

**Pentecost 13B – Proper 17B (8/30/09 – Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God)**

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Our *INTROIT* for today is from PSALM 51. The Scriptural title of that Psalm tells us under what circumstances David wrote it: *A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.* It is a Psalm of repentance and of crying out to our merciful God for forgiveness. You know the story – how very much evil proceeded out of David’s heart: lust, coveting, adultery, deception, lies, murder, theft. David coveted Uriah’s wife when he lusted after her in his heart. Then he abused his authority as king and requested that Bathsheba come to his palace. David committed adultery. Then he thought to cover up his sin by deception, calling Uriah back from the battle under false pretense. And when that didn’t work, David again abused his kingly authority and wickedly commanded his general to place Uriah on the front line of battle and then to withdraw – thus leaving Uriah to die at the hand of the enemy. And finally David “thieves” Uriah’s wife ... making Bathsheba his own.

David is proof-positive of just what our Savior says in our *Holy Gospel Lesson*. ***What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within, and they defile a person.*** [MK 7.20-23] Before giving us this “laundry list” of just how corrupt our sinful hearts are, Jesus says that ***whatever goes into a person from the outside cannot defile him.*** By divine inspiration St. Mark notes that in saying this, Jesus ***declared all foods clean*** [7.19]. But there is more to Jesus’ words than just a comment about diet. This word of our Lord also teaches us that we cannot blame our sins on anyone or anything else.

Oh yes, we have inherited our sinful flesh from our parents ... all the way back to Adam and Eve. But that doesn’t excuse us. We own our sins – they’re our own fault; they come out of us. We can’t blame genetics. We can’t point the finger at society or our own family environment. Our sins – whatever they are ... whether evil thoughts, or sexual immorality, or theft, or murder, or adultery, or coveting, or wickedness, or deceit, or sensuality, or envy, or slander, or pride, or foolishness ... and I suppose we could add any number of additional sins like anger or hate ... Jesus wasn’t intending to be exhaustive in His list (though He pretty much covers the gamut) – our sins are our own. Each of us is individually responsible. I won’t be able to stand before God on the Day of Judgment and say: *But it was my environment ... my culture ... my genetics.* I won’t be able to blame anyone else for my sins – no finger pointing (except to point to myself). There’s no covering up our sin – not before God. There’s no shifting the blame – not before God.

David tried all of that to the n<sup>th</sup> degree – but God saw through it all ... and sent Nathan to uncover to David the totality of his sin.

You see, in trying to deceive and fool others about our sin, we actually often deceive **ourselves** ... and cause **ourselves** great spiritual harm. David wasn't owning up to his sins – he was in the mortally dangerous spiritual state of impenitence. He had made his having Bathsheba *seem* legitimate ... perhaps even compassionate – *Behold how kind your king is ... taking this poor widow into my palace as wife*. But despite the fact that David had not killed Uriah with his bare hands, David was the murderer ... David the liar and deceiver ... David the coveting, lustful, sexually immoral adulterer ... David the evil-hearted sinner. But David didn't see that ... admit that ... confess that – until by divine “trickery” (if you will), David was made to see his sin ... and then by divine mercy was brought to repent and confess his sin before Nathan (who basically pronounces Holy Absolution, saying: *The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die* [2SAM 12.13]).

What sins have proceeded from your own sinful heart? Sins like those of the Pharisees and scribes who with sinful motive questioned our Lord – self-righteousness, going through the outward motions of right worship but denying the substance of it by your words and deeds, calling evil good and righteousness sin? Failure to constantly put on the armor of God by your neglecting of God's Word and Sacraments [EPH 6.11f]? Or forgetting to pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication [EPH 6.18]? Abandoning your responsibility to keep your soul diligently and to make known to your children and your children's children the statutes of God [DEUT 4.9]? *All these things come from within, and they defile a person* [MK 7.23] ... and make you unclean in the sight of God.

Repent, therefore ... and pray with David: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me* [PSA 51.10]. And know that the LORD your God is near to you, whenever you call upon Him [DEUT 4.7].

The LORD your God is near to you – and quick to forgive the sins of the penitent. When David recognized his sins, he knew exactly where to turn for aid and lasting relief. *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow*. [PSA 51.2, 7] In Holy Baptism **you** have been *wash[ed] thoroughly from your iniquity, and cleanse[d] ... from all your sin*. In Holy Baptism the LORD your God drew near to you to bring to bear and pour out upon you all of the blessings of the life, death, and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ. Elsewhere in Holy Scripture, God refers to your Baptism as *the washing of rebirth [or regeneration] and renewal by the Holy Spirit* by which He saves you [TITUS

3.5].

Already in GENESIS 6, Scripture tells us: *The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* [6.5]. The Word of our Savior in our *Holy Gospel* is not some new teaching – but one that the Jewish religious leaders should have known quite well. As a remedy for this great evil that *comes from within ... to defile a person*, the LORD God caused the Flood to cover the earth. Only Noah and his family *found grace in the eyes of the LORD* [6.6] – and the Lord kept them safe and sound in the ark. In 1PETER 3 God points us to His work of blotting out sin by means of the flood and of preserving Noah and family, saying: *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ* [3.21]. In your Baptism, you have received the *clean heart* and the *right spirit* you need and desire ... and *a good conscience* – one that no longer accuses you before the Lord ... since your sins are forgiven and you are clothed in Christ and His righteousness by God's grace through God-given and God-sustained faith.

But ... to rephrase our Lord's word elsewhere: *I have washed you, and I will wash you again* [ see JN 12.28] – for your God is the LORD, Who draws near to you whenever you call upon Him. Although your Baptism happened only once ... and maybe a long time ago – as the Scripture says: *one Lord, one faith, one Baptism* [EPH 4.5] – you may return to your Baptism ... return to its blessings ... **daily**. Every time you succumb to the temptations of your own flesh and fall into sin, call upon God in repentance and faith ... and know that the Lord is near to forgive you – to wash and cleanse you – once again. Every time some evil thought proceeds from your heart, call upon God in repentance and faith ... and know that the Lord is near to create in you a clean heart and to renew a right spirit within you. Whenever you become defiled because of your own sin, call upon God in repentance and faith ... and know that the Lord is near to restore to you the joy of His salvation and to uphold you with a free and willing spirit.

And know this as well, dear Christians: the Lord does not merely stand around, waiting in the sidelines for you to call upon Him – for even such calling is His work in you. He is, indeed, the Source of all that is just and good. He is the One Who nourishes in you every virtue and Who brings to completion in you every good intent, so that you may grow in His grace and by that grace bring forth the fruit of truly good, faith-driven, God-pleasing works. To keep you in this saving faith, the LORD your God works in your life daily ... continuously ... to provide you with all that you need to run with perseverance the course that is set before you ... and to guard and protect you from the evil one ... indeed, from the evil that lies within you.

To that end, the LORD graciously gives you a mighty armor – the *armor of God* as our *Epistle* puts it. This is armor forged by God ... armor given you by God ... armor that would keep you safe for God ... armor that in many ways consists of God, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. For Christ is the Truth by which we are girded as a belt. Christ is the Righteousness which we have put on as a breastplate. Christ is the Gospel of Peace with which our feet are shod. Christ is the Author and Finisher of the faith which we have taken up as a shield. Christ is the Salvation which we wear as a helmet. And it is from the mouth of Christ that the Word of the Spirit proceeds – sharper than any two-edged sword to condemn us under the Law but to revive us under the Gospel. Clothed in Christ by Baptism and faith – armored in Christ and His righteousness – we know that the LORD our God hears and comes near to create clean hearts and renew right spirits within us.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the + SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]