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Septem Psalmi Poenitentiales

History, Demise, and Rebirth of an Ascetical Tradition

“THIS DAY, BRETHREN, warns me to think more attentively about the burden I carry.”¹ It is a safe bet that few homiletics professors would recommend this as an opening line for a homily celebrating the anniversary of one’s ordination, and yet, this is precisely how St. Augustine began his preaching one day sometime in the year A.D. 425. Looking back upon his years in ministry, Augustine did not shrink from calling his ministry what it was—a burden. “The very day is a reminder to me to think about this burden; in addition, such a reading as that is chanted (Ez 33) to strike great fear into my heart, and make me think about what I am carrying; because unless the one who placed it on my shoulders carries it with me himself, I am bound to fail.”² In an age in which homilies too often begin with a joke, Augustine’s approach would strike most modern congregations as dour and joyless, which may reveal more about our modern expectations than anything else. Certainly, there is a need for joy and there is even

1. Augustine, *Sermo* 339, I. “*Hodiernus dies, fratres, admonet me attentius cogitare sarcinam meam.*”
2. *Ibid.*, 2. “*Parum est enim, quia dies ipse admonet nos eandem sarcinam cogitare; insuper etiam talis lectio recitatur, quae nobis incutiat magnum timorem, ut quid portemus cogitemus; quia nisi nobiscum qui imposuit portet, deficiamus.*”

a place for a good sense of humor. Yet at the core of the sacred liturgy, we are about the serious work of worshipping almighty God, which is anything but a trivial pursuit.

The good bishop explained the source of his burden. He reminded the people that “you are only going to render an account for yourselves alone, while I shall be giving one both for myself and for you.”³

While one could carry this thought to an extreme, effectively absolving members of the flock from personal responsibility, it is likely that those in attendance understood perfectly well their bishop’s point. There is indeed a weighty duty that accompanies ecclesial ministry and one may rightfully speak of accountability with respect to the actions of the ministers of the Gospel, especially for those called to the episcopacy. In the past decade the Catholic priesthood has felt a crushing burden, a modern day *sarcina*,⁴ primarily due to the grievous sins of sexual misconduct by our brothers, and in some cases, the lack of proper ecclesiastical oversight from the episcopacy. To help the Church bear this heavy burden, I propose that she rediscover one of her venerable traditions—praying the penitential psalms.

Recovering an Important Spiritual Tradition

Praying the penitential psalms is a tradition that was inexplicably forgotten following the Second Vatican Council, but it need not be irretrievably lost. Augustine was thoroughly steeped in the psalms and, understandably, passed that knowledge along to his flock. “I nourish you with what nourishes me. . . . I offer to you what I live on myself,” he once told his congregation.⁵ At the same time, Augustine’s episco-

3. Ibid. I: “*Hoc enim interest inter unumquemque vestrum et nos, quod vos pene de vobis solis estis reddituri rationem; nos autem et de nobis, et de omnibus vobis.*” (Augustine uses the papal “we” in his writing.)
4. *Sarcina*, he called it, a *bundle* to carry, a *burden* to bear. Originally “a soldier’s kit,” often referred to today as “baggage.”
5. Robert L. Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 42. (Sermo 339, 4): “*inde pasco, unde pascor; minister sum, paterfamilias non sum; inde vobis appono, unde et ego vivo.*”

pal duties too often prevented him from pursuing the intellectual life to the degree he desired. Many bishops today would heartily agree with him when he said, “Little force would be needed to make me to lead a life of leisure instead. . . . There could be nothing more enjoyable than rummaging around in the divine treasure chest with no one to plague me. . . . Preaching, arguing, correcting, building God’s house, having to manage for everyone—who would not shrink from such a heavy burden? But the Gospel terrifies me.”⁶

Augustine was not alone, even if he was rather bold in describing his responsibilities as he did. At the dawn of Vatican II, the Church’s liturgy was remarkably candid with respect to the burden of the sacred ministry. In the conclusion of the 1962 ceremony for the conferral of Minor Orders, the *Roman Pontificale* reveals a striking similarity to the homily referenced above. The closing reads, “Dearly beloved sons, carefully consider the order which you have received today and the burden which has been laid upon your shoulders. Endeavor to live holy lives devoted to religion and to be pleasing to the almighty God, that you may obtain His grace. May He in His mercy deign to bestow it upon you.”⁷ What happened next in the ceremony for conferral of minor orders might come as a surprise to many young clerics today. The bishop instructed them to perform a sacred task upon the conclusion of the ceremony: “All those who have been promoted to the first tonsure, or the four minor orders, say once the seven penitential psalms with the litany, versicles, and orations.”⁸ The bishop accepted their affirmative responses and concluded the

