



An Epiphany Gift, 2010

Selected Psalms  
Freely Rendered into English  
From the Latin Psalter  
of Pope Pius XII

by Marcel B. Matley

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Marcel B. Matley  
San Francisco, CA

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The cover photo is of a Nativity set we purchased from [holylandshopping.com](http://holylandshopping.com). It was crafted in Bethlehem where Christ was born.

## INTRODUCTION

These are free renditions of selected psalms, based on the Latin Psalter of Pope Pius XII. Reference was made to several common translations and to commentaries on the Sacred Scriptures in order to keep to the meaning of the passages selected, expressing the meaning as best I can in English.

Translations of the Psalms that I have seen often warp, twist and contort English syntax and order in mentally and literarily painful ways. Traditionally, obsolete or obscure words and phrases are piled on, while so-called modern translations may employ current, and soon fittingly to die, colloquialisms. They also seem either unaware of proper and elegant English expressions or persuaded that Scripture, in order to elevate the lowest of souls, must be expressed in the lowest literary register. I have endeavored to write in our common English without writing in the common parlance. The Incarnate Christ, as did the Divine Revelation from the first, bent down to us, to our earthly muck, not to be bent or to be in muck, but to raise us up straight, to elevate us purified to Heaven itself. I trust my feeble efforts will so serve the reader.

A mostly happy exception to the above evaluation of translations is a book I have just acquired but have only had opportunity to review a few passages in the Psalms. It is:

*The Catholic Study Bible; The New American Bible....* Second edition.

Donald Senior and John J. Collins, editors.

Oxford University Press, 2006.

Hardback, 1851 pages, plus maps and index.

It seems only about one in five verses of this translation have some contortion of proper English sequence. For example, Psalm 1, verse 2 reads: "Rather, the law of the Lord is their joy; God's law they study day and night." Correct syntax means the object of their study is "day and night," while "God's law" is some kind of peculiar adverbial phrase. Our minds, of course, must flip back to the first words of the verse 2b, that initially were taken as the subject of the sentence, and interpretatively switch them to come immediately after "study" as its object. Research shows that elderly people especially have difficulty grasping such left imbedded phrases. Being an elderly person, I can personally attest to the mental gymnastics and the time to execute them that are required during Scripture readings at Holy Mass, particularly from the Psalms. I find myself rereading texts and reordering them to correct English usage so that I can be certain of what is read. This exercise enabled me better to phrase my rendering of these selected psalms.

Traditionally, when the Psalms are chanted, two choirs arranged on opposite sides of the church sing alternate verses but join together for the antiphon at the beginning and end. Each verse is chanted in two half-verses, with notes rising and falling at the start and

finish of each half verse. This half-verse division for chanting is indicated by a tab. My understanding is that in the original Hebrew this division would exhibit more balance and consistency in length than English, or even Latin, can replicate. My verse separations do not necessarily match the traditional numbered verses of the Bible, because I rearrange when the Latin text has very unbalanced verses or line breaks, rarely adding or rearranging words to improve literary and line balance.

When the Psalms are chanted in the Holy Office, which are official prayers for the seven designated times of the day, a doxology is added at the end of each psalm. The Latin doxology is:

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto;  
sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

The following is my free rendition of this doxology, expanded for the sake of literary cadence and balance:

Let us give glory to Jahweh, Our God,  
to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
Since the glory is His from the beginning till now,  
and the glory is His alone always. Amen.

If the numeration for the psalms given here does not match that in your Bible, simply go up or down one number. All Bibles have the same psalms, but in some two psalms are joined as one while one is divided into two.

Fifty-five years ago I began annotating the Latin text of the Psalter with a view to rendering the entire 150 into English. I annotated fifty-five, averaging one a year, and I only translated the ones included here. These are the ones that appealed to me most, each at a particular time or on a notable occasion. I trust that you will find that one or more of these selected psalms will fill some special spiritual need or express a prayer for which you lacked words. Most of all, I hope these will invite you to read further in the Sacred Books of the Bible, to learn more of God and the things of God.

