

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Psalm 51 is the basis for our Lenten meditation this day/evening. You may be seated.

Have mercy on me, wash me, cleanse me, purge me, create, renew, restore, uphold, deliver me... David made many requests of the Lord in this Psalm. And he had reason to.

After his adulterous relations with Bathsheba and his deceptive attempts at covering this up, which resulted in his murder of Uriah, David suffered great pangs of conscience. The word of God through the prophet Nathan convicted him of his sinful conduct. However, David came to a greater realization. David realized that he was sinful and corrupt through and through; from birth and even conception he was sinful, brought forth in iniquity. It wasn't just a matter of him needing to change his conduct. He needed to be re-created, reborn. As a contrite penitent, he prayed for a purified, or clean, heart and a new and right spirit.

In 2 Samuel chapter 12, Nathan confronts David with his crimes. Upon realizing the enormity of his sins and hearing the judgment pronounced upon him, David can only respond with the words, **“I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Samuel 12:13)**. He offers no excuses. He does not attempt to shift the blame. Nor does he qualify his repentance in any way. He simply confesses. And Nathan, in response to David's confession, pronounces God's forgiveness: **“The Lord has removed your sin.”** We don't know how David took these words, but when you and I receive such absolution, do we believe them to be true or do we think, *“I don't know... that's not possible, my sin has been too great.”*?

Psalm 51 echoes David's confession: **“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.”** This confession may very well be our own, for we often are acutely aware of the wrong

that we have done. David then goes on to tell God, **“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment” (Psalm 51:3-4).**

David not only confesses actual sins (sins of thought, word, and deed) that he has committed, but he also acknowledges his original sinful nature. **“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).** We recognize that we are sinful through and through from birth, even conception. Paul writes to the **Romans (5:12): “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin . . . so death spread to all men because all sinned.”** There is no good to be found in us. With the apostle Paul, you and I are called to acknowledge ourselves as the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15). This is a matter of being totally honest with ourselves and with God.

All sin is an affront to God—our original sin together with our actual sins, those committed against others or self. God is proved right when He speaks and is justified when He judges us as sinners. For He calls us to confess the truth about ourselves - the truth that we are sinners. Remember? **“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).**

God’s Word reveals the truth about ourselves (that we are sinners) and God (that He judges us rightly). And so we recognize our need for re-creation because we are so corrupted by sin. Thorough change is required of us, something we cannot effect ourselves. Only the cleansing blood of Christ can change our status before God. We know that dealing with sin requires more than merely cleaning up our act. God wants a change of heart, something David, in his corrupt state, could never produce. We were dead in trespasses and sin as Paul writes in Ephesians (2:1).

If you were to fall over due to a sudden heart attack right now, you could not somehow raise yourself. Even if your brainwaves were still working, and your brain told you that you should try to get up, you couldn't, because your heart would be stopped and you would no longer be breathing. You would need someone else to revive you through CPR. So it is with each of us because of sin. We are spiritually dead and can do absolutely nothing to fix our situation before God. Cleansing of sin must come from God. He must do it all.

In the Offeratory we often sing the words of David from Psalm 51. **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit.”** When we do so, we join David in praying that God would create a new heart within us. We are sinful people who need God to forgive our sin. We pray that He will be merciful to us, grant us forgiveness, and restore us to be His people. He does these things through Christ Jesus. By singing these words, we are reminded that our offerings, though they are a response to God's blessings, are nothing compared to what God has given us. His giving far exceeds the small gifts that we bring.

That is David's prayer in Psalm 51. His prayer of confession is an acknowledgement of his sin. But his prayer of confession also trusts that God's cleansing from sin is thorough and complete. Sin is blotted out. Sin is washed away. Sin is cleansed completely.

This cleansing of sin is based on God's gracious work in Jesus Christ. Cleansing with hyssop was part of the Old Testament purification rituals for those who were considered unclean, including lepers and those exposed to the dead. Blood and water were sprinkled or applied. The application of blood and water with hyssop in the Old Testament foreshadows our cleansing by the application of

the blood of Christ through faith. Old Testament purification rituals point to Christ. God's forgiveness is also described by David as God hiding His face from sin so that He no longer sees it, as God blotting out sin from His record book and as God washing us and making us whiter than snow. All of these point to the redemption and complete cleansing that come through Christ, for **“the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7).**

Because Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, God hides His face from our sin; God blots out our sin from His record; God washes us whiter than snow; **“that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19).** In Christ, your sins have been removed. Do not doubt, but believe it!

The words of David **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10),** bring to mind the prophet Ezekiel's recording of God's promise to His people Israel: **“And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My rules and obey them. And they shall be My people, and I shall be their God” (Ezekiel 11:19–20).** Therefore we can be confident in this prayer when we pray as David did - **“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).** God has given His Word. God keeps His promises. And answering this plea is something that only God can do. He is the Creator. God alone creates our conversion. Thus, David prays for the miracle of a new creation, performed by the Creator alone. God the Holy Spirit works this new creation that involves repentance, faith, and willing service. Renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace.

The old Adam in us must daily be drowned and the new man in Christ brought forth. The Holy Spirit works through God's Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, together with Confession and Absolution (which is the Word applied to you personally). In Holy Baptism, the old man is drowned, faith in Christ is created, and the Holy Spirit is given (Acts 2:38). There, we are connected to Jesus' death and resurrection and walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4). Through God's Word of Law, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and brings us to repentance. Through God's Word of Gospel, the Holy Spirit assures us of God's forgiveness and love in Jesus Christ, which strengthens our faith.

Because this renewal is never perfect in this life, David prays that the Spirit will keep him steadfast and sustain him so that he will not fall again. This prayer is also an expression of confidence that God will answer David's prayers, since David says with assurance: **"Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. . . . O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise" (Psalm 51:13, 15).**

In all of this, we pray that God would do this work - fulfilling David's requests as well as our own, for it is only God who can do it. This is David's attitude throughout Psalm 51, but especially when he says, **"For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17).**

In praying Psalm 51, we know, believe, and trust that through Christ Jesus and the working of the Holy Spirit, God fulfills all of David's requests, as well as our own, according to His good and gracious will—God hides His face from our sin; He blots out our sin from His record; He washes us whiter than snow. And so with David and all the faithful through the ages, together with angels and

archangels and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify our glorious, merciful God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.