

## Faith in 5 – Adults The Seven Penitential Psalms



1. An ancient tradition of the Church involves the meditation on seven Psalms, called the **“Penitential Psalms”** because of their spiritual themes of penance and conversion. They are appropriate to use as a Lenten devotion. These psalms are:

Psalm 6

Psalm 31 (32)

Psalm 37 (38)

Psalm 50 (51) –Known also as the Miserere, long recognized as the most esteemed

Psalm 101(102)

Psalm 129 (130)

Psalm 142 (143)

**Note:** When there are two numbers expressed for the psalm, the first number reflects its order found in the Latin Vulgate based on the Septuagint; the number in parenthesis expresses the Masoretic Hebrew order and is used in the modern-day Bible.

These psalms have been regarded as David’s expressions of lament over his sins. The Seven Penitential Psalms are often associated with the Seven Deadly Sins, and they outline a spiritual progression in our own acknowledgment of sin towards a reconciliation with God. “For example... fear of punishment (Psalm 6); sorrow for sin, then confession and remission (Psalm 32); hope of grace, then more fear, followed by hope again (Psalm 38); love of purity, mercy bestowed (Psalm 51); longing for heaven (Psalm 102); distrust of your own strength and confidence in divine mercy (Psalm 130) and joy (Psalm 143)”. ([Source](#))

2. St. Augustine in his last days, ordered that 4 penitential psalms be written out where he could read and meditate upon them. In the following century, Cassiodorus (490-584) – a government public servant who later became a simple monk - identified a grouping of seven penitential psalms used today, listing them in the order found in the Septuagint: 31, 37, 50, 101, 129 and 142. He further comments: these seven are especially worthy of attention, since they “are given to the human race as an appropriate medicine, from which we receive a most salutary cleansing of our souls, revive from our sins, and by mourning, come to eternal joy.”([Source](#))
3. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) ordered these psalms to be prayed during the days of Lent. If they could not be said on each day of the Season, they could at least be prayed on Lenten Fridays (or one could pray one prayer on each of the 7 Fridays of Lent) ([Source](#)). Although no longer officially mandated, they are still widely used in the liturgy, especially Psalm 130, the De Profundis (Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord), and Psalm 51, the Miserere (Have mercy on me, O Lord).
4. The structure of the penitential psalms is similar. All begin with an initial cry for help, healing or mercy, followed by the reality of the sin, sinful state or suffering condition. The psalmist acknowledges his humility, and approaches God confidently because of His great goodness. The psalms end with a petition for help.

5. Praying the Seven Penitential Psalms may be used as a devotion to pray during Lent by prayer and meditation. When praying this devotion, all Seven Psalms may be prayed together at once or praying just one. One suggestion is to pray this devotion as preparation for confession.
6. When praying these psalms, begin and end each one with a short antiphon, "Remember not, O Lord, our offences, nor those of our parents; and take not revenge for our sins". (Tobias 3: 3-4). A Glory Be follows each psalm, before the next one is prayed and meditated on.
7. There are other ways to pray the Seven Penitential Psalms:  
[Praying the Seven Penitential Psalms](#) : included here is a Lectio Divina guide as well as using these prayers for intentions related to the Seven Deadly Sins.  
Psalm 6: From the sin of pride, O Lord, deliver me.  
  
Psalm 32 [31]: From the sin of avarice, O Lord, deliver me.  
  
Psalm 38 [37]: From the sin of envy, O Lord, deliver me.  
  
Psalm 51 [50]: From the sin of wrath, O Lord, deliver me.  
  
Psalm 102 [101]: From the sin of lust, O Lord, deliver me.  
  
Psalm 130 [129]: From the sin of gluttony, O Lord, deliver me.  
  
Psalm 143 [142]: From the sin of sloth (acedia), O Lord, deliver me

#### [USCBB Audio and Reflection](#)

[Pray the Seven Penitential Psalms](#) (Traditional): note, the number of the Psalm in this guide corresponds to the Septuagint order.

[Download a copy of the Psalms in English and Latin with antiphons and Gloria.](#)

8. We can use these seven psalms as a special source of prayer and reflection during Lent. "...[E]ach of these penitential psalms provides an example of how to come before God in repentance. They encourage the reader to cry to God for help, recognize one's own sinful state, and trust in God's character for forgiveness" ([Source](#)).

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