6. Ibid.: “*Nam ad istam securitatem otiosissimam nemo me vinceret: dulce est, bonum est; praedicare autem, arguere, corrumpere, aedificare, pro unoquoque satagere, magnum onus, magnum pondus, magnus labor. Quis non refugit istum laborem? Sed terret Evangelium.*”

7. Sacred Congregation of Rites, *De ordinatione presbyterum*, in the *Pontificale Romanum*, Pars Prima, Editio Typica, 1962, 58–59. “*Filii dilectissimi, diligenter considerate Ordinem per vos susceptum, ac onus humeris vestris impositum; studete sancte et religiose vivere, atque omnipotenti Deo placere, ut gratiam possitis acquirere: quam ipse vobis per suam misericordiam concedere dignetur.*”

8. Ibid., “*Singuli ad primam Tonsuram, (vel) ad quatuor minores Ordines promoti, dicite semel septem Psalmos poenitentiales, cum Litaniis, Versiculis, et Orationibus.*”

ceremony with the last gospel, the Prologue of St. John. One might imagine the serious impression that was made upon the *ordinandi*.

From where did the Church gain this understanding of the penitential psalms? The answer is somewhat complex due to the relative paucity of primary sources. Not surprisingly, we may first turn to Augustine. An episode at the end of Augustine's life provides a poignant glimpse into the saint's final days. Augustine's biographer and friend of forty years, Possidius, whose testimony on these points has not been seriously disputed by scholars, writes sometime before A.D. 429, "Now the holy man in his long life given of God for the benefit and happiness of the holy Church (for he lived seventy-six years, almost forty of which he spent as a priest or bishop), in private conversations frequently told us that even after baptism had been received, exemplary Christians and priests ought not depart from this life without fitting and appropriate repentance."⁹ In his final hours, Augustine did not exhort others to pray, rather, he directed them to place sheets of paper on the walls so that he himself might read psalms of a penitential nature. Possidius describes the scene in the following passage:

And he himself did this during the final illness from which he died; he ordered the Davidic Psalms, which are few in number concerning penance, to be copied for him, and lying in bed he used to look at those pages which had been placed on the opposite wall and read them, and wept profusely and continuously: and so that his attention would not be impeded by anyone, about ten days before he departed from the body he demanded of us present that no one should come into him, except only at these hours in which the doctors were entering for medicine or when nourishment was brought into him. And thus it was observed and was done, and during all that time he was devoted to prayer.¹⁰

9. Possidius, *Vita S. Augustini*, XXXI.

10. Ibid.: "Quod et ipse fecit, ultima qua defunctus est aegritudine: nam sibi iusserat Psalmos Davidicos, qui sunt paucissimi de poenitentia, scribi, ipsosque quaterniones iacens in lecto contra

Augustine's practice should not come as a surprise, since his devotion to the psalms was well known. However, Possidius' text does not identify particular psalms, only that the penitential psalms are few (*paucissimi*) in number. Some translations render *paucissimi* as the "shortest" psalms, but the context seems to indicate quantity. In any case, it is clear that Augustine himself characterized some psalms, perhaps four, as penitential in nature.¹¹

Instead of Augustine, it fell to an unlikely source to enumerate the first known list of penitential psalms. A sixth century Roman statesman by the name of Cassiodorus provides the first clear evidence of a grouping of seven psalms of a penitential nature in his comprehensive *Expositio Psalmorum*. A loyal friend and adviser to the Ostrogothic (and Arian) Emperor Theodoric, Cassiodorus later preserved many documents that became a precious source of history of the Ostrogothic kingdom.¹² Following the fall of the gothic kingdoms, Cassiodorus dedicated his life to God and embarked upon an ambitious commentary on all 150 psalms.

He first mentions a group of penitential psalms in his commentary on Psalm 6, where he writes, "Be mindful however, that this psalm is the first of [the] penitential."¹³ He then lists the complete set, including Psalms 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and 142. In the summary at the end of his commentary on Psalm 6 he notes: "Although we ought to employ the eagerness of intelligence to all the psalms, inasmuch as from them are acquired the greatest relief for our lives,

parietem positos diebus suae infirmitatis intuebatur, et legebat, et iugiter ac ubertim flebat. Et ne intentio eius a quoquam impediretur, ante dies ferme decem quam exiret de corpore, a nobis postulavit praesentibus, ne quis ad eum ingrederetur, nisi iis tantum horis, quibus medici ad inspiciendum intrarent, vel cum ei refectio inferretur. Et ita observatum et factum est: et omni illo tempore orationi vacabat." (Author's translation.)

