

In Nomine Jesu

RECEIVING TRUTH AND WISDOM IN ONE'S INWARD BEING

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Our homily for this Ash Wednesday is drawn from our Psalm, with our thoughts guided by the following translated verse:

*Behold, truth You desire in (the) inward being,
and in (the) secret heart You will cause to teach me wisdom.¹*

This year, this day, we are hearing of how one may be found receiving truth and wisdom in one's inward being. The straightforward answer is that those are God's gifts. Truth and Wisdom, God's precious treasures, are worked in the believer by Him as one hears His Word, and as he or she returns to holy Baptism each day.

That this beginning day of Lent is aligned with a pseudo-Church holiday is a rare coincidence of the calendar. It seems that the coinciding of Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day has not occurred since A.D. 1945. For you who may be thinking you may have heard about St. Valentine in one of our sermons, there were days (in 2010 and 2016) where his day aligned with Sundays (more about him in a bit).

This year's overlap between the penitential day of Ashes and a romantic day of love has caused some consternation among Christians who either desire to, or are obligated to, fast and reflect penitentially as Lent begins. According to an article in the Chicago Tribune last Wednesday, those who desire to follow Roman doctrine, to be faithful concerning Lenten fasting and penitence, today have been called to abstain from meat and fast, even though this is also St. Valentine's Day. They have been asked to, "Celebrate love over a steak dinner and candles another day!"² Roman Catholics in the Archdiocese of Chicago were invited to rejoice in Valentine's Day traditions on Fat Tuesday, that is, Mardi Gras, which was yesterday. They were also reminded that St.

¹ *Psalm 51:8 MT.*

² Internet. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-met-ash-wednesday-valentines-day-20180207-story.html>. Accessed February 13, 2018.

Valentine's Day has not been officially recognized as his Saint's Day since 1969, when he was removed from the official Roman Catholic calendar.³

Well, you dear ones, are free to fast or not fast. You are free to celebrate Valentine's Day or not. In either event, I remind you to not make a big show about whatever you decide. You are called to keep any fasting you do before you and God alone. And, please celebrate romance with your loved one as you may agree.

Keep this in mind when you consider the romantic traditions of this day: the association with love and Valentine can either be traced back to the 14th century and Geoffrey Chaucer, or to the Christianizing of a pagan Roman fertility feast, Lupercalia. Please understand that originally a "Valentine," was a card with a girl's name written on it that a boy drew by lot. The boy was then to court the girl whose name he had received. Arranged courting could lead to marriage—just one step away from arranged marriage, so it seems! How romantic is that?

Well, it was a practice until the 16th century. Then, St. Francis de Sales tried to change that courtship arrangement to one in which "Valentines" provided the names of saints to emulate. That such a change from romance to religious encouragement failed provides us just one more support for the adage that it is often far easier in the Church to change true doctrine and/or practice to false doctrine and/or practice than to change tradition! To that we say: may the truth ever win out! Hear again our theme verse for this year:

*Behold, truth You desire in (the) inward being,
and in (the) secret heart You will cause to teach me wisdom.*⁴

Hear now a bit of wisdom concerning the day named for St. Valentine. That there was a Valentine who was a priest in Rome, martyred in A.D. 269 during the persecution of Claudius the Goth is open to question. He could also have been the

³ Internet. http://www.cleveland.com/entertainment/index.ssf/2018/01/ash_wednesday_is_valentines_da.html. Accessed February 13, 2018.

⁴ *Psalm 51:8* MT.

Bishop of Terni who was martyred in Rome in A. D. 273.

What can be ascertained is that Pope Julius I, in the mid-three hundreds, had a basilica built on the Via Flaminia, about 3 miles from Rome. It was constructed over a sepulcher where a Valentine's body was supposedly interred. That is to say, we can determine that it holds one of the eight complete bodies and one head (I misstated that count earlier this month) that are venerated in various Roman Catholic churches around the world as Valentine's. Hear again our theme text:

*Behold, truth You desire in (the) inward being,
and in (the) secret heart You will cause to teach me wisdom.⁵*

As the example of Valentine might teach, we live in an era where, for humans, truth has been relegated to either any truth which a particular individual may hold, or to any truth which a collection of individuals holds, to be true. For some, truth has been tossed into the dustbin of non-existence. That is summed up in the once-popular myth that there are no absolute truths.

Others in our society have moved beyond that type of thinking. They are beginning to be drawn to congregations where genuine divine truth is proclaimed. They are we who have moved past a false-absolute that there are no absolutes to the truth that Truth is. We recognize that Truth exists outside of humans. We believe that, by God's grace, humans may be aligned to the Truth. We hold that the Truth may be received in one's inner being through the gifts and grace of God, as His Word declares.