With my best regards,

Marcel

## PSALM 1

Whoever does not follow advice of the wicked,  
is a man well blessed,  
And he does not walk the way of sinners,  
nor join those trampling over others;  
But his delight is in the Lord's Law,  
and he ponders His Law day and night.  
And he is much like a tree  
planted beside streams of water,  
That yields fruit at its proper time,  
whose leaves do not wither,  
And whatever he undertakes  
produces prosperity.

The wicked are not like this, not at all,  
but are like chaff that the wind scatters.  
Thus the wicked do not hold up under judgment,  
nor do sinners in the assembly of the just.  
For all this the Lord takes care of the way of the just,  
and the way of the wicked will perish.

## PSALM 6

The first of the seven penitential psalms.

Lord, do not indict me in Your anger,  
nor reprove me in Your rage.  
Lord, be merciful to me for I am ill;  
heal me, Lord, for my bones are wrenched,  
And my soul is thoroughly wrung;  
but, Lord, how long will You...?

Turn back, Lord, snatch up my soul,  
make me safe because of Your compassion,  
Because there are none in death who recall You.  
Who among the deeply buried praise You?  
I am wearied with my sighing;  
all night I sprinkle my bed with weeping, my mattress tear-soaked.  
My eye is dimmed through mourning,  
it ages because of all my enemies.  
Away from me! all you who do evil,  
for the Lord listens to the sound of my weeping;  
The Lord listens to my prayer,  
The Lord takes up my outcry.  
May all my enemies blush with shame and be wrenched;  
may they quickly go away, reddening with shame.

## PSALM 15

Safeguard me, my God,  
for with You I seek shelter.  
You are my Master, I tell the Lord;  
You are my only good.  
How honorable has He made all my love  
for His servants who dwell within His land.  
Those adhering to other gods  
only increase their sorrow.  
I shall not share their sacrifice of life-blood,  
nor even have their names upon my lip.  
The Lord is my total inheritance, my only grant;  
You are the guardian of my allotment.  
The portions marked out as mine have proven agreeable,  
and I am content with my inheritance.

I continually bless the Lord,  
for He Himself advises me;  
Ever more I bless Him,  
for in all distress my conscience guides me.  
My gaze is fixed on the Lord;  
I shall remain firm, for He is by my side.  
Thus my heart sings with joy, and my soul rejoices;  
and even my body will repose in peace;  
Because You will not leave my soul buried in oblivion,  
will not permit decay to mar Your loyal servant.  
Rather will You show me the path of life, Your full happiness,  
the unending bliss of Your presence.



## PSALM 18

The skies speak to us of God's glory,  
and the heavens show His artistry.  
This message endures from day to day,  
and nightly its truths are visible.  
There is not a word, not a phrase,  
whose meaning is lost to the listener.  
Their eloquence swells to fill the world,  
and their voice embraces all space.  
See the home which the Lord built for the sun,  
which comes forth as from the bride's bed.  
A mighty athlete, he sprints the heavens,  
warming all with his glowing fire.

The Lord's law is flawless, to restore the soul;  
He commands with power, to support the weak.  
His will is unerring, the joy of hearts;  
He guides with harmony, the light of minds.  
Who fears God is sinless, his soul secure;  
God's judgements are true, they are made in justice.  
Such is more valued than treasured gold,  
gives more delight than the finest foods.

Though Your servant ponder these things with care,  
though he observe them with diligence,  
How can he recognize all his faults?  
Forgive my sins, even my unwitting sins.  
Ever guard Your servant from pride's tyranny;  
then I would be free of guilt.  
May my words and my thoughts gain Your approval,  
my Lord, my Rock, my Bailbondsman.

## PSALM 21

My God, my God, why? Why do You abandon me?

You stand off when I pray; You ignore my pleas.

My God, all day long I call out; You take no heed.