11. *Quaterniones*—number four; 4 on a dice; group of 4 (men/things).
12. "Cassiodorus," entry by M. L. Angrisani Sanfilippo in *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 150. Cassiodorus was born ca. 485–90 A.D.
13. Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, commentary on Psalm 6: "*Memento autem quod hic poenitentium primus est psalmus.*"

nevertheless I judge that (those psalms) of the penitents should be investigated most carefully for they are discharged just as medicine corresponding to the human race.”¹⁴ When he arrived at the last of the seven psalms on his list (142 in the Vulgate numbering), Cassiodorus summarized the spiritual journey: “The affliction of the suppliants and the course of their blessed tears was indeed ended. But what the meaning is of this seventh prayer of those penitential [psalms], ought to be more diligently scrutinized.”¹⁵

He goes on to explain that “these psalms begin with hardships and end with joys, to ensure that no one despairs of the forgiveness which he realized lay in the prayers themselves.”¹⁶ Cassiodorus then compared our sins during the seven days that make up the course of a week with the gift of healing repentance that comes from the same number.¹⁷

Middle Ages up to the Reform of Vatican II

Three hundred years later, St. Benedict of Aniane, a ninth-century reformer of Benedictine rule and practice, sought to give the penitential psalms a place in the Church’s public prayer. Through the Council of Aix-la-Chapelle in A.D. 817, Benedict exerted his reform that included making the Penitential Psalms part of the daily office

14. Ibid., commentary on Psalm 142, “*Licet in omnibus psalmis intelligentiae studium adhibere debeamus, quoniam inde vitae nostrae maxima subsidia conquiruntur, tamen poenitentium aestimo magnopere perscrutandos, qui humano generi velut competens medicina praestantur.*” (Author’s translation.)
15. Ibid., “*Finita est quidem afflictio supplicantium, et felicitum cursus ille lacrymarum. Sed diligentius perscrutandum est quid sibi velit poenitentium istorum septima deprecatio.*” (Author’s translation.) Cassiodorus again lists the seven in order: (6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, and finally 142).
16. Ibid., “*quia psalmi ipsi ab afflictionibus inchoant, et in gaudiis desinunt: ne quis de venia desperaret, quam in ipsis precibus positam esse cognosceret.*”
17. Ibid., “*sicut in hac hebdomada peccamus, quam mundi istius temporis ductus excurrit, ita et in eodem numero remedialis poenitentiae munere salvemur.*”

following Prime.¹⁸ Around the turn of the fifteenth century, Pierre Cardinal D'Ailly spiritualized the seven psalms by linking each to the list of the seven deadly sins, not surprising given the symbolic nature of the number seven.¹⁹ St. John Fisher preached a series of sermons on the Penitential Psalms to Margaret, Countess of Richmond, and at her behest, committed them to writing for publication in 1508. It was the first publication for the bishop, who was martyred in 1535. That this work might be accessible to Catholics today, Ignatius Press published an edition in modern English in 1997.

The Breviary of Pope St. Pius V (1568) included the Penitential Psalms in an appendix after the Commons, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Office of the Dead. Yet, the papal bull *Quod a nobis* that promulgated this edition makes it clear that the recitation of the penitential psalms was no longer obligatory for clerics not bound to pray the Office in choir (i.e., secular clergy). Still, he strongly urged them not to avail themselves of this remission²⁰ and attached indulgences of 100 days for praying the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Office of the Dead and 50 days for the Gradual and Penitential psalms.²¹ From the time of Trent until Pope St. Pius X, the Penitential psalms continued to be prayed in choir after Lauds on the Fridays of Lent.

