

“Cleanse Me from My Sin”

(Psalm 51 – Midweek Lent 4 – March 11, 2026)

Psalm 51 – ¹*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴Against 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. ⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. ⁶Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. ⁹Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You. ¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. ¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. ¹⁶For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise. ¹⁸Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. ¹⁹Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.*

Dear Redeemed in Jesus Christ,

King David had it made. He had Bathsheba. Uriah was dead. The whole kingdom of Israel thought David was the kindest king for taking care of poor Bathsheba after her husband died in battle. But God knew the rest of the story. He saw how David’s state of impenitence had led him to multiply his sins – starting with committing adultery with Bathsheba when her husband was off to war, then committing murder to cover his tracks, and then living a lie for a long time as he tried to hide his sins. But then God sent His prophet to David, to preach the Law to him for his own good.

The prophet Nathan came to David with a story. He told of a rich man who had many flocks and herds, and a poor man who had nothing but one little ewe lamb that was dear to him. Yet when the rich man had a guest visit his home, he was unwilling to take an animal from his own flock or herd to prepare a meal for the guest. Instead, he took the poor man’s only lamb, slaughtered it, and they ate it. When David heard this, his anger burned greatly, and he said: *“As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity”* (2 Samuel 12:5-6).

But now, Nathan applied the most pointed Law in Scripture as he looked at David and said: *“You are the man!”* King David was the rich man who had taken what was not his from poor Uriah. He had taken Uriah’s dear wife, and even Uriah’s life, to satisfy his own selfish desires. David’s heart must have sunk in shock at this revelation of God. But he did not make excuses or avoid the truth. He confessed: *“I have sinned against the Lord”* (2 Samuel 12:7, 13).

But wait a minute. Hadn’t David actually sinned against Uriah? Hadn’t he actually sinned against Bathsheba and against the people of his kingdom? What did this have to do with God? But this is what Psalm 51 teaches. David’s confession gets at the heart of the matter as he says: *“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”* (vs. 4).

Psalm 51 shows us that any sin of ours is fundamentally sin against God. When we confess our sins – whether our sins have hurt others or ourselves – above all, we are acknowledging that we have offended God. We are saying that He would be completely just to judge and condemn us for our sins against Him, and that we deserve nothing but death and hell.

All our sin is ultimately against God. All our sin is finally against His First Commandment: *“You shall have no other gods before Me”* (Exodus 20:3). That was Peter’s real sin in our Passion History reading. He proudly had boasted that he would never leave Jesus. He would serve no other God, no other Savior. He would even die with Jesus if faithfulness required it. Yet how quickly Peter denied Jesus before His enemies. Thus he made a god out of other people and himself – serving their wishes, serving himself – instead of serving God alone.

Like Peter, we all have the same problem. In our pride, we want to boast in our faithfulness to God. But so often, our pride comes before our fall into sin. How quickly, in the hour of trial, we fall away and make gods out of people, valuing human opinions more than God’s Law. We make gods out of things, valuing riches and possessions more than God. We make gods out of ourselves, valuing our pleasure and self-rule more than God.

So by every sin we are guilty against God for breaking the very First Commandment. This is the guilt David confessed with his own sins. And like him, we too must confess to God: *“Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight”* (vs. 4).

Another thing we see in this psalm is that, like David, not only must we confess in a general way that we are sinful; but that we have committed specific sins against God and others.

Indeed, David confessed his sinful condition as he said: *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me”* (vs. 5). There is nothing wrong with being conceived in our mother’s womb the way God designed for procreation between a husband and wife. The problem is the sinful nature that is passed from parents to children at conception;

so that all of us, as fallen children of Adam and Eve, are conceived and born with a sinful nature that makes us guilty and condemned before God.

But God also would have us confess our sinfulness more specifically, in terms of actual sins we commit against Him and against other people. Here David does so. When the prophet Nathan pointed at him and said, “*You are the man!*” how could David not confess the specific sins of adultery and murder he had committed, as exposed by God’s revealed Law? So it is with us as sinners. As we hear the Law of God, it reveals specific sins we have committed.

