

Psalm 51

- To begin this hour we will prayerfully listen to and reflect on Psalm 51, a psalm of mercy.
- Let's remind ourselves that we are in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord and prepare ourselves to hear his word.
- Come Holy Spirit, help us open our hearts and minds to the scriptures that you have inspired. Your word is alive and active and can speak to us today. Help us to leave behind our own expectations and pay attention to what you are doing in us through these words.

(Slowly read the scripture passage.)

Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.

In your compassion blot out my offence.

O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin.

My offences truly I know them;

my sin is always before me.

Against you, you alone, have I sinned;

what is evil in your sight I have done.

That you may be justified when you give sentence

and be without reproach when you judge,

O see, in guilt I was born,

a sinner was I conceived.

Indeed you love truth in the heart;

then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom.

O purify me, then I shall be clean;

O wash me, I shall be whiter than snow.

A pure heart create for me, O God,

put a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence,

nor deprive me of your holy spirit.

Give me again the joy of your help;
with a spirit of fervour sustain me,
that I may teach transgressors your ways
and sinners may return to you.

O rescue me, God, my helper,
and my tongue shall ring out your goodness.

O Lord, open my lips
and my mouth shall declare your praise.

For in sacrifice you take no delight,
burnt offering from me you would refuse,
my sacrifice, a contrite spirit.

A humbled, contrite heart you will not spurn.

In your goodness, show favour to Sion:
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Then you will be pleased with lawful sacrifice,
holocausts offered on your altar.

- Was there a word, phrase, or image that seemed to stir something in you? Spend some time repeating the phrase or sitting with the image. Trust that God is working. Make yourself available to his work in you.
- Lord, what do you want me to know?
- How do you want me to respond?
- How do you want me to apply this to my daily life?
- Spend some time in silent listening and adoration of God. At this stage, the Lord may further reveal himself to you in the gift of peace or joy. If so, allow yourself to rest with God in that feeling

(Wait 1-2 minutes before playing the reflection.)

Psalms 51 is known as one of the seven penitential psalms. It is attributed to David as his acknowledgement of sin after committing adultery with Bathsheba and then arranging the death of her husband, Uriah.

The psalmist begins with an open confession of his guilt and an appeal to God for the forgiveness of his sin. Verses 1 and 2 ask for the sin to be removed by God using three different images: blotting out, washing and cleansing. Each of these actions gives us an insight into the psalmist's understanding of the nature of sin:

The original Hebrew word, to blot out, is linked to the legal and commercial world. It means to "cancel" a contract or written document. In this way, sin is compared to a contracted debt that has legal written proof.

The second term, washing, refers to laundry. It evokes the washing away of sins in the same way that we wash dirty clothes or objects.

The third term, to cleanse, is *taher*, and is closely related to the Arabic and Aramaic word *zhr*, which means "to shine". This means that the action of cleansing is linked to restoring the original splendour of something. In other words, sin darkens things or makes them opaque; the person or the situation has lost its glow and needs to be brought back to its natural splendour.

So, when the psalmist appeals for the removal of his sin, he is aware of the threefold damage it has done to himself. It has created a debt, left a stain, and taken away his natural radiance.

Which of the three psalmist's images for the removal of sin speaks to you at this time? Bring this to the Lord and allow it to form a conversation with him. What does Jesus want you to know?

Break (2 mins)

In verse 7, the psalmist asks "O wash me, I shall be whiter than snow." In Israel snow is rarely seen. This means that the purity and blanketing effect of snow would inspire wonder and awe when it occurs. In a sense, the beauty of snow would be appreciated more in Israel. This is also the case for most Australians; snow evokes a feeling of fairy tale, a special occasion, a rare form of beauty. The extreme whiteness of freshly fallen snow is not really a part of the normal colour range in our natural world. Imagine your home garden or favourite park transformed by snow. Now look into the purity and light of our Lord, truly present in the Eucharistic host before you, and imagine yourself, made white as snow, through his mercy.

Break (30 secs)

In verse 8, the psalmist asks "A pure heart **create** for me, O God".

With these words, the psalmist acknowledges that God alone is our Creator. He alone creates us and can recreate us. How easy it is for us to forget this. In fact many of the sins in our life are a loss of trust in the truth that God is our Creator and Father and that he loves us and will always provide us with what we need. As soon as we forget this truth, we start trying to take control of our circumstances and others, we grasp for things that we are certain we will

not get unless we make it happen. It opens the door to pride, selfishness, fear and anger. Spend some time now resting in the knowledge of God's love and provident care for us, made so real in his Son and his gift of the Eucharist. Ask Jesus to help us to lay down our distrust, rest in His love so that he can create a pure heart for us.

Break (1 min)

In verses 12 and 13 the psalmist writes:

"Give me again the joy of your help;
with a spirit of fervour sustain me,
that I may teach transgressors your ways
and sinners may return to you."

The psalmist recognises here how powerful God's mercy truly is. It is so great that God can use the psalmist's fall and rescue to teach and encourage others. His drama becomes an example. How great is the merciful plan of God, that the one forgiven and rescued becomes a teacher and a doorway to God's mercy! Reflect on the moments of great mercy that you have experienced. Ask Jesus to show you how these can be an encouragement to others.

Break (1 minute)

In verses 16 & 17 the psalmist makes his final statement of faith in God's mercy when he writes:

"For in sacrifice you take no delight,
burnt offering from me you would refuse,
my sacrifice, a contrite spirit.
A humbled, contrite heart you will not spurn."

The psalmist shows his understanding that a "show" of repentance, relying on a shallow level of prayer and worship, has no value in the eyes of the Lord. He understands that the God of love is concerned with our heart. He pours out his mercy and grace on all those who seek it with their heart. He cannot refuse us when we express our sincere need and trust.

Lord, we know that you are here with us in the Blessed Sacrament.

You welcome with joy our hearts turned to you in trust.

We place our needs for mercy and those of others before you.

Do not refuse the cries of our heart. Turn and graciously hear us.

Continue your work of salvation in us and the whole world.

Amen.