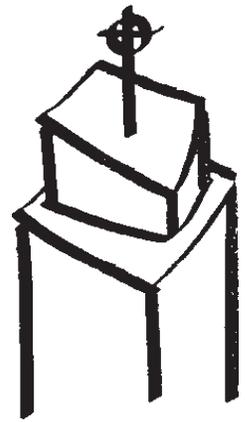


# OUR FAMILY



# NEWS

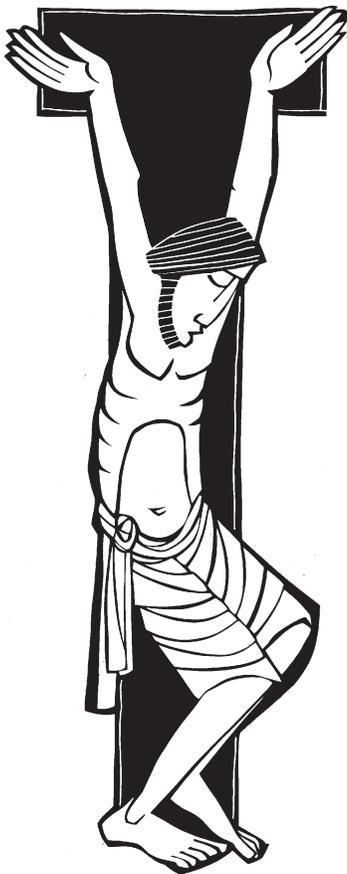


For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

November &  
December, 2014

## THE PSALMS: AN INTRODUCTION OF SORTS (concluded)

What scriptural warrant is there for the use of the psalms in what we Christians profess? The Synoptic Gospels, the letters customarily called Pauline, and, to a lesser extent, the Gospel of John and Revelation, all announce and elucidate the Good News with allusions to and quotations from the Book of Psalms (among other Old Testament works, to be sure, particularly the books of the prophets).



Nor in the Synoptic Gospels is there any want of examples of Jesus's own use of the psalms in his ministry. For instance, there is his referencing of Psalm 118—"The stone that the builders rejected / has become the cornerstone (Ps 118:22)."—after telling the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants to the Jewish chief priests and elders (Mt 21:42, Mk 12:10-11, Lk 20:41-44). There is his appeal to Psalm 110—"The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand / until I place your enemies under your feet.' (Ps 110:1)."—in questioning the Jewish authorities about the identity of the Christ, that is, the Messiah (Mt 22:41-46, Mk 12:35-37, Lk 20:41-44).

Impressive as these and similar examples may be, however, what gives both the greatest authority for and the greatest impetus to turning to the Old Testament psalms to frame and formulate New Testament belief is not any one or even all of such instances of Jesus's invoking a psalm in his evangelizing. It is, rather, that pronouncement of his to the apostles after his resurrection, recorded by Luke in his Gospel, "'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.'" (Lk 24:44)."

Luke continues, "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, 'Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.'" (Lk 24:45-48)."

But, again according to Luke, the risen Lord had already said substantially the same thing to the unnamed disciples on the road to Emmaus: "'Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?'" (Lk 24:25-26)."

on to say, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures (Lk 24:27).”

Although Jesus did not mention the psalms by name to his two traveling companions, it should be remembered that David, traditionally believed to have been the author of the entire psalter, was himself considered a prophet. Thus



when Luke resumes his gospel story in the Acts of the Apostles, the evangelist records Peter as saying, in his address to a congregation of about one hundred and twenty believers, “‘My brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand through the mouth of David...’ (Acts 1:16).” Likewise, Luke reports the same apostle as declaring, in his Pentecost proclamation of the Lord’s resurrection to a large crowd of non-believers, the devout Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast, “‘David says of him...and he was a prophet.’ (Acts 2:25.30).” And, further, Luke presents the community of believers as praying, upon the release of Peter and John from custody, “‘Sovereign Lord,...you said by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of our father David...’ (Acts 4:24-25).”

Most significant in the initial chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, though, is not the out-and-out validation of the presumed author of the psalms as an authentically inspired prophet. It is, rather, the witness of the actual extensive use of the psalms in the earliest preaching of the primitive Church.

To get some notion of just how extensive that use is, find an annotated bible and take a few minutes to sit and read from it the first five chapters of Acts. I heartily recommend *The Jerusalem Bible* for this purpose. Quotations from psalms—a total of eight—are therein italicized, and five of them set off from the rest of the text; they are, besides, all identified in the margins of the text (except for—surely an oversight—the quotation of Ps 16:10 in 2:31), as are the simple references to psalms—four in number—that can also be clearly identified in these chapters.

And to what, exactly, does this abundant use, this remarkable role, of the psalms give such significant witness? To the firm faith of the infant Church that the psalter is filled with Christ, even as he himself said it is.

What is strikingly evident from the Acts of the Apostles is that for the earliest of our Christian forebears, the Old Testament psalter was not merely a *vehicle* for the expression of God’s final and complete revelation of himself in the New Testament, ultimately in the person of the Word, his Son; that is, it was not something that at most provided a cache of concepts, a set of themes, and a handy vocabulary with which to express a revelation that came only much later in time. It was for them that selfsame revelation, in prophetic form, whose precise and full *meaning* became *clear* later in time—in “the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4)—with the advent of the living Word, the living fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy. Such is the psalter for us as well.

