

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

Psalm 143 is the basis for our Lenten meditation this day/evening. You may be seated.

It's been a humbling experience to journey through the penitential Psalms during this season of Lent. God continues to teach us through these prayers as we join the saints who have prayed them before us. He leads us to recognize and sorrow over our poor, miserable, sinful condition - granting us contrite hearts and confident faith to receive the forgiveness that only He can give.

Psalm 143 begins with David basing his appeal on the Lord's faithfulness to His promises of deliverance through the coming Christ. David asks for mercy. Because he is a child of God through faith, David can call upon the Lord for help. **"Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!" (Ps 143:1).** He calls on God to answer because He believes in the goodness and unfailing love of God.

David is up front with his own unworthiness. **"Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you" (Ps 143:2).** He is saying, I know that I don't deserve anything good from you. No living human being does. No one can measure up to the righteousness that you rightly demand from us. All we can hope for is God's mercy and grace.

And David confesses his sin—not in the sense of naming each one - God doesn't require such a work of us—simply by stating that he is unworthy, that he cannot stand before the righteous judgment of God. **"My spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled" (Ps 143:4).** All he has and his only hope in life is God's help, **"Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD! I have fled to you for refuge" (Ps 143:9).**

You and I do not have to be pursued by an enemy into a desert wilderness to call out to God in desperation. The fallen-ness of our sinful condition confronts us day in and day out - giving us every reason to cry out to God. Yet, we, too, have an enemy pursuing us: **“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8)**. The devil stalks particularly those who have been claimed by God as his dear children. Like robbers or thieves lying in wait to ambush the unsuspecting, so Satan and his legion of evil angels seek to attack the faithful with despair, doubt, and eventual unbelief.

Children of God live life under the law, knowing their sins, and resting all of their hope in God. The life of a Christian is a life of repentance, so these feelings of David, so eloquently expressed in this Psalm, should be familiar to each of you. Sometimes our sorrow is the result of gnawing awareness of our sins, whether they are big and numerous, or relatively small (in the eyes of the world around us) and few. The sinner knows his guilt, and he understands that no sin is truly minor and that his guilt is never small. With David, the penitential heart cries out, **“Answer me quickly, O LORD! My spirit fails! Hide not your face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit” (Ps 143:7)**.

At one point or another, our guilt rises up before us. And so, as we face our sin and its consequences, as we face the enemies that assail us, the devil, the world, and our flesh, as we face our weakness, as we feel smothered and faint, all the life and energy being sapped out of us, it is then that we cry out to God in repentant faith. Like David, we cry out for mercy—the forgiveness of our sins. Like David, we **“stretch out [our] hands to [the Lord],”** for our souls thirst for God like a parched land (Ps 143:6). We cry out to God for sustenance, for word of God’s steadfast love, for refuge and deliverance from the enemy, for guidance and teaching, for the leading of the Holy Spirit,

**“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!”**

**(Ps 143:10)**, and for preservation of life—life in God. The devil will come and rub your face in your sins to try to draw you into despair. Our only hope at such a time is God’s grace and forgiveness.

David highlights this saying, **“Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul” (Ps 143:8).**

Where else can we turn? When we understand our own guilt and sin, we know that there is no hope in making up for it or running away from it. God has us dead to rights, and our hope is that what He has promised us in the Gospel is true. That is to say, we must rest in faith - faith founded in God’s Word and His promises. David’s weakness is overcome by thinking on the Lord’s great redemptive works of the past. He says, **“I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands” (Ps 143:5).** All that God has done in the past, in “days of old,” together with his unfailing love, gives David confidence for the future.

David calls out to God, trusting that God will deliver him by providing sustenance for his troubled soul. He asks the Lord to answer his prayer and his plea according to God’s faithfulness and righteousness. God gives us His righteousness in Jesus Christ as He brings us to faith in Christ as our Savior. That was a promise David hoped for, because for him the fulfillment of the coming Savior was still in the future.

But for us, this is a promise now fulfilled. The only-begotten Son of God fulfilled all righteousness for us. What we could not do because of our sinful condition, Jesus did as true God and true man through His perfect life. He suffered all the evil that the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh could dish out as He bore our sin on the cross. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He has taken away your sin! This forgiveness and atonement with God, together

with the very righteousness of Christ, become yours and mine through faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. It is imputed to us by God through faith.

This faith is something that our faithful, righteous God brings and sustains in us as He feeds us with His Word and Sacraments. It is all by grace, and it is all God's doing. God comes to us with living water, our Savior Jesus Christ. God comes to us in the water of Holy Baptism, bringing us new life in Christ. The triune God places His name on us in Holy Baptism, giving us faith, connecting us to Jesus' death and resurrection, and giving us the washing of regeneration as Christ's righteousness is thereby applied to us. God continues to nourish us with His Word as we hear it read and proclaimed, as we study it in Bible class, and as we read it in our private devotions. He gives us nourishment to carry on, regularly assuring us that Jesus Christ is our Savior, that we are more than conquerors through Christ. And our Lord feeds us with His very body and blood in His Holy Supper. As another Psalm proclaims, **"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" (Ps 34:8)**. We take refuge in Christ who gives us Himself, His very body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine, for the forgiveness of our sins. And where there is forgiveness, there is the strengthening of faith and eternal life.

David wraps up Psalm 143 with a plea for life and rescue from enemies: **"For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life! In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble! And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies, and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul, for I am your servant" (Ps 143:11-12)**. For God's name's sake, not our own, we are given life. All that we have is purely by God's grace, and so all that we are and all that we do is for His name's sake, for His glory. So regardless of what happens, we are His, and He will be glorified through us. During good times and bad, we have life in Christ. **"For if we live, we live to the Lord,**

**and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:8).** We are His workmanship, created in Christ to do what God has intended us to do, all to the glory of God (Eph 2:10). David declares himself the Lord's servant, and so are we! But through Christ, we are not mere servants; we are children of God and heirs of eternal life. We will have a seat at the banquet feast of the Lamb in heaven, not as servants, but as children of God, heirs of His kingdom. Amen.

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