Also, in various editions of the Roman Ritual since its initial

18. Joseph Jungmann, "Christian Prayer Through the Centuries" (Translated text copyright, 1978, 2007, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press); see also Herbert Thurston, "Primer," *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, The Encyclopedia Press, 1911).
19. Successive virtues were embraced with each psalm—fear or punishment (6), sorrow for sin, then confession and remission (31), hope of grace, then more fear, followed by hope again (37), love of purity, mercy bestowed (50), longing for heaven (101), distrust of one's strength and confidence in divine mercy (129), and joy (142). Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly (1351–1420).
20. Pope Pius V, *Quod a nobis*, "Omnes vehementur in Domino . . . cohortamur ut remisisonem nostram quantum fieri poterit sua devotione ac diligentia praecurrentes illis etiam precibus."
21. Ibid., "Quod vero in Rubricis Nostri huius officii praescribitur quibus diebus officium beatae Mariae semper Virginis et defunctorum, item septem Psalmos Poenitentiales et Graduales dici ac psalli oporteat; Nos propter varia huius vitae negotia multorum occupationibus indulgentes peccati quidem periculum ab ea praescriptione removendum duximus."

publication in 1614, [cf. Roman Ritual 1614 Title V, Chapter 3], the penitential psalms were indicated in certain prayers for the anointing of the infirm and the reconciliation of penitents on their deathbed. It was for this reason that for the next three hundred years they were preserved as an appendix to the Breviary together with other prayers that would be useful and easily accessible to a priest in his daily ministry.

Outside of the official liturgy of the Church, the penitential psalms also appeared. For example, Dante Alighieri composed an Italian poetical version of the penitential psalms in *terza rima*²² based upon the Vulgate. Orlando di Lasso composed a polyphonic version of the seven penitential psalms for private performance in the chapel of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria (1559). They were only published some twenty years after his death.²³ His composition was the first to include all seven as a coherent group, and remains a standard work in the repertoire of renaissance polyphony.

LEADING UP TO THE REFORMS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The penitential psalms slowly began to lose their place in the prayer of the Church during the first liturgical reforms of the twentieth century. With the apostolic constitution *Divino Afflatu* of November 1, 1911, a thorough reform of the Roman Breviary and its accompanying rubrics went into effect. The document removed the remaining obligation for the choral recitation of the penitential psalms, but they remained, nevertheless, in their traditional place in the text of the Breviary. Effectively, the penitential psalms became a private devotion.

The Acts of the Preparatory Commission leading up to the con-

22. Terza rima is a three-line stanza using chain rhyme in the pattern A-B-A, B-C-B, C-D-C, D-E-D.

23. "Orlando di Lasso: The Seven Penitential Psalms and Laudate Dominum de Caelis," [Recent Research in the Music of the Renaissance, vols. 86-87, ed. Peter Bergquist, A and R. Editions, 1990].

vening of the Second Vatican Council are instructive in and of themselves. On March 30, 1962, the Central Commission examined the chapter concerning the Divine Office of the proposed Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Arcadio Cardinal Larraona delivered a presentation concerning aspects of the reform of the Breviary, including a brief mention of the “little offices”: “It is expressly indicated that the Little Office of the BVM, inasmuch as it is included in the Breviary, contains the public prayer of the Church.”²⁴ The April 16, 1962 response from the Commission is significant, indicating the mindset with respect to the Little Offices leading up to the Council:

Art. 76— Little Offices

RC (Response of the Commission):

There is no difficulty because they (little Offices) are recognized as the public prayer of the Church. Even now the Little Office of the BVM is liturgical prayer: the Breviary contains it. Concerning the rest, when the Breviary will have been restored, it is probable that many religious will desire to pray with the sacerdotal Breviary and leave behind the Little Offices.²⁵

Reforms of Vatican II and the Immediate Aftermath

Following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the future of the penitential psalms and other of the so-called “little offices” became murky and the communication from Rome does not appear at all consistent. While the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* called for a revision of the Divine Office, as with the Mass, the specifics would only be worked out after the Council.

24. Ad art. 76. *Declaratur expressius quod Officium parvum B. Mariae Virginis, utpote in ipso Breviario inclusum, continet publicam Ecclesiae orationem.*

25. *Ibid.*, *Officia parva*. RC: *Nulla difficultas quod recognoscantur uti publica Ecclesiae prex. Etiam nunc Parvum Officium BMV est prex liturgica: illud habet Breviarium. De cetero, cum Breviarium instauratum erit, probabiliter per plures religiosi cupient orare cum Breviario sacerdotali et parva Officia derelinquent.* (Author’s translation).

With the publication of the apostolic letter *Sacram Liturgiam* issued *motu proprio* by Pope Paul VI on January 25, 1964, the Consilium (of the Sacred Congregation of Rites) was established. Its task was to oversee the implementation of the liturgical reform. Later that same year, the first instruction on the implementation of SC was released entitled *Inter Oecumenici*, and subsequent clarifications were often directed to norms indicated in one of these two documents.