I pray at night; You pay no attention.

But You do dwell in Your sanctuary;

You are the praise of all Israel.

Our fathers put their trust in You;

they trusted and You freed them.

They called to You, and You saved them;

their trust in You was not betrayed!

But I, a man, am more a worm than a man,

like a thing men look on as filthy.

I am a joke to those who see me;

they pucker their lips, cock their heads and mock:

“May the Lord deliver him; didn’t he trust in Him?

If God loves him, let Him rescue him!”

Was it not You who saw me safely born?

Did You not shelter me at my mother’s breast?

When I was born, You saw in me a son;

You are my God since the womb first bore me.

Do not stand far off, for I am in trouble!

Be near at hand; there is no other help.

A herd of bullocks are stomping about me;

these bulls of Bashan have me cornered.

They snarl at me as a ravenous lion would;

I am like spilt water; my bones are limp.

My heart has become weakened and waxen;

it fails and melts away within my breast.

My tongue swells; my throat is a parched brick;

and You have downed me in the dust of death.

Small wonder this wolf pack mills about me,

an evil-minded mob cutting off escape.

They have cruelly gauged my hands and feet;

I can mark the pain in my every bone.

So they gawk at me and like what they see;

they take shares of my clothes, gambling for my cloak.

But, Lord, do not You stand back;  
my only aid, rush in to help me!  
Rescue my soul from the sword that threatens;  
snatch my life from the dog that grasps it.  
Save me, so miserable, from the lion's mouth,  
from the antlers of the antelope.

I will recount Your fame to my brothers,  
I will praise You to the assembly:  
"You, the Lord's devout, honor Him; sons of Jacob, worship Him.  
Show Him respect and fear, you children of Israel.  
For He has not cast off the wretched nor despised their misery;  
nor hidden His face, but listened when they called Him."  
From the solemn assembly, my prayers and blessings rise to You;  
there for Your worshipers to see I fulfil these vows:  
"Those in want will be fed and their needs be filled;  
those desiring God will praise Him; may your hearts not falter."

All the world will note these things and turn to God,  
and the whole family of nations will bow before Him,  
Because the ruling power is the Lord's alone,  
and He only will be Master among the nations.  
Whom else but Him shall they adore who sleep in death?  
To whom else shall they bow who sink to dust?

So my soul will live but for Him; my children serve only Him.  
My soul proclaims: "The works of the Lord are these...."

## PSALM 22

This psalm was written to be chanted to a melody from the Gregorian, thus the lines are of the same length and with the same rhythm.

The Lord shepherds me in verdant pasture,  
    He fills all my need;  
He has me recline beside still water,  
    He freshens my soul.  
He guides me in the pathway of virtue,  
    for sake of His name;  
Though I may wander through ravine of gloom,  
    I shall fear no ill.  
In all my ways, Lord, my heart is steadfast,  
    for You are with me;  
Your all-protective rod and shepherd staff  
    give me great courage.  
An honored guest am I at Your banquet,  
    which my foes behold;  
You anoint my brow with the choicest oil;  
    my cup is replete.  
Beneficence and favor will be mine,  
    each day of my life;  
And I shall visit the House of the Lord,  
    for days past counting.

(Doxology added in the traditional form of a liturgical hymn)  
To You, Eternal Father, and to Christ,  
    our Bread and Shepherd,  
Be all glory with the Holy Spirit,  
    dwelling within us.

## PSALM 22

This psalm is repeated in a free verse rendition in keeping with the others included herein.

The Lord shepherds me: nothing is denied me;

He has me recline in rich pastures.

He herds me to waters where I may rest:

He revives my soul.

He guides me by the right pathways,  
for the honor of His name.

Though I roam in the death-dark chasm,  
with Your presence I will not fear the evil ones.

Your rod and Your staff  
will reassure me.

You prepare a meal for me  
while my enemies can only watch;

You pour oil on my head;  
my cup is filled to the brim.

