

Create in me a clean heart O God
Psalm 51:11-16

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

“Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.”

Are those words familiar to you? If you were to turn to page 75 in the front of your green hymnal and you would see the offertory canticle based on this very psalm. A song of confession, repentance and forgiveness designed as an option to be used whenever we don't have communion at worship, to help us remember the sinfulness of our lives and the dependency we have on the grace of God for salvation. It is also the same exact Psalm that we used on Ash Wednesday, when began Lent with this call to confess, repent and seek forgiveness, when we were told we are dust and to dust we shall return. Now here on the last Sunday of Lent before we enter into the Passion Story of Holy Week we read this Psalm once again. We read it/sing it in worship because the words expressed in that psalm, the emotions and feelings should be very familiar to us.

Do you ever feel that pain and suffering, that guilt and remorse? I wonder... do you... I am scared to think that many people don't feel that pain or remorse. I am worried that many shrug off guilt or shame, burying those feelings deep down more concerned about finding what makes oneself happy in the immediate moment. Drugs and Alcohol are forms of ways we get away from feeling our emotions. Others use games of chance the lottery, slots, Atlantic City, Vegas, while still others may use sports, sleeping, shopping, gossip, tv, internet, pornography as means of escaping emotions and seeking a fantasy world instead. We live in a world that seeks the immediate satisfaction of self. What's in it for me? What are you going to do for me? What do I get out of it? What are you going to give me? Our society has brought up and trained people to avoid responsibility, to blame others or some neurosis, our their environment, anything rather than feel guilt, pain, regret.

What makes this Psalm so interesting is that the writer did fear God, and knew the judgment of the Lord was hanging over his head. He felt that guilt, and he was pleading for forgiveness and hope. Listen again: To the beginning of those words: Have mercy on me O God, according to your steadfast love in your great compassion blot out my offenses. It is not like he

had a choice in the matter, it actually was pointed out to him in a not so private fashion, but instead in front of everyone, very openly and publicly.

The preamble to this psalm begins with these words: “To the Leader, A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” David had been reminded of his sin in a very open fashion. He was the king, and if there was anyone who could say that they lived in the “it’s all about me society” it would have been him. But even David knows and believes the wrath of God, even while having all that power as King, with armies and people that followed every order without question, with riches and everything you could ever want right at hand, he still was called to task for his sinfulness, he was still reminded that he is under God’s authority.

According to this introduction this psalm was written right after Nathan, the prophet of God, the one who had replaced Samuel as the spokesperson for the Lord Almighty on Earth comes into the courts of the King, into David’s very throne room in front of his people and confronts him with his adulterous and murderous affair with Bathsheba. David had lusted after her, and taken her, impregnated her and tried to cover it over, when that plan failed because Uriah, her rightful husband was just and honorable, David arranged to have him killed by sending him into battle at the front of the heaviest spot of fighting and drawing his troops back thus leaving Uriah alone to die. David’s lust, adultery, betrayal and murder hadn't fooled anyone, definitely not God and he is confronted with his shame, his sinfulness, his disobedience. Before his entire court Nathan points the judgment finger on him. You have fallen, filled with sin and darkness. Nathan even calls down wrath and punishment on David, saying that trouble will arise for him within his own family, that his child shall die and that he shall know the shame and punishment of God. As a result, David calls out to Nathan and to God to mend his broken heart, to cleanse him from his sins, to allow him to repent and turn back to God.

And so Psalm 51 is a psalm of confession and repentance and pardon, that’s why we start the Lenten Season with this Psalm and even have it here on the last Sunday of Lent before Holy Week begins. It’s a constant reminder that we should also follow this process of confession and repentance in our daily personal relationship with God, because each of us have fallen short of the Glory of God. I am not like Nathan, I can not confront you with your sinfulness. But believe me God knows. We each bear sins that we have done on purpose and things we have done by simple mistake, but are sinful all the same. We are responsible for our own doubts, anger, fear, greed, lust, and all matters of deceit and guile. Maybe we didn’t sin in such a way as King David did here, but we are sinners all the same, all needing to be confronted by that word of judgment, all needing to confess, repent and seek the pardon of the Lord.

