Study Guide

The Psalms of Mercy

Introduction

All of life is reflected in Psalms. Composed in Hebrew in the sixth and eighth centuries, the Psalter was used for prayer by the communities of those times. The psalms are written poetically and are rich in symbols of human experience because they are musical. In Hebrew the psalter is called the “book of praises” and in Greek it is called psalmos or “song.” This does not mean that there was always an instrument used in the recitation of the psalms, but that they were used for early liturgical gatherings. The psalms contain some of our earliest liturgical compositions of thanksgiving and praise, grief and lamentation, salvation and mercy. In The Psalms of Mercy, one of the official catechetical texts for the Year of Mercy, the splendor of the psalms and their beautiful appreciation of God’s mercy is presented in the hope that you will discover the great gifts of prayer for mercy contained within them.

Reflection Questions:

1. “Mercy is one of God’s most highlighted characteristics in the Psalter.” Why do you think the psalms so often emphasize God’s mercy?

2. How is divine mercy linked to the Old Covenant? What role does divine mercy play in the New Covenant?

3. In Psalm 42 and 43, the Jewish people are in exile and feeling far from God. Verse 9 asks the Lord, “Why have you forgotten me?” Have you ever felt far from God? How might you help someone who is “in exile” from the Church?

4. Which symbol(s) from the psalms most resonates with you? (Eagle’s wings, lion, bird, ox, mother, oil, etc.) Why did you select this particular symbol?
5. In Psalm 103, the Psalmist links mercy with compassion. How do mercy and compassion interrelate? Can we have one without the other? Why or why not?

6. Which psalm of mercy speaks the most to you? How can you incorporate this psalm into your prayer life this week?

**Process Activity:**

Psalm 136 is a Psalm of Thanksgiving for the many ways the Lord shows mercy to His people. Read this Psalm aloud as a group. Take a few moments to pray and reflect on this Psalm and then write your own Psalm of Thanksgiving for God’s mercy in your life.

**Prayer:**

My God, I know that your mercy endures forever. I give thanks to you, oh Lord of lords, for you are good and merciful to all. Thank you for extending your mercy to me, a sinner. Help me to share it with others—especially to those who are poor or vulnerable, sick or lonely, or marginalized. May I never forget to be merciful with family members and others who are closest to me. Help me to always live in your mercy. Amen.