Kindness and graciousness will follow me  
all the days of my life,

And I will dwell in the Lord's house  
day after day after day.

## PSALM 31

The second penitential psalm.

The one whose injustices are pardoned is blessed,  
whose sin is obliterated.

Blessed the man whom the Lord does not charge with guilt,  
and whose soul is free of trickery.

As long as I kept quiet, my very bones weakened  
during my constant sighing.

And rightly so, for Your hand is heavy on me night and day;  
my vigor withers as if by a summer drought.

I confessed my sin to You,  
and I did not hide my guilt,

Saying, "I confess my injustice to the Lord,"  
and You obliterated the guilt of my sin.

Therefore, every godly person will pray to You  
at the instance of every need.

When many floods are rushing upon him,  
they will not engulf him.

You are my safe haven, saving me from tight spots,  
immersing me in the joy of my safety.

I will instruct you, teaching you the road you are to walk;  
I will educate you, keeping close watch on you.

Do not choose to be like a senseless horse or mule,  
whose impulse is checked by bit and bridle;

This is not in keeping with your intelligence;  
it does not come near to befitting you.

The sorrows of the impious are multiple;  
but mercy envelopes one who hopes in the Lord.

You who are just, may you rejoice and be glad in the Lord;  
and, all you of an upright heart, be jubilant!

## PSALM 37

The third penitential psalm.

Lord, do not accuse me while in Your anger,  
nor arraign me in Your ferocity.  
No wonder Your arrows are stuck in me,  
and Your hand has come down upon me.  
There is nothing healthy in my flesh from Your disdain;  
nothing is wholesome in my bones because of my sin.  
Further, my guilts are piled up over my head,  
they weigh me down too much like a crushing load.

My bruises are reeking and decaying  
because of my foolishness.  
I have perished and am completely downcast;  
I wander gloomily the entire day.  
What's more, my loins are fully inflamed,  
and nothing at all in my flesh is healthy.  
I grew feeble, I was thoroughly crushed;  
I crumple because of the quavering of my heart.  
Lord, my every desire is with You,  
and my sighing is not hidden from You.  
My heart pounds, my rigor deserts me,  
and the very light of my eyes fails me.  
My friends and comrades halt far from my presence,  
and my relatives stand far back.  
And snakes strike out to ambush my pathways,  
as do those who wish me evil, bullies and cheats.

I, however, as if deaf, hear nothing,  
and I am as a mute, not opening my mouth.  
And I am made into a man who does not hear,  
and who has no answer in his mouth.  
All because I trust entirely in You, Lord:  
Lord, my God, You will listen.  
No wonder I say: "May they not rejoice over me;  
nor may they gloat against me while my foot slips."

Thus, I am near to slipping,  
    and my sorrow is always in front of me.  
And rightly I admitted my guilt,  
    and I was worried because of my sin.  
But they who oppose me without cause are powerful,  
    and they are many who hate me unjustly.  
And they who pay back evil for good  
    harass me because I pursue the good.  
Lord, do not forsake me;  
    my God, do not stay so far away from me.  
Rush to my help,  
    Lord, my safety.



## PSALM 41

As the thirsting doe longs for the running brooks,  
so my soul longs for You, God.  
My soul thirsts for God, the life-giving God;  
Oh, when shall I catch sight of His face?  
By day and by night, I feed upon my tears;  
and all the while they taunt me: "Where hides your God?"  
I recall leading processions to God's house amid festive chants;  
I recall, and my soul is deeply troubled.  
My soul, why be downcast and troubled? Look to God!  
For once again I shall worship Him, my Savior and my God.