The Vatican journal *Notitiae* contains the official responses to specific questions posed regarding the implementation of the directives of the Council and other liturgical matters. In 1965, a brief exchange was published that included several responses in light of the directives contained therein. One response specifically addresses the topic of the so-called “little offices,” among which the seven penitential psalms are generally included: “Whether little Offices after the restoration of the sacred Liturgy are to be abolished? Resp.: The *Constitution* art. 98 and the *Instruction* nn. 80 to 84 suppose the existence of little Offices even after the restoration of the sacred Liturgy.”²⁶ However, a simple glance at the table of contents clearly reveals that most of these “little offices” were removed. While an Office of the Dead was retained, most others simply disappeared without further comment. Religious orders that had been in the custom of reciting the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary (e.g. the Visitation Nuns) successfully petitioned Rome for the ability to pray the revised Liturgy of the Hours.

The 1964 Instruction *Inter Oecumenici* touched upon the Little Offices only in a most general way. Specifically, “little offices already lawfully approved suffice for the time being as a sharing in the public prayer of the Church, provided their make-up meets the criteria just stated.”²⁷ It would appear the “the time being” extended only

26. *Notitiae* I (1965), 186, n. 44, “*Utrum Officia parva post instaurationem sacrae Liturgiae abolenda sint? Resp.: Constitutio art. 98 et Instructio nn. 80 ad 84 supponunt existentiam Officiorum parvorum etiam post instaurationem sacrae Liturgiae.* (Author’s translation).

27. *Inter Oecumenici*, no. 80-81, referencing the Vatican II document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 98.

until the publication of the new Liturgy of the Hours, promulgated in 1971.

Pope Paul VI's 1968 Apostolic Constitution on the doctrine of indulgences referenced the value of penitential practices, noting "the Christian faithful have always endeavored to help one another on the path leading to the heavenly Father through prayer, the exchange of spiritual goods and penitential expiation." The Little Offices (*officia parva*) (though not specifically the Penitential Psalms) are listed in the section of the Enchiridion titled "Other Grants," no. 36.²⁸ Questions remained, and in 1980 a series of replies was published again in *Notitiae*, some of which touch upon the subject of the "little offices" (*Officium parvum*) within a more general discussion of various Votive Offices. A number of religious congregations had retained the use of the Little Offices, whether once per week, or at least occasionally, and the question was raised "whether now the habit or custom (*consuetudo*) of reciting even in our times the "Little Offices" is able to be preserved as it was before, or variations ought to be introduced in the text or, if it is proper, into the constitutions directing the 'Little Offices.'"²⁹

The initial responses were indicative of the Consilium's mindset regarding these offices: "Before all else one ought to turn one's attention to the fact that according to the mind of the Constitution of Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (cf. n. 34) an addition of whatever other Office one wishes besides (Blessed Virgin Mary, of the Dead, etc.) cannot be admitted to the proper Office of the day."³⁰ The cited reference (SC, n. 34) states: "The rites should be distinguished by a noble simplicity; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions; they should be within the people's

28. Paul VI, "The Doctrine of Indulgences", no. 5 (January 1, 1967) in Enchiridion of Indulgences, 1968.

29. *Notitiae* 16 (1980), *Documentum explanatio*, 473–74.

30. *Ibid.*, "Ante omnia animadvertendum est quod secundum mentem Constitutionis de sacra Liturgia *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (cf. n. 34) adiectio cuiusvis alterius Officii (*Beatae Mariae Virginis, defunctorem, etc.*) ad *Officium diei proprium admitti nequit.* (Author's translation).

powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation.”³¹

The citation appears to imply that the addition of little offices to the daily office is contrary to the mind of the Council. Recall, as mentioned above, that the earliest documents following the Council envisioned their retention. The response clarified regarding the “little offices” in use by religious institutes and congregations not bound by the Liturgy of the Hours. For these, the norms already given by the Apostolic See are to be observed: “Offices of this sort must be composed or recognized according to the norm of the Liturgy of the Hours . . . concerning this, they must consist of hymns, psalms, readings and prayers and their rationale should be that of the different hours of the day or of the liturgical seasons (cf. SC) An office that would always be the same in the same mode on each day, as the year rolls around, should be rejected.”³² The Consilium response reinforces that even religious who celebrate a Little Office that has been rightly approved, play a part in the public prayer of the Church. The most telling response was that which stated: “nevertheless the celebration of the Liturgy of Hours is recommended to Institutes either in whole or in part in place of the Little office for more intimately participating in the liturgical life of the Church.”³³ Thus, by 1980 even those not bound by the Liturgy of the Hours were being steered in that direction. It is hardly surprising that these offices quickly fell out of use. Clearly, the die was cast.

