

Responsorial Psalm

The Responsorial Psalm follows the [period of brief] silence after the first reading. Occasionally this is taken from other parts of the Scripture, but ordinarily it is from the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament. It is designed in the form of a dialogue. The cantor sings the antiphon and all [including the assembly] repeat it. The verses are sung by the cantor; and [then] the antiphon is sung again by the assembly. Occasionally, for lack of a [qualified] cantor, the psalm is recited instead of sung. However, the Responsorial Psalm should be sung [if/when possible].

Why Is the Responsorial Psalm Supposed to Be Sung?

The psalms in the Old Testament were written as [poetic] songs. Some even have notes about instrumentation. They are poetic prayers that were used in worship by the community and by individuals. As poetry, they express the whole gamut of human feelings: joy, sorrow, pain, gratitude, anger, and praise. The psalms teach us that there is no feeling that we cannot bring to our God. We can stand honestly before God to express ourselves and know that God listens and understands. We have the examples of the Old Testament psalmist before us. The psalms have traditionally been attributed [in whole or in part] to David, but were actually written over a period of about 1,000 years. David is considered to be the primary [origin], author and compiler.

Responsorial Psalm II

Why is the psalm called “responsorial?” In a certain sense, the psalm is a response to the first reading. The name, however, derives from the fact that it is in an antiphonal “call and response” format. It is representative of the dialogical nature of the liturgy itself, sort of a “conversational” form of prayer. This is why it is important to use musical settings that honor that format, rather than hymns that are based on psalms, but which have no repeated antiphon.

What Is the Importance of the Responsorial Psalm Text?

The psalm, taken from the sacred Scripture, is the word of God. In the psalm, we are responding to the Word of God, with the Word of God. The psalms have been chosen because of their relevance to the readings of the day and help us interpret them. One [appropriate description] is that the Responsorial Psalm is the aura within which we understand the rest of the readings. [In essence and reflective purpose, it is “prayed” sacred Scripture that is sung—it is not simply just another hymn or song—because it is derived from the Word of God, not the word of humanity.]

Types of Psalms

Most of the psalms fit into three (3), basic types or categories, with some subdivisions:

The first type is *Psalms of Lament*, an expression of grief or sorrow moving to hope and finally to praise. These are usually divided into two groups, *Penitential Psalms* and *Imprecatory (or Cursing) Psalms*.

Thanksgiving Psalms recall a previous call for help, acknowledge God’s deliverance and end in praise. Two subdivisions of the Thanksgiving Psalms are *Salvation History Psalms*, which in some way refer to the Exodus story, and *Songs of Trust*, which reflect on God’s actions resulting in trust.

The final type is *Hymnic Psalms* or *Psalms of Praise*. These begin and end with praise of God, describing the basis for the praise in the body of the psalm.