

## An introductory commentary on Psalm 51

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your merciful love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

*The call for mercy three times in the very first verse sets the tone for the entire Psalm. Mercy is a common theme in the Gospel; mercy is mentioned 24 times both by Jesus preaching/teaching about it and by people asking Jesus for mercy. See Luke 18:38, Matthew 12:7.*

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

*This is an example of parallelism, the most common literary technique used in the Psalms. It is a repeat of verse 1's asking to "blot out" the sin. The theology here is that the sin is being removed not just covered over.*

3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

*This shows an examination of conscience. The sin in question is not just some generic admission of sinfulness, but of specific sins. This is what we are called to do in the Sacrament of Reconciliation: we must know what our sins are. In a literal sense David knows he has committed adultery and murder, in a moral sense, we need to know our specific sins.*

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless in your judgment.

*While our sins may be committed against one another, all sin is ultimately against God. It is God's commandments that we violate, and His judgment and His punishment.*

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

*It seems that David knows about original Sin from our first parents Adam and Eve. We have a tendency to sin, it is called concupiscence. David is appealing to The Lord about this.*

6 Behold, you desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

*The Lord wants us to know the Truth about how much He loves us and that us living in that truth will help us not to sin. David wants to know wisdom so that he can make the right choice. The heart in the Bible is where we make a choice to love or not to love (sin). See Ezekiel 36:26*

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

*Hyssop in the Old Testament was not only used to spread the blood of the Passover lamb on doorposts but also in the liturgical rite for the purification of a leper. This verse is a restatement (repetition) of verses 1 and 2. Note: \*Scholars believe that the hyssop in Scripture was the herb we call marjoram (\*Catholic Bible Dictionary).*

8 Make me hear joy and gladness; let the bones which you have broken rejoice.

*David wants to experience life without sin hanging over him. Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit and he wants to experience it with all his senses: seeing, feeling, tasting, hearing. The broken bones are a metaphor of the "disfigurement" that sin causes not only in our soul but in our body as well.*

9 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

*David is ashamed of his sin, as we should be also. The repetition of verse 1 to "blot out" is to have the sin removed and not just excused or covered over.*

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

*The heart is the vital center of life in the body, mentioned over a thousand times in Scripture. Most often "heart" is used metaphorically to mean the emotional center or the seat of life (e.g., Jer 7:31; Mark*

7:21–23; Luke 6:45; 1 Cor 2:9). Thus the condition of the “heart” describes the state of mind or moral condition of the person (Ps 24:4, 73:1; Mark 7:21; 2 Cor 5:12). (Catholic Bible Dictionary).

11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy Spirit from me.

*There is an understanding that sin creates a separation between us and God. The mention of the “holy Spirit” is one of only 5 in the entire Old Testament. It also implies the presence of the Holy Spirit with us when no (serious) sin is within us. Literal Sense: “Cast me not away”, I want to live my life here on earth with you, Anagogical Sense: Cast me not into Hell, for eternity.*

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

*Living in a state of grace (salvation) brings with it a Gift of the Holy Spirit that is joy. Upholding refers to The Lord keeping us close to Him and the protection that offers.*

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

*There is a sequence of events in verses 7 to 12, which have as their purpose more than just the individual person that is being forgiven. Once we are back into a state of grace with God, we are to bring others with us. We lead others to The Lord by the example of our lives.*

14 Deliver me from bloodguilt, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

*Bloodguilt: depending upon translation the footnote for this world is “death”. The curse for violating the Covenant that The Lord makes with David is death. David does not want to die, he wants to live. In His death on the cross Jesus takes up our bloodguilt as well as David’s (and all of humanity’s).*

15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise.

*If I can breathe, I am alive, and I can then talk and I will then praise God for the gift of life.*

16 For you take no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

*The sacrifice of animals in the Tent of Meeting (and later continued in the Temple of Jerusalem) was not something that The Lord wanted, it was done to make an example to the people of Israel after they were worshipping the golden calf. See also Matt 9:13, 12:7, and Hosea 6:6.*

17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

*The Lord wants us to sacrifice (kill) our pride (as well any other sin). We are called to be humble for a multitude of reasons, the most important of which is we can then repent of our sins.*

18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,

*Note: Some Bible experts think that verses 18 and 19 were later additions to this Psalm.*

*Looking at the first 17 verses as David’s personal sin and redemption from that sin, there is an expanded view or perspective from the personal to the city and nation. So the first part of the verse is a petition for all of the people of Israel, and the rebuilding of the walls is a request that The Lord protect His holy city from the evils that exist outside of this holy city.*

19 then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

*The right reason (intention) for the sacrificial offerings is important, because we want to give back to the Lord what He has given to us, in recognition that everything we have is from The Lord.*