

Ash Wednesday, 2010C

613 "To Thee, Omniscient Lord of All"

\*607 "From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee"

615 When In The Hour of Deepest Need"

### "Godly Sorrow"

<sup>1</sup> To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. <sup>3</sup> For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. <sup>4</sup> Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight -- That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. <sup>5</sup> Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. <sup>6</sup> Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. <sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. <sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You. <sup>14</sup> Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. <sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise. <sup>16</sup> For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart -- These, O God, You will not despise. <sup>18</sup> Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. <sup>19</sup> Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar. (Psalm 51, NKJ)

King David was the second King of Israel. King Saul was the first king, appointed by God to lead His people (1 Samuel 9-10). But King Saul, rather than live and do according to the will of God, went His own way. He did His own thing, acting contrary to God's will and Word, which were revealed and spoken through the Lord's prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 13, 15). As a result, God dethroned King Saul of his office and gave it to another, to David, a son of Jesse, a shepherd boy, one of eight sons.

It was David who had defeated giant Goliath with only a stone and a sling, God being on his side. By the hands of King David, Philistines were defeated and his kingdom grew strong, being blessed of God. He prospered in what He did—and all this because the Lord was with him—King David even being called by God as **a man after His own heart** (1 Samuel 13:14).

But King David, as great as he was, and as much as the Lord had blessed him, was by no means perfect. Nor was he by any stretch of the word—sinless. He had his faults—his weaknesses—and his iniquity and guilt.

Today's Psalm from Psalm 51 is such a Psalm where King David writes of that guilt and iniquity, where he specifically speaks of his weaknesses and faults, even saying, **Against You, O God, against You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—That you may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge** (Psalm 51:4).

And what sin had King David committed? What thing had he done so wrong that he prayed to God saying, **Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin** (Psalm 51:1-2). What terrible abomination was David guilty of that he pleaded for mercy and desired to be clean?

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King David, even with everything that God had given him, even with all the goods and the blessings by which he was blessed—he still coveted—he still wanted something which wasn't his—he looked at a woman not his wife, Bathseba (בַּת־שֶׁבַע, Βηρσαβεε) by name—the wife of another man, Uriah the Hittite. King David lusted after her and committed adultery with her.

As result, Bathseba conceived in her womb. She became pregnant. David wanted to cover it up. But Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, was more righteous than he. So to add sin upon sin, in the hopes of covering up his transgression, King David had ordered that Uriah, a soldier in the army, be placed on the front line in the heat of battle.

Uriah was, and as a result, he was killed, just as David had hoped. But the matter wasn't at all over. King David gave Bathseba time to mourn her husband, and then married her, the wife of the man who was now dead. And she did bear a son. But, the text says, **The thing that David had done displeased the LORD** (2 Samuel 11:27).

The thing that David had done had displeased the Lord. He coveted his neighbor's wife—the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment. He committed adultery—the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment. He committed murder by placing Uriah in the line of fire where he was sure that Uriah would die—the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment. All these things, King David had done. But above all, in breaking these commandments, he was also breaking the very First Commandment—Not having any other god before the One true God.

King David, in his transgression, first and foremost, committed transgression against God—by making himself to be number one, the one who himself determined what he was to do instead of following God's Word and will.

God hadn't hid His will from David about how he was to live to Him. David did have God's Word. The prophet Nathan had spoken it to him. And yet David still fell. David still went his own way—and not at all a minor thing. And rather than confess his sins, David tried to hide them. David tried to hide what he had done—even from God and from everyone else.

But he couldn't.

**O God, You know my foolishness; And my sins are not hidden from You** (Psalm 69:5), says the Psalmist.

And again, **Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?** (Psalm 139:7)

David couldn't run. He couldn't hide. He could try to cover it up as much as he could, but to no avail. God would find him out. And he did.

God sent Nathan the prophet to confront this impenitent and unrepentant King—He who had coveted, committed adultery, and murdered by the hand of another. He was guilty. And at Nathan's words, **You are the man!** (2 Samuel 12:7), King David repented, for he said, **I have sinned against the Lord** (2 Samuel 12:13).

King David confessed what is right and true. He confessed that he was the sinner. He confessed that before God he had done wrong and was deserving of death. He confessed that it was just as Nathan the prophet had spoken—just as God had revealed.

His was a proper confession—a good confession—for by it, David acknowledged his sinfulness, his helplessness, his utter inability to do anything about what he had done before God. He was totally—completely—entirely—at God's mercy.

The good confession is just such a confession. It is of the kind that St. Paul talks about where he writes, **Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death** (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Godly sorrow is not just about feeling bad about what one did, or because of getting caught. It is that which is brought about by hearing the Word of the Lord, that you are the sinner—that you have done what God has forbidden—that you have not done what He has commanded—that you have lived contrary to His ways—that you have spoken hurtful words—that you have coveted, lusted, murdered—that you have not forgiven—that you have not had God as your only God, but that you have served others, even yourself, before Him.

Godly sorrow is that sorrow which one has for having disobeyed the Lord, having done against what he has said. Godly sorrow is that sorrow which has no human remedy. It is that sorrow which works repentance—to look to God for help and mercy.

David had such godly sorrow. There was nothing of himself in which to make things right. There was nowhere for him to turn in order to be safe and at peace with God. David was—**THE SINNER**.

But to David—the covetous, adulterous, idolatrous, murdering King David—to Him did God pronounce forgiveness, for through Nathan the prophet, God said, **The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die** (2 Samuel 12:13).

This was the Word of forgiveness that David was to hear. This was the precious absolution that God was to declare—Not because of anything David did, but because of the mercy and compassion of God toward the sinner.

You, like David, are the sinner—the sinner before a righteous God. You have coveted what is not yours. You have lusted. You have spoken evil of others. You have committed idolatry by placing yourself above God and His Holy Word.

You are the sinner. But hearing these words, you don't shrug them off as not applying to you. You rather say, "This is true. I have not loved God as I ought. Nor have I loved others as God has bidden me to do. I am judged and condemned, righteously, by the just God."

You also say, as David did, **Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin** (Psalm 51:1-2).

**Against You, You only have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when you speak, and blameless when You judge** (Psalm 51:4)

And what does the Lord say to these your words of confession? What does the Lord say as you acknowledge your transgressions before Him?

He says to you what He says to all who acknowledge their sinfulness before Him, their helplessness, their utter inability to do anything to get right with God, their being totally—completely—and entirely—at His mercy.

To you, God says, **The Lord has put away your sin** (2 Samuel 12:13). To you, God says, **I forgive you**. Your sins are hidden from me, **as far as the east is from the west** (Psalm 103:12).

It is as the Psalmist again says, **I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin** (Psalm 32:5).

This is so because of Jesus. Because of Him who was crucified, died, and buried—because of Him who bore your sins and carried your sorrows—because of Him who was numbered with the transgressors—because of Him who was scourged, and crowned with thorns—because of Jesus who shed His blood for you—in order that you have peace with God.

Jesus hides your sin from the Father, and because of Him, you do have peace with God. Because of Jesus, your sin is truly 'put away,' to condemn you no more.

Therefore, this Lenten tide, beginning today with Ash Wednesday, look to Jesus. Yes—you are a sinner. And yes—you do sin. But even more than these do you have a Savior—Christ the Lord.

Thus do you continue to pray, **Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit** (Psalm 51:10-12). Amen.