

Following the imposition of ashes, we will say together Psalm 51.

Found on page 266 of your Book of Common Prayer.

{Pause} Please Be Seated {Pause}



The 51st Psalm speaks especially for us.

It resonates with our fallen position.

And has a long history in the church.

Liturgically: it was read seven times a day

At the end of each of the hours

Those who pray the daily office

Still hear a portion of it

When they start the office each morning:

“Oh Lord, Open thou our Lips”

“And our mouth shall proclaim thy praise.”



Why is the church so fascinated with this psalm? {PAUSE} ////

Psalm 51 is David’s response to his sin///// And what sin that was!

It’s introduction states, that after being confronted by Nathan

For sleeping with Bath-she-ba, another man’s wife

David writes the psalm///

Adultery—sleeping with another man’s wife—

is quite serious in Old Testament times, Leviticus 20:10 states

“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife

With the wife of his neighbor both the adulterer and

The adulteress are to be put to death.”



Adultery remained serious in in Christ’s time

In John Chapter 8, a woman was brought before Jesus after engaging in an adulterous relationship.

The leaders reminded Christ of the law of Moses;

That the woman was to be stoned.

(Somehow, they managed to let the guy get away...)

(How Convenient)... (And Unfair)... Sigh...



Anyway, this is of course the famous passage where Jesus says:

“Let him who is without sin cast the first stone”

The leaders depart one by one & Jesus is left ...

Standing with the woman, he asks her: “Where are your accusers?

Has no man condemned thee?” AND

The woman replies: “No man, Lord.” AND

Jesus does not condemn her either

Though He does tell her to “sin no more.” ////

//// David’s sin is far worse than this!

Not only has he been an adulterer, But he successfully
Developed a scheme to kill Bathsheba’s Husband

By any code, let alone the code of the Most-High God,

David fully deserves the penalty appointed by Exodus 21:14,
To be “taken from the altar and put to death,”

This is the specified punishment for premeditated murder

Even if the murderer flees to a sanctuary city

And Jerusalem is **not even** a **sanctuary** city!

So, the family of Uriah or of Bathsheba

are authorized to avenge David’s sin in blood! //////////////

And, David is no ordinary sinner;

He cannot claim that God has “kept silent in his life.”

He was anointed King, through God;

Was rescued from Saul, through God;

Was given Saul’s House; was given Saul’s wives

Was given the House of Israel & Judah

And would have been given much more according to the Lord ///

/// The LORD almost seems perplexed

in his response through Nathan in 2nd Samuel:

“Why have you done such evil in my sight?” /////

/// This is completely appropriate!

Psalm 50, the psalm preceding the examined psalm,

Talks of God saying to **strangers**:

“Why would you believe I would keep silent?”

“Did you think I was like you?”

“Did you think I would not rebuke you
and lay a charge before you?”

What, therefore, should God do with the man who

He himself claimed was ‘a man after His own heart?’ /////

//// David, will be spared of a deserved death penalty////

But his sin will have consequences: But his family

Will be a wreck; They will attempt to kill each other.

The sin which David commits in secret /// Adultery ///

Will be committed against him publicly AND

The death of Uriah will be avenged by the death

Of the son Bathsheba bears for David

David will also experience the death of another son, Absalom.



'David's sin is put away, but a mess remains: Family strife,

Problems in the kingdom... (Did you hear what the king did?)

(His sin is hardly a secret!) There will be fallout

David will need to live in the bed he has made!

We must live with the mess our sins make too

Although absolution is available in the confessional

There may be civil or criminal ramifications



David appears to understand, he hears God's judgment

Beginning his request with a form of the Kyrie Eleison!

"Have mercy on me, Oh God. Blot out my transgressions.

Wash me from my iniquity; Cleanse me from my sin

For I know my transgressions

And my sin is ever before me."

(Wash me from my iniquity; cleanse me from my sin... Is actually)

(The prayer I say every Eucharist, as I wash my hands...)



David's prayer is really extremely bold given the magnitude

Of the gifts he has been given and the sin he has committed

He has no right to assume that God should have

Anything to do with him ever again!!!

David saw what God did with Saul (the rule before him) AND YET:

He dares to presume that God would still be merciful

This very presumption, may be a reason that David is in fact

Called a man after God's own heart///

David realizes he can depend only on God's steadfast love

Since his sins are legion! ///

David clearly sinned against Bathsheba

He defiled her; she now also deserves death

David has sinned against Uriah; At least twice!

David has sinned against the Commander in the field

He has sinned against all the soldiers, and

He has sinned against the house of Israel

Yet at verse four, of our psalm, he audaciously claims

That he has sinned against God alone!

How can he make such a claim; **How can we!**

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David understands that despite the magnitude of his sin against all others

His Greatest Sin IS Against the Lord who has Loved Him

And Given Him So Many Gifts ///

Has God Loved Us too? Has God given us many gifts?

Has God Shown Us His Care? ///

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All Sin, regardless of its magnitude: Forgets God's Presence

As one commentary stated, If God is omnipresent

And nothing is hidden from his eye

When we commit sin, we ignore that God's eye is upon us,

We say, 'The Lord shall not see, Neither shall the God of Jacob regard it'

If the glance of another person—a mere creature—

Might prevent a crime—how much more should

The Lord Almighty's glance keep us from the slightest sin!

Therefore, despite sinning against Bathsheba, Uriah, his General,

All his soldiers, and even the entire house of Israel,

David's principal sin is against God

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Sin: Denies God can see; Denies God's sense of justice.

Denies God's sovereignty!

David, rightly proclaims, therefore that God is

Justified in his sentence & blameless in his judgment



In David's acceptance of his difficult yet extremely merciful sentence:

We see the true extent of his penitence!

David's punishment is severe, yet he deserved even greater punishment

We also must understand the gravity of **our** sins!



It is only by acknowledging that we entered this world with nothing, AND

That all that we have has been given to us, by

The very God that we continuously rebel against,

That we can truly understand the magnitude of what we will receive

In our complete pardon at the final judgment.

Seeing the full effect of our sin is in fact a gift from the Holy Spirit.

It allows us to see, like Joseph did, that it would be egregious

To offend against "Potiphar's wife."

Yet even if we should commit such a sin, we are still

Assured by David’s words that we shall be washed, cleaned,

And made whiter than snow. Because:

“There is absolutely nothing inside us so horrific
That God cannot forgive us.”

This must be why Saint Augustine said of the 51st Psalm,

“Oh, blessed sin of David, so gloriously atoned for!

“Oh, most happy fault which has brought in

“So many straying sheep to the Good Shepherd”



Let us begin a Holy Lent, in the name of the Father

And of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Our service will continue on page 264 of the BCP.