

The Fifth Sunday of Lent *Create a Clean Heart in Me, O God*

In today's responsorial Psalm, taken from Psalm 51, we sing this refrain, "Create a clean heart in me, O God." Psalm 51 is one of the seven penitential psalms that the church encourages us to pray when we are in need of forgiveness. The other six are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, 143). Psalm 51, however, is the best known of the seven penitential psalms. Jewish tradition attributes it to the great King David, Israel's most outstanding king. On one occasion David committed the sin of adultery, and when confronted by the prophet Nathan, he repented and recited this psalm.

As we enter the final weeks of Lent, Psalm 51 reminds us what Lent is about; it is a time to repent and turn to the Lord. It is a time to ask the Lord to create in us a clean heart. A "clean heart" is a biblical metaphor for a heart that is completely and totally dedicated to God, a heart that is single-minded in its devotion to God.

The prophet Jeremiah talks of such a heart in today's first reading when he speaks of the new covenant that God will make with his people. It will not be like the old covenant that was made in stone. Rather, God says, "I will place my law within them and write it *upon their hearts*; I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

God fulfilled this promise of a new covenant when he sent his only begotten Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world. By Jesus' life-giving death and saving resurrection, God poured the Holy Spirit into our hearts; God created a new heart for us.

But there are times when we fall short of the mark. There are times we live with a divided heart that wants to be devoted both to God and to the world at the same time. Such a heart reserves something for itself because it is afraid to take the risk of giving itself completely and totally to God. Such a heart gives part of itself but not the whole of itself to God. Such a heart is divided in its allegiance.

Lent calls us to a renewal of our heart that can only come from sincere repentance and the gift of God's grace. Lent invites us to give the whole of ourselves, not just a part of ourselves, to Christ and the gospel. That is why we sing in today's responsorial psalm, "Create a clean heart in my, O God."

Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, the most important week of the Christian year. Are you ready to celebrate this great week of our salvation? Are you prepared for the Paschal Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter? Is your heart ready? Have you allowed the Lord to create in you a "clean heart" that is completely and totally devoted to Christ and the Gospel?

In the final weeks of Lent prepare yourself for the great mysteries we are about to celebrate. Avail yourself of the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Penance that is celebrated every Monday in every church of the Archdiocese from 6:00 to 7:00 PM. Allow the Lord to create in you a clean heart.

Father Matera

This is the final week of my Lenten Series on the Psalms. Join us in the Lower Church, on Thursday, at 7:30 PM