sings well prays twice’” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 88).

I appreciate thinking of how our Lord Jesus would have also sung and prayed these same words in the Psalms. Since we know from the Gospels that he regularly went to the Jewish prayer gatherings, we can conclude that he would also have sung the Psalms regularly. There were times he referred directly to the Psalms, such as when he started praying Psalm 22 from the Cross: “My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?”

It doesn’t get much better than spending a little time with the Lord using the exact words he used to pray. The next time you have 20 seconds to spare, try praying Psalm 117. If you have 20 minutes, check out a longer passage, like Psalm 119. If you are really feeling bold, try to sing one, whether at Church, working outside, or in the shower. It is always “good to praise the Lord!” (Psalm 92:1)