

From Praying the Psalms by Thomas Merton\*

...the Psalms are songs of men who *knew who God was*. If we are to pray well, we too must discover the Lord to whom we speak, and if we use the Psalms in our prayer we will stand a much better chance of sharing in the discovery which lies hidden in their words for all generations. For God has willed to make Himself known to us in the mystery of the Psalms....

To put it very plainly: the Church loves the Psalms because in them she sings of her experience of God, of her union with the Incarnate Word, of her contemplation of God in the Mystery of Christ....

(St. Augustine tells us) “the best way (to praise God) is to seek the way of praise in the Scriptures of God.” (He) adds that God has taught us to praise Him in the Psalms, not in order that He may get something out of it, but in order *that we may be made better by it*. Praising God in the words of the Psalms, we can come to know Him better. Knowing Him better we love Him better, loving Him better we find our happiness in Him.

The contemplation we learn from the Psalter is not mere “speculation.” The Psalms are not abstract treatises on the divine nature. In them we learn to know God not by analyzing various concepts of His divinity, but by praising and loving Him. The Psalms being hymns of praise, they only reveal their full meaning to those who use them in order to praise God.

To understand the Psalms, we must experience the sentiments they express, in our own hearts. We must sing them to God and make our own all the meaning they contain.... We must praise him as much in sorrow as in joy.

...the Psalms not only form our minds according to the mind of the Church, not only direct our thoughts and affections to God, but they *establish us in God*, they unite us to Christ. But they do this only if our hearts follow their thoughts and words back to the inspired source.... Therefore the sentiments of the Psalmist, which are the thoughts and sentiments of God Himself in His Church, must lead us into the hidden sanctuary of God. Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. The function of the Psalms is to reveal to us God as the “treasure” whom we love because He has first loved us, to hide us, heart and soul, in the depths of His infinite Light. The Psalms, therefore, lead us to contemplation.

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\* Cf. pages 7-8, 9, 12, 13, 14