My soul is deeply depressed; yet my thoughts dwell on You,  
though I be about Jordan and Herman or on Mount Misar.  
The canyons echo with the crash of Your torrents;  
but fiercer yet are Your floods washing over me.  
Would that the Lord pour out His grace by day,  
and by night I should sing His praise, the God of my life.  
I say to God: "You, my Rock, and have You forgotten me?  
Must I sulk under the enemies' oppression?"  
My spirit is broken by the insults of my foes;  
and all the while they taunt me: "Where hides your God?"  
My soul, why be downcast and troubled? Look to God!  
For once again I shall worship Him, my Savior and my God.

PSALM 42

Be my judge, God, giving me judgement against a godless gang;  
free me from the injustice and treachery of man.  
Indeed, Lord, You are my strength; so why have You rejected me?  
Why must I sulk under the enemies' oppression?  
Keep Your pledge and give me Your guiding light,  
to lead me to Your holy hill, into Your dwelling.  
There shall I approach Your altar, God of my joy and rejoicing;  
and I shall praise You with the organ's music.  
My soul, why be downcast and troubled? Look to God!  
For once again I shall worship Him, my Savior and my God.

## PSALM 50

The fourth penitential psalm.

God, be merciful to me in accordance with your mercifulness,  
according to your numerous mercies delete my wickedness.  
Cleanse me of my innermost guilt,  
and scour me of my sin.

For I acknowledge my wickedness,  
and I am always mindful of my sin.  
My sinning was against You alone,  
and I did what was evil in Your view,  
So You shall be shown just in Your sentence,  
correct in Your judgement.

Take note: I was born in guilt,  
and my mother conceived me in sin.  
Take note: You are delighted by sincerity of heart,  
and You teach me heartfelt wisdom.

Splash me with a hyssop and I will be cleansed;  
wash me, and I will be whitened far more than snow.  
Make me to hear delight and joy;  
may the bones You have crushed leap up.  
Turn Your face away from my sins,  
and wipe out all my faults.

God, create a clean heart for me,  
and renew a firm spirit in me.  
Do not toss me away from Your presence,  
and do not withhold Your Holy Spirit from me.  
Give back to me the joy of Your safety,  
and embolden me with a noble spirit.

I will teach the wicked Your ways,  
and sinners will be turned back to You.  
God, God my savior, free me from the death penalty,  
and my mouth will broadcast Your praise.  
For not only do You not delight in sacrifice;

You would not accept a holocaust should I offer it.  
God, my sacrifice is a crushed spirit;  
God, You will not disdain a crushed and humbled spirit.

NOTE: The last two verses that follow were most probably not part of the psalm originally; indeed, they seem to contradict the spiritual thrust of the psalm. Therefore, I have separated them, but others may see it differently and will want to read these two verses as an integral and fitting conclusion of the psalm.

Lord, for Your own goodness act kindly towards Sion,  
that You may rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.  
Then You will accept the legal sacrifice, full service and burnt offering,  
then young animals will be offered upon Your altar.

## PSALM 84

Lord, You have been kindly to Your earth;  
    You have made Jacob's share come out well.  
You have discharged Your people's guilt;  
    You have entombed all their sins.  
You have restrained all Your fierceness,  
    You have stepped away from the fury of Your anger.

Make us stand up again, God our Savior,  
    and set aside Your indignation towards us.  
Are You always to be irritated with us,  
    or extend Your anger into all generations?  
Lord, show us Your mercy,  
    and give us Your salvation.

May I hear whatever the Lord has spoken:  
    He has spoken a perfect peace,  
Spoken it to His people and His saints  
    and to those who turn their hearts thoroughly to Him.  
Surely His safety is right at hand for those fearing Him,  
    that glory may dwell in our land.  
Mercy and Faithfulness will travel together;  
    Justice and Peace will kiss each other.  
Faithfulness grows up out of the earth,  
    and Justice looks searchingly from heaven.  
All the while, the Lord will give the good,  
    and our Earth will give its fruits.  
Justice marches on ahead of Him,  
    and Salvation follows in His footsteps.

## PSALM 101

The fifth penitential psalm.