The first part is Confession. David realized he had to come before God with a spirit of confession. Confession is an honest look at our lives and our relationship with God. It recognizes both strengths and weaknesses. And it has at the heart of it a desire to change our relationship with God. Confession is letting God know that we understand that we have done wrong, that we have sinned, that we need God's help, that its not all about me and my wants, my desires, my pleasures, but that are fallen from God's ways.

But Confession is only the first step in this process. Confession by itself is not enough. You see a lot of us don't mind confessing at all. To stay at that level is just as bad as the sins, because it almost becomes a badge of honor. I am sure you know what I mean, we are all or have known people that are like this. When asked how they are they open up everything of their lives. We love to parade it before others without even thinking about it. "Woe is me", "look at me", "I carry such a burden, feel sorry for me", "Just let me tell you" and then we go into all that is wrong, confessing our days of darkness to anyone who will listen, and yet never moving on. True confession to God requires us to move to the next step.

To first confess and then seek Repentance. You see confession without repentance is like dumping all the garbage of your life out of a big sack, showing it off to God, and then repacking the bag and carrying around some more while adding more and more to it each and every day. If that is how we confess, laying our wrongs out there and then doing them again and again, with full knowledge, then the confession doesn't really do us any good. It doesn't have any effect on our lives or our faith. All we did was name those things that separate us from God and then go on living like that.

Did Jesus die for that? No! Jesus died on the cross so we could be free of the dirt and the filth of our sin, Christ died so that we could be given "a new clean heart and a new and right spirit" Jesus gives us a way to be free of the burden of our sin. Jesus offers us a way to tear down the wall that separates us from God and a way bring us as close to God as God's heart. And that's through both confession and repentance.

Confession is realizing what we did and naming it before God. Repentance is leaving it there and turning away from it. That is what the literal translation of the word repentance means: to turn around. To turn away. It means to make a 180% turn; to do a "U-turn". It means to head completely in the opposite direction, to turn from our own path that has led us to all this sin and turn in the direction of God who frees us from that sin.

And that brings us to our last step in our process – the pardon to hear the words of forgiveness. With the pain and guilt gone from our lives, with the deceitfulness, lies, anger, pains and sorrows taken away, we are given a new and clean heart and right spirit with in us to live in

that love and grace of God. Renewed and changed by God, restored in the joy of salvation that sustained by the eternal Spirit of God now and forever. This Psalm grants us the understanding that the grace of God is even more powerful than our darkness. The light of God overcomes all things and wins for us a pardon that is everlasting. The burdens are set free. The wayward are brought home. The lost are found. The helpless are filled with hope.

God grants us this hope now and always. May we confess and repent and receive that everlasting pardon, that forgiveness of sins, that righteousness with God that has been won for you and all by the blood of Jesus Christ. Live in that assuredness and give God thanks.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, you have sent Jesus Christ to overcome all sins and hardships, all evils and temptations. He overcame all these things to win for us a place in your eternal kingdom. Continue to bless us with that hope and assurance, so that we may turn to you leaving behind the sins and burdens of this life and receive instead your love and forgiveness now and forever.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

O Heavenly Father, we ask that you bless us with a new and clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Cast us not away from your presence and take not your

Holy Spirit from us. Give us your saving help and allow us to praise your name in joy and blessedness. We turn to you Lord for help and guidance. Where there is violence and war, we need your spirit of peace. Where there is hatred and guilt we need your spirit of forgiveness. In a world filled with disasters both manmade and natural where so many are suffering we need your spirit of Hope. Lord Bless us this day with your Love, grace, forgiveness.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

God, stretch out your saving hand to those who are sick. With your strong love, comfort the lonely, the oppressed, and all who suffer. Give courage to those facing surgery. Give healing to those who are afflicted. Give peace to those troubled both physically and mentally. Impart your Holy Comforter to be with them in their times of need. Especially we remember today our hospitalized, our homebound and all those we name now in our prayers to you....

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for this community of faithful; teach us to use the many gifts you have given us for the common mission of your Church. Take and use us as your witnesses, as your servants in this community and beyond to spread your word, to share your good news, to welcome the stranger and lift up those torn down by hatred and sin. Lift up your face and shine upon us and send us forth as your witnesses of that glory now and forever.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, o Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.