31. SC, 34: “*Ritus nobili simplicitate fulgeant, sint brevitate perspicui et repetitiones inutiles evitent, sint fidelium captui accommodati, neque generatim multis indigeant explanationibus.*”

32. Notitiae 16 (1980), resp. 4 a., 474 *Officia huiusmodi componenda vel recognoscenda sunt ad Normam Liturgiae Horarum* (cf. Const. Sacrosanctum Concilium, 98; Instr. Inter Oecumenici, 81); *qua de re constare debent Hymnis, psalmis, lectionibus et orationibus atque rationem habere tum diversarum horarum diei tum temporum liturgicorum* (cf. SC, 13, 107, 108). “*Officium quod semper eodem modo idem esset in unoquoque die anno vertente est reiiciendum.*” (Author’s translation.)

33. Ibid., resp. 4b, 474. (Author’s translation, emphasis added. The response footnotes the *motu proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*, “*Normae ad exsequendum decretum Concilii Vaticani II*” *Perfectae Caritatis*, 20.)

Status Quaestionis: *Moving Forward in Hope*

Where do things stand today 2014? In written correspondence with Archbishop Piero Marini, former secretary to Archbishop Annibale Bugnini of the Consilium and later Master of Ceremonies for Pope John Paul II, this author inquired concerning the decision for the removal of the psalms as an appendix in 1971. Archbishop Marini graciously replied, “In the plan of the liturgical reform there were foreseen (books), ‘*De Processionibus*,’ ‘*De Supplicationibus*’ (where they would have been able to be found in a place in the cases of violations of sacred places), a ‘*Liber precum*’ where certainly they would have been published, also because in the Manual of Indulgences, they are also mentioned.”³⁴ In reality, the proposed texts cited above have yet to be published. The penitential psalms are not collected in any currently approved liturgical text emanating from the Holy See, despite the intentions of the council and those entrusted with carrying out the liturgical reform.

Conclusion

It was in 2002 that a story about sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston broke in the *Boston Globe*. As Cardinal Sean O’Malley soberly noted ten years later, “the life of the Church in the Archdiocese of Boston (and throughout the world) was forever changed by the revelations of clergy sexual abuse that dominated the news in January of 2002.”³⁵ More recently and much closer to home, the detailed and frequent reporting of the handling of abuse cases in the Arch-

34. *Nel piano della Riforma liturgica erano previsti un De Processionibus, un De Supplicationibus (dove avrebbero potuto trovar luogo nei casi di violazioni di luoghi sacri), un Liber precum dove certamente sarebbero stati pubblicati, anche perché nel Manuale indulgentiarum sono ancora menzionati.* (Written correspondence with the author, with the original Italian provided.)

35. *Ten Years Later—Reflections on the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Archdiocese of Boston* Cardinal Seán P. O’Malley, OFM Cap., January 4, 2012.

diocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has become a *cause celebre* in the media outlets for the better part of one year, leaving many Catholics demoralized and confused. Nor has the scandal of sexual abuse spared the rarified air of major collegiate athletics, where revelations of abuse and its cover up have devastated Penn State University. The wounds of sexual abuse, certainly not limited to the Church, have left a lasting mark on society.

During Mass on January 6, 2012, the Solemnity of the Epiphany, Pope Benedict XVI consecrated two priests to the episcopacy for service as nuncios. In his homily, the Pope Emeritus spoke of the restlessness that must characterize the present day ministry of the bishop, a restlessness that is satisfied with nothing less than God. “But not only are we restless for God: God’s heart is restless for us. God is waiting for us. He is looking for us. He knows no rest either, until he finds us.”³⁶

Like Augustine before them, many priests today speak of their “restless hearts,”³⁷ crying out for a spiritual response to this crisis, yet lacking a specific means to bring it about. Perhaps now is an opportune time to revisit the intentions of the Council Fathers, providing to priests and laity alike a simple and effective means by which to exercise prayers of penance. Recovering the tradition of praying the penitential psalms could provide an official vehicle for alleviating the present burden on the Church. Combined with an exhortation to pray them on Fridays, it would also signal to the faithful the seriousness with which the clergy sees its own need for purification and sanctification.

36. Pope Benedict XVI, homily for Epiphany, January 6, 2012.

37. Augustine, *Confessions*, I.I.I “*quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te.*”