

Easter Seasonal Psalms

By Paul Mason

Introduction

The Australian Lectionary includes three Seasonal Common Psalms for Easter Season. They are:

- Psalm 135 (136) His love is everlasting. (*for the Easter Vigil*)
- Psalm 117 (118) This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad.
- Psalm 65 (66) Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Sung Seasonal Common Psalms may be used in place of the psalm of the day in order to facilitate the singing of the psalms in all Masses. The choice of Seasonal Common Psalm is dictated by its relevance to the readings of the particular celebration. The recommended Seasonal Common Psalms for use on each Sunday in Easter, based on the correspondence to the readings for Year B, are detailed in the tables linked to the article on Music Recommendations for Easter - Pentecost.

The following excerpt from my psalm resource book *Psalms for All Time* provides some background to the history and liturgical use of psalm 117 (118) as well as some compositional background for the musical setting contained in the resource.

Psalm 117 (118): This Is the Day

A Song of Thanksgiving

This psalm has traditionally been used in the temple liturgy of the festival of thanksgiving (the Feast of Tabernacles). The series of psalms 113-118, known as the *Hallel*, was a permanent part of the cycle of autumn feasts and of Passover.

Some think this was the psalm Jesus sang at the end of the Last Supper (cf. *Mt* 26:30; *Mk* 14:26). The motif of thanksgiving for salvation from death and a military-style victory, together with the tradition of its messianic interpretation in Judaism, has led some commentators to see it as a king's hymn of thanksgiving. Certainly this is the way that the earliest disciples of Jesus interpreted it, as in its application to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (*Ps* 118:25-26; cf. *Mt* 21:9, 11, 15; 23:39; *Mk* 11:9-10; *Lk* 13:35; 19:38; *Jn* 12:13).

The rejection and subsequent exaltation of Jesus is also seen in the psalm: "the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (*Ps* 118:22-23;

cf. the synoptic parables *Mt* 21:42; *Lk* 20:17). The implications for Christian discipleship are spelled out in the New Testament and the psalm's early incorporation into Christian worship is also in evidence (cf. *Acts* 4:11-12; *1 Pet* 2:7; *Lk* 20:18; *Rev* 19:7).

Psalm 117 (118) was the subject of a number of *Gradual*, *Alleluia* and *Offertory* chants, the most famous of which is *Haec Dies* ("This is the day"). Augustine references this Easter responsorial psalm and its earliest musical settings are ancient. The Gregorian *Haec Dies* is a Mode II chant, made particularly joyful with the use of Bb and irregular rhythm in the response. The musical setting presented here is similarly conceived, written in the key of F, but with a lively syncopated response.

This psalm is the pre-eminent Easter psalm. It is especially used at the Easter Vigil as an *Alleluia* psalm, and as a responsorial psalm on Easter Sunday and other Sundays in the season of Easter. It also has application as a processional song during the presentation of the gifts. Psalm 117 (118) is sung in Morning Prayer on Sundays (listed for weeks 2 and 4 of the Psalter cycle), and Prayer During the Day on Sundays (listed for weeks 1 and 3 of the Psalter cycle).