If you *do* read those beginning chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, you may notice that Luke’s account shows not only *that* the primitive Church made use of the psalms in its preaching, but also *how* at first it did so, which is to say

in what ways it perceived the presence of Christ in the psalter: what is said in the psalms is understood either as being spoken *about* Christ or as spoken *by* Christ.

It was not long, though, before the Church came to see that certain passages of some psalms, and even certain psalms in their entirety, might legitimately be interpreted in yet another way, that is, as being spoken *to* Christ.

These three ways of understanding the contents of the psalms are not—as in two distinct senses they might be—mutually exclusive. That is to say, for one thing, that in a given psalm Christ may, for example, be understood *both* to be spoken about *and* to be speaking, either in clearly differentiated sections of the psalm or in passages of the psalm in which he is taken to be speaking about himself...and, for another, that a given psalm may, for example, now be understood to be spoken *by* Christ (to the Father), now understood to be spoken *to* Christ (by an individual Christian or by the Church as a whole). This latter consideration brings me back to the subject with which I began this essay: our *own* use, as Christians, of the Hebrew psalms as prayer.

We are most assuredly not limited to praying *to* Christ in our use of the psalter. The Christ who is understood to be spoken about and/or to be speaking in the psalms is always the *whole* Christ, Head and Body, Christ and his Church as one. When Christ is spoken about, *we* are being spoken about *with* him; when Christ is speaking, *we* are speaking *with* him. There are no psalms—as there are no other prayers (even the Lord’s Prayer, as we acknowledge explicitly in the liturgy)—that we can dare to pray *except* in union with Christ—we sinners who have no credentials of our own, so to speak, whose only access to the Father is through Christ.

I introduced these remarks with a tale of an unlikely cocktail-party encounter with a young man who was, to put it mildly, taken up with the psalms, and who said about these venerable prayers, “Yeah, there’s just no way of getting away from them.” I commented to you, the reader, that his assertion was “a statement that said far more than he realized at the time.” Indeed it was. As the author of the second part of the book of Isaiah proclaims, “The grass withers, the flower fades / but the word of our God remains forever (Is 40:8),” and as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews affirms, “The word of God is something alive and active (Heb 4:12).” What biblical scholar Bruce Vawter once wrote of prophecy is just as true of the psalter: “It is...not an archival record, but the living word of a living God.”



Oh, yes. As for the young man himself...I eventually managed to get him to see that, as unruffled as *I* was at his first words to me—“Hey, what is it with those psalms?”—someone else, even another monk, might find such directness somewhat off-putting...especially at a cocktail party. As an experiment, I suggested that he approach a young lady who was standing nearby, nursing a cocktail all by her lonesome, and attempt to engage her in conversation with the same “opening line.” He did so. “Er, yes,” she replied, “uh, would you excuse me? I think our hostess needs help with the onion dip.”

---Br. Nathaniel

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***Our Family News*** is published in the special interest of the oblates of St. Bede Abbey. Please send changes of address and comments to The Editor, Our Family News, St. Bede Abbey, 24 W US Highway 6, Peru, IL 61354.

We welcome your submissions to this publication, either instructive or reflective, whether prose or poetry. They should in some way relate to the ***Rule of Benedict***, Benedictine spirituality, and/or the oblate program. The editor reserves the rights to choose material for publication and to edit as necessary.

Dear Oblates,

Profound and profuse thanks from Pastor Alusine Kargbo and the people of Kamakwie, Sierra Leone, for your aid in their struggle to survive the Ebola epidemic. Your contributions, together with another from Abbot Philip and yet another from Barbara Hejmanowski and her family, enabled me to give the sum of \$450.00 to oblate Kathy Martin to get to Sierra Leone with all due speed. Pastor Alusine used the donation to purchase food, medicine, and plasticware (such as individual drinking cups) needed to prevent the spread of the virus. Further contributions are, of course, most welcome. Sierra Leone is judged to be the second poorest nation in the world.

Abundant thanks from me personally and from Abbot Philip and the rest of the monastic community for your ongoing hands-on help in the monastery theology library project.

In your prayers please remember (as many of you have already been doing) Jan Welch, devoted oblate and longtime friend and benefactor of St. Bede Abbey, as she continues to regain her health in what has become a rather prolonged process. Unable to attend monthly oblate meetings or otherwise visit St. Bede, Jan very much misses her brother and sister oblates and all the monks.

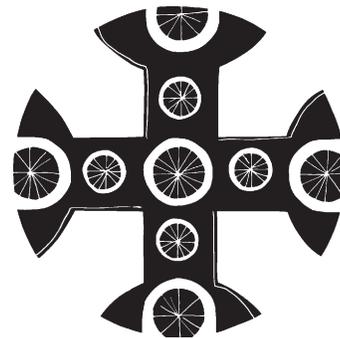
--- Br. Nathaniel

## SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the abbey church from 1:30  
P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2014

Sunday, January 11, 2015  
Sunday, February 8, 2015  
Sunday, March 8, 2015  
Sunday, April 12, 2015  
Sunday, May 3, 2015



## Passage for *Lectio* at the December Meeting

Sing a new song to the Lord,  
for he has worked wonders.

Psalm 98:1