

Grace Notes from the System Chaplain 🎵 🎵

March 2018

Dear Friends,

As I look out of my office window at a brilliant blue sky and sunshine, I only have to drop my gaze to see the crusty, white ground which is evidence of the sub-zero temperature. Having never been a lover of cold weather, I am always looking for signs of spring and the song of a bird in the CEC parking lot this morning was enough to get me singing too! How wonderful that we have Lent to set the stage for the burst of celebration that Easter and Resurrection bring!

Last week I attended the Hamilton Diocesan Musicians' Retreat which was a multi-course feast on the Psalms. So often in our liturgies the psalm is seen simply as a bridge between the First and Second Readings – or the First Reading and the Gospel, and we don't recognise the gift that these poetic summaries of the story of salvation have to offer us. It may be necessary to correct an understanding that the Psalm is 'responsorial' not because it has a refrain we chant at the direction of the cantor, but because it **responds** to the First Reading.

If we read through the whole collection of 150 Psalms, we find the narrative of God's relationship with humanity with all the emotions of that relationship. Psalm 1 begins, "Happy [or blessed] are those ... and Psalm 150 ends, "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" Between, we find what Kathleen Harmon calls "a communal diary with intimately personal footnotes".¹ We find Psalms of praise, delight in God's creation, joy and thanksgiving; however, there are also Psalms of pleading with God, cursing God, crying with pain, anger and despair. Some familiar Psalms bring us comfort: "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*"², or express confidence in God's protection in time of trouble,

*"You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress;
my God in whom I trust."³*

Among the Psalms which we would classify as Laments, perhaps one of the best known is the psalm from Palm Sunday, which starts, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" and then works its way through the despair to a plea and finally an acknowledgement of God's greatness and a commitment to praise the Lord.⁴

The Psalms are the major part of the daily prayer of those in monastic life, and by following the Psalter, one can pray all of the Psalms over the course of a month. You can find simple versions of the Liturgy of the Hours on line which can be used as daily prayer for personal use or with students and thus join the rhythm of the prayer life of the universal Church. Even a verse of one of the Psalms could be used as a meditation. This Lenten season is a wonderful opportunity for us to spend some time in such contemplation. The unfolding of the story of salvation through the seven readings and their responsorial Psalms in the Easter Vigil Liturgy is a beautiful review of God's interaction with creation; if you can't

¹ Kathleen Harmon, *Becoming the Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015)

² Psalm 23:1, *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition* (Nashville, TN: Catholic Bible Press, a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1993)

³ *Ibid.*, Psalm 91:1-2

⁴ *Ibid.*, Psalm 22

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attend the liturgy, you may enjoy just reading it through in a missalette. To hear a lively rendition of the Easter Sunday Psalm (118), go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIX9d_Wc5h0

The workshop I attended tied the Psalms we studied to the illustrations of the Saint John's Bible. You might like to explore these with your students in conjunction with the Psalms. If you cannot arrange a visit with the SJB through the Diocese (at <https://hamiltodiocese.com/stjohnsbible/booking.html>), you can find many of the images at (https://www.google.ca/search?q=saint+john%27s+bible+psalms&rlz=1C1GGRV_enCA759CA759&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjC19W6-vZAhUi64MKHXTzAR8QsAQISg&biw=1920&bih=974).

After spending a little time with the Psalms, you might like to challenge your students to write and illustrate their own psalm. Please share some of their work with me if you try this.

A reminder of the Diocesan Youth Rally, open to students in Grades 7-12. It is hoped that our young people will attend with a parish youth group; however, there is provision for a school to send a group or someone to attend independently if there is no local parish group to join. Details can be found at www.hamiltodiocese.com/youthrally where you will find information, posters you can print and the registration info and forms.

There are three Adult Faith Formation events in the next few weeks:

- **“Knowing God’s Perfect Love is Knowing God’s Mercy: Loving God, Self and Others in a Perfect Way”** with Dr Josephine Lombardi, on Wednesday March 21, 2018 at Holy Cross Church Hall, 144400 Argyll Road, Georgetown. As usual there are two sessions, morning and afternoon.
- **“The Next Morning...”** facilitated by Wayne Lachapelle, our annual retreat at Mount Carmel Retreat Centre in Niagara Falls from Friday evening, April 20th to the afternoon of Saturday April 21st.
- **“The Upper Room – Love and the Holy Spirit”** led by Fr. Wayne Lobsinger on the evening of Wednesday, May 30 from 7-9 pm at Fionn MacCool’s Irish Pub, 2331 Appleby Line in Burlington. This is a great opportunity to get out for a spring evening with some friends, enjoy your favourite libation and engage in thoughtful discussion.

Please go to Event Registration to indicate your attendance. You can find further information about Adult Faith events in the Adult Faith Formation Program Book at StaffNet>Board Services>Focus on Faith>Adult Faith Formation.

Note that support materials for the Theological Theme can be found by clicking directly on the Focus on Faith heading. Our high school chaplains are writing monthly reflections in support of the theme which you may like to use for a staff meeting or meditation session.

A Spring edition of Focus on Faith newsletter is underway and I would be delighted to have contributions from schools to include. If you have any short anecdotes about the theological theme or Christian Meditation in your school, please share!

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"EASTER SUNDAY"

[The people say that the sun dances on this day in joy for a risen Saviour. Old Barbara Macphie at Dreimsdale saw this once, but only once, during her long life. And the good woman, of high natural intelligence, described in poetic language and with religious fervour what she saw or believed she saw from the summit of Benmore:

"The glorious gold-bright sun was after rising on the crests of the great hills, and it was changing colour - green, purple, red, blood-red, white, intense-white, and gold-white, like the glom of the God of the elements to the children of men. It was dancing up and down in exultation at the joyous resurrection of the beloved Saviour of victory. To be thus privileged, a person must ascend to the top of the highest hill before sunrise, and believe that the God who makes the small blade of grass to grow is the same God who makes the large, massive sun to move."

[From: *"The Sun Dances" - Prayers and Blessings from the Gaelic. Collected and translated by Alexander Carmichael in Carmina Gadelica]*