Lord, listen to my prayer,  
and let my outcry reach You.  
Do not hide Your face from me  
in the day of my anguish.  
Lend Your ear to me:  
when I call on You, immediately hear me.  
For my days vanish like smoke,  
and my bones burn like fire.  
My heart dries up like parched grass;  
I even forget to eat my meals.  
Because of my violent crying  
my bones stick to my skin.  
I am like a sea bird in the desert,  
as if turned into an owl in ruined haunts.  
I am sleepless and I wail  
like a solitary bird on a roof.  
My enemies constantly insult me;  
they who fume against me revile my name.  
So I eat ashes rather than bread,  
and I mix my drink with tears,  
All because of Your disdain and fury towards me,  
having lifted me high then thrown me down.  
My days are like prolonged shadows,  
and I dry up like the grasses.

However, You, Lord, abide forever,  
and Your Name lasts through all generations.  
Rise up and be kindly towards Sion,  
now is the time to give her mercy, now the hour.  
For Your servants love her very stones  
and they anguish over her ruins.  
Also, Lord, the nations shall revere Your name,  
and all the earth's rulers will revere Your glory.  
Once the Lord has renewed Sion,  
He shall appear in His glory,

He will turn His attention to the plea of the poor,  
and He will not refuse their plea.  
These things will be written for future generations,  
and may the people be made devoted to praising the Lord.  
For the Lord looks from on high to His sanctuary,  
and surveys the earth from heaven,  
That He might hear the wailing of captives,  
that He might free those condemned to death,  
That the Lord's Name be proclaimed in Sion,  
and His praise in Jerusalem,  
Whenever the people and rulers gather together  
that they might Serve the Lord.

He has eaten up my strength along the way,  
He has cut my days short.  
I say: My God, do not deny me half my days;  
Your years last through all generations.  
You set up the earth in the beginning,  
and heaven is the work of Your hands.  
They will perish but You will endure,  
and the universe will wear out like a garment.  
You alter it like clothing and it is altered:  
but You are the same, and Your years are unending.  
The children of Your servants will dwell securely,  
and their seed will endure in Your presence.

PSALM 129

The sixth penitential psalm.

From the watery depths I call to You, Lord,  
Lord, hear my voice.  
May Your ears be attentive  
to the sound of my supplication.

If You should keep score of sins, Lord,  
Lord, who could withstand it?  
But the pardon of sins is with You,  
that the sinner might serve You with reverence.

My hope is in the Lord,  
and my soul hopes in His word;  
My soul keeps watch for the Lord,  
more so than guards for the dawn.

More so than guards for the dawn,  
let Israel keep watch for the Lord,  
Because mercy is with the Lord  
and a wealth of redemption is with Him:  
And He Himself will ransom Israel  
from all her wickedness.



## PSALM 142

The seventh and last penitential psalm.

Lord, hear my petition,  
listen to me out of Your justice.  
Accept my entreaty  
for the sake of Your integrity,  
Please do not call your servant to judgment,  
for no living being is just compared to You.

For the enemy pursues my soul:  
he smears my life in the dirt.  
He has set me in darkness  
like the long since dead.  
And my spirit falters inside me;  
my heart freezes within me.  
Mindful of long past days,  
I meditate on all Your works,  
The whole of creation,  
carefully wrought deeds of Your hands.  
I extend my hands to You;  
like parched earth my soul thirsts for You.

Listen to me right now, Lord:  
for my spirit falters.  
Do not hide Your face from me,  
nor let me be like those falling into a pit.  
Quickly let me seize Your grace,  
because I trust in You.  
Make known to me the way I may advance  
because I lift my soul up to You.  
Snatch me from my enemies:  
I trust in You, Lord.

Teach me to do Your will,  
for You are my God.  
Your Spirit is goodness:  
may it lead me along level ground.

For sake of Your Name, Lord, keep me alive;  
in Your kindness guide my soul from traps.  
And in Your enduring grace  
destroy all my enemies,  
And wipe out all who harass my soul:  
for I am your servant.