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A psalm brings serenity of soul; it is the author of peace, calming bewildering and seething thoughts . . . A psalm is a city of refuge from the demons; a means of inducing help from the angels; a weapon during trials by night; a rest from toils by day; a safeguard for infants; an ornament for those in the prime of youth; a consolation for elders; a most fitting adornment for women; . . . the advancement of those making progress; the support of those being perfected; a psalm is the voice of the Church.

A psalm brightens feast days; it creates a sorrow in accordance with God, for a psalm calls forth a tear even from a heart of stone. A psalm is the work of angels, a heavenly institution, and spiritual incense.

Within it lies true theology . . . the hope of the resurrection, fear of hell, promise of glory, revelations of mysteries. All things, as if in some great public treasury, are stored in the Book of Psalms.

—Saint Basil the Great, *Homily on Psalm 1*, PG 29, 212–13

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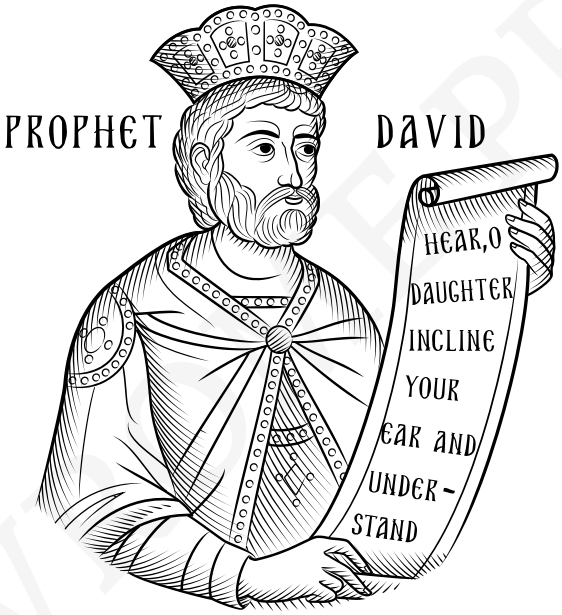
PROPHET DAVID
HEAR, O
DAUGHTER
INCLINE
YOUR
EAR AND
UNDER-
STAND

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PROLOGUE

The Psalter is the most familiar book in the liturgical life of the Church. It is used on a daily basis in every service of the daily office (Vespers, Matins, the Hours, etc.) and both entire psalms and single verses are employed in the Divine Liturgy and other sacraments. All of the Church's hymnography is based on the Psalter.

Composed by the prophet David through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the verses of the Psalms contain profound meaning. The Psalter is a "public treasury of teaching," and a "common hospice, containing the medicine for every ailment," according to Saint Basil the Great.

All the saints loved the Psalter and would read it. But two contemporary Cappadocian saints, Arsenios and Paisios, also used it as a Prayer Book. When Saint Arsenios could not find an appropriate prayer to address a specific issue regarding which people sought his assistance, he began to use the psalms for these purposes as well. To each of the psalms he assigned a petition of prayer, depending on the meaning he found in them.

Saint Paisios also utilized the Psalter in a similar fashion. "It is a lightning bolt to the devil," he would say. "If you read the Psalter in a difficult situation, you feel relief, redemption, and assurance that God will help." Indeed, during the final years of his life, his prayer for the world was mainly conducted with the assistance of the Psalter. He divided it into three parts, reading one part each day. His prayer was based on the petitions that Saint Arsenios had allocated for each psalm.[1]

The prayerful petitions of each psalm—regarding which he would

1 Saint Arsenios wrote the petitions for the Psalms in *karamanlidika* (Turkish words written in Greek letters). The final translation of these petitions was made by Saint Paisios following much prayer (and without a sufficient knowledge of Turkish). "Hatzefentis lifted the lid," he said laconically, implying that the enlightenment came from above through the intercessions of Saint Arsenios (who was called Hatzefentis by the local people).

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dedicate a certain amount of time for prayer of the heart—would normally be supplemented by other related circumstances. The latter, however, were not constant, and they were not predetermined. It was a "flight of the heart," as he would say—a heart that felt all the afflictions of the world and prayed fervently for it. He neither recorded nor revealed them, apart from exceptional cases. He wanted his prayer to be heartfelt and of the deepest kind. He considered the time spent reading the Psalter to be his most positive contribution to the world. Many people saw him appear clearly before them during these times of fervent prayer, saving them from traffic accidents and other hazardous situations.

That holy man had written in his own Psalter these words addressed to Saint Arsenios:

> No matter how much I try, unless you intervene, the signal cuts out. For this reason, keep doing what you did before [referring to when Saint Arsenios appeared to him as a signalman]. If you cannot hear me on account of my sins, then it is not right that the people should suffer because of me. Instead, you should punish me as a good father. Dear father, dear father, dear father.

This volume is a kind of prayer book based on the Psalter. Above every Psalm is the purpose for which Saint Arsenios had used it in prayer. In addition, whenever it is known, Saint Paisios's own petition is included together with his name. Following each kathisma, there are three troparia and one prayer.

The troparia of the first seven kathismata are taken from the first ode of the Great Canon, which Saint Paisios always read before chanting the Small Service of Supplication (Paraklesis) to the Mother of God (since he felt he did not possess the liberty to address her with boldness). The troparia selected for the remaining kathismata are exhortations to repentance. Of the prayers chosen, several lengthy ones have been abbreviated, hence the term "extract" in the relevant titles. The prayers are drawn mainly from the liturgical Book of Hours known as the Horologion and from the Compilation of Compunction Prayers made by Saint Nikodemos the Athonite.

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The English translation of the Psalms used in the *Psalter Prayer Book* is by Reverend Father Peter Chamberas. We thank Father Peter for his gracious permission, and the permission of Holy Cross Orthodox Press, to publish it. We would like to thank the person, who wishes to remain anonymous, that translated most of the remaining content of this book; may Saint John the Evangelist reward his efforts. In addition, we acknowledge that numerous texts in English were derived from various bilingual resources, such as those that are freely available on the website dcs.goarch.org. These translations were then edited for accuracy and clarity. Readers must also bear in mind that the numbering of the Psalms follows the pattern of the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, which varies slightly from the Hebrew numbering system known to many in the West.

It is an old custom to combine psalms, prayers, and three hymns, as we observe in Codex 43 of Pantokrator Monastery, Mount Athos (dating from the eleventh century and recently published), as well as in the prayer book known as the Thekaras (fourteenth century) and in a printed Psalter of Leipzig (1761), which also makes reference to the subject matter of the psalms. This edition seeks to emphasize the supplicatory power of the Psalter in the way it was employed by the aforementioned saints. Thus, the petitions of both saints are positioned above the title of each Psalm, and they can also be found in the index included at the end of this book.

Praying the Psalms cannot be used by all the faithful exactly as it was by Saint Arsenios, given that he was a priest. It is to be used rather for personal prayer, and it would be good for this to occur in the manner suggested by Saint Paisios.

The rubric of these suggestions is presented in the following pages. First is Psalm 50, which is the psalm of repentance par excellence, followed by one hymn requesting the assistance of the Mother of God and the apolytikion of Saint Arsenios. We have also added the apolytikion of Saint Paisios in order to call upon his intercessions as well. To conclude, Saint Arsenios would advise the reading of the Doxology and the hymn "It is truly meet" as a form of gratitude to Christ and His All-holy Mother.

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It is well-attested that these two Cappadocian Saints greatly assist in this approach to prayer. We hope and trust that this first edition in English will help to sustain the sacred task of prayer, for which there is such great need, especially in our times.

Hieromonk Gregorios
Feast of the Annunciation of
the Theotokos, 2024

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