When the Commandment says: “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Exodus 20:14), we may not have done exactly like David, committing sex with another person’s spouse, or with anyone else outside of marriage. Yet as Jesus points out, just by looking lustfully at another, we have committed adultery in our heart (Matthew 5:27-28).

Or when the Commandment says: “*You shall not murder*” (Exodus 20:13), we may not have done exactly like David, shedding the blood of another who got in the way of our selfish desires. Yet how many times have we acted in a self-preserving and hurtful way against someone who got in our way? How many ways have attitudes of the heart shown by lashing out with hot and hateful words; or turning a cold shoulder with that silent treatment that says, “I’m still holding that against you!” As Jesus teaches, just by having such an angry, unforgiving, hateful spirit, we commit murder in our heart (Matthew 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15).

God would not have us go on as David did for some time, trying to cover one sin by another, living a lie. Such unrepented sin harms, not only others, but oneself. If a person were to go on hardening his heart in sin, hardening his heart against the Holy Spirit’s call to repentance, he would at last kill any saving faith given by the Spirit and separate himself from the Savior of sinners. As David was finally confronted with his sin, he could not bear the thought of God taking His Holy Spirit from him, and that he should be cast away from His presence forever.

But as David learned, the God of all grace and mercy only confronted him with his sin so that he would confess it in truth, so that he could hear God’s Word of Absolution and live in His forgiveness. This is God’s loving purpose when He confronts us with our sins. Once again, this truth comes out in our Catechism, as we recited earlier:

What is Confession?

Confession consists of two parts: one, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the pastor or confessor as from God Himself, and in no way doubt, but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

Notice it does not say we “confess our sin,” in just a general way. It says we “confess our sins,” as in specific sins. Of course, God wants us to confess our sinful nature; and for Jesus’ sake He forgives all the sins proceeding from that fallen nature, even those we do not realize.

But here the Catechism is getting at confessing specific sins that weigh heavily on our conscience, perhaps bringing us to despair. As we do so, what a benefit it is to hear God's Absolution, spoken through a pastor or confessor: "I declare to you the full forgiveness for these sins. You are loosed and set free in the name of Jesus, who paid for these specific sins by His own blood on the cross." Again, we declare this based on Jesus' authority and promise: *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.... and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:19).

This is what happened when God sent His prophet to confront David with his specific sins. David confessed those specific sins. Instead of continuing to hide his sins and let his guilt ruin him, he prayed: *"Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me"* (vs. 2-3).

David knew the truth that was taught by all the blood sacrifices under the Old Covenant: *"without shedding of blood there is no remission"* (Hebrews 9:22). Time and again in the tabernacle, the blood of sacrificed animals was sprinkled before the Lord for the people's sins. A branch of the hyssop plant was dipped in blood and sprinkled on penitent sinners. This pronounced them individually cleansed and restored before God. David looked ahead in faith to the once for all blood sacrifice of the Savior. It was to the blood of Jesus that David appealed, as he cried out: *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.... Create in me a clean heart, O God"* (vs. 7, 10).

As soon as David confessed the sins he had committed, and that he deserved God's just judgment in death, God spoke His Word of absolution through Nathan. The prophet declared: *"The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die"* (2 Samuel 12:13).

Today we join David in confessing our sinfulness. We confess specific sins that burden us. We are sorry for the things we have done wrong and for the things we have not done right. We pray to the God who forgives: *"Cleanse me from my sin."* We want to amend our lives, to put away those sins. We want to live a new life, led by the Holy Spirit in us. We pray with David: *"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"* (vs. 11-12).

To our penitent hearts, God speaks His Absolution. Through Jesus' blood sacrifice, He has paid for our sinfulness itself; He has paid also for our specific sins, each and every one. According to the multitude of His tender mercies, God blots out all our transgressions; and He covers us in Christ's righteousness. So we shall not die. In the power of Jesus' resurrection, He replaces eternal death with eternal life. He restores to us the joy of His salvation. He opens our lips to show forth His praise, and to share His abundant forgiveness with fellow sinners.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.