

Sermon for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany (2021)

by Fr Nick Mezacapa

Today's readings, on this second Sunday of the Epiphany, include Psalm 139, as we heard. It happens to be my all-time favorite psalm. It was the psalm chosen for my ordination into the diaconate after seminary in 1981 at Trinity Cathedral in Cleveland, Ohio. I chose it again for my ordination into the priesthood in 1982 at St. Luke's Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan. And again, for my installation as rector at St John's in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and Calvary in Rochester, Minnesota. And here we are again today in our liturgy, reading Psalm 139.

Just a few words about the Book of Psalms in general. There are 150 psalms. Supposedly, Martin Luther memorized all of them. Tradition has it that at least half of them were written by King David. Same David who faced Goliath, and later became king of the Jews. These poetic words were written as musical lyrics, texts, if you would, for hymns, and fulfilled several different categories. The categories being royal ceremonies, laments, supplications, and thanksgivings. These psalms have a deep reach, and by them we are able to resonate with the original emotions of the writers. It really is truly incredible. And although they are particular in their references, being written thousands of years ago, they can be also meaningful, these lyrics, to our place in time in this 21st century. They address the depths of our feelings and they span the time. When we can't find the words, it seems the Psalms can provide them.

In the process of entrance into the priesthood, everyone talks to you, everyone is interested in your explanation of the call. *The call*. What is your call to be a priest? What is your call toward ordination? The parish is interested, the diocese is interested, the seminary is interested, your family, your friends, even Tom down at the corner pub. And quite honestly, it was hard for me to find the words to answer that question, what's your call about. I just knew that somehow, it was right. Now, I didn't pull out Psalm 139 and read it to them, but it inspired me to patiently go forward. It was that comforting inner voice that strengthened me. Let me just read a portion again. "Lord, you've searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down, and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You trace my journeys and my resting places, and are acquainted with all my ways. Indeed there is not a word on my lips, but you, O Lord, know it altogether. You press upon me behind and before, and lay your hand upon me." Incredible. It fortified me, when I was facing those who were interested in what my call was about. It's kind of like drinking out of the chalice at the altar, that is, the wonderful literature of these Psalms. Think about that. When you touch the chalice, think about all those who have touched it before. Think about all those who have looked into it, into the reflection on the sacrament. All those who have found strength and hope, assurance, in that sacrament. And by touching that same chalice that you and I touch, there with them, together enjoying it, in a neighborhood, if you would.

So it is, with these biblical lessons and stories, the feelings of these lessons and stories. For me, particularly Psalm 139 — words, images, like the chalice there at the altar, have comforted and affirmed the faith for centuries. And reading the stories, seeing these images, we become one with those who have gone before. We join them in faith, experiencing real life, whether it's the parting of the Red Sea, restoring sight to the blind, the Resurrection, or searching for a new rector at Christ Church. Poetic presence, the love, the hope, the affirmation that we feel— is timeless, true, and gracious, providing for us the presence of God, the word incarnate, if you would, the quiet power of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.