One such discipline that flows from that truth is that Ash Wednesday is given to us as a day to remember that we, as humans, were formed (in Adam) from the dust of the earth. We teach the truth that, on account of Adam's sin, all people (except those mortals who are alive on the Last Day) will return to the dust. That means that the earth is a big dustbin that is getting quite full! Lord, have mercy!

⁵ Psalm 51:8 MT.

Ash Wednesday is a day to hold in mind and heart that God's Holy Law is given to declare to us true knowledge of the origin of sin. Today we hear that His Law teaches us what sin is. Even now, His Law informs us of the damage that sin causes.

Ash Wednesday is also a day to recall how one may be freed from sin. This day is the beginning of the 40 days (not counting Sundays) in which we remember that, without God's re-creation of each of us through the water and the Word, sin would crush us. This is a day for this truth to be proclaimed: The Blood of Jesus is God's answer to our Psalm's petition:

*Mercy me, O Elohim, as (to) Your steadfast love,
according to (the) abundance (of) Your mercy blot out my
transgressions;
cause to thoroughly wash me from my iniquity,
and from my sin cleanse me.⁶*

God has "mercied" you according to His steadfast love. Through Holy Baptism He has caused you to die with Christ, and to rise to new life in Him. He showers His mercy upon you as He returns you to your Baptism through His Holy Absolution. Through such earthly and divine means, He repeatedly cleanses you from sin through Jesus' blood-bought forgiveness.

According the abundance of His mercy, He comes to you. He wills to touch you with His very Body and Blood. Through those elements, Jesus grants you forgiveness as Jesus strengthens you to life everlasting! Through the means of God's grace, He answers your Offertory plea:

*(A) clean heart create in me, O Elohim,
and (a) steadfast spirit renew within me.
Do not cause to cast me away from Your Face,
and Your Holy Spirit do not take from me.
Cause to restore to me (the) joy Your Salvation,
and (grant a) spirit of willingness (to) uphold me.⁷*

⁶ Psalm 51:3-4.

⁷ Psalm 55:12-14MT.

Words similar to that translation ring out through God's public Services to His people. Those Ash Wednesday Psalm verses are familiar to the majority here today. During an average of three Sundays per month we use such divine words to call upon God to create good within us after we hear His Word preached; before we give of our first-fruit tithes and offerings; and as we prepare to lift up before Him the sacrifice of the prayers.

The chant, *Create in me a clean heart, O God...* from the 51st Psalm... works in the hearer of the Word, in order to move him or her, you, into further receiving truth and wisdom in your inward being. Those Psalm verses serve to transition the faithful from receiving divine Truth through hearing alone, into tasting and beholding the Lord's goodness through God's visible Word. This day's Psalm is used to move us from God's Service of the Word into God's Service of the Sacrament, as it declares to us God's revealed Truth for sinners.

That truth is Good News – for those who find themselves breaking God's Word frequently, daily, hourly, momentarily! It is for those who believe what we sing – that God would imprint the image of Christ-crucified upon the centers of their beings. A few of you know that this is what the Hymn for Reflection does in our Liturgy of the Stations of the Cross. That Hymn is also, coincidentally (or not), today's closing distribution hymn. Divine truth in such song reveals that all people need to declare to themselves, before God and neighbor in this fallen world, words such as these:

*Mercy me, O Elohim, as (to) Your steadfast love,
according to (the) abundance (of) Your mercy blot out my transgressions;
cause to thoroughly wash me from my iniquity,
and from my sin cleanse me.⁸*

What does that text say to those who think, and who may have actually have

⁸ Psalm 51:3-4 MT.

convinced themselves, that because they believe in Jesus, they no longer sin? How might those ancient words speak to those who believe that people are not sinners until, and unless, they actually sin?

The answer to those questions is found in the verses that surround them. They teach that all people sin because we are conceived and born in sin. No one, save One, Christ Jesus our Lord, has been in a sinless state since Adam's Fall following the serpent's deception of Eve. Hear again, an absolute truth:

*Behold, in iniquity I was brought forth,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.⁹*

There is no wriggle room out of sin in those words! The word order, in the Hebrew, ties together the words, "iniquity" and "my mother." Since the 51st is a public Psalm, given to the Church through the Psalmist some 3,000 years ago, it declares much more than a personal, private, confession. It was given to the Church that all we might ever declare that even those who have been bought back from sin, death and hell by the blood of the Christ still sin while in our mortal bodies. We sin, you sin, because you, we, are sinners. We break God's Law daily. We daily need His blood-bought forgiveness. Our Psalm provides us words to declare, to confess before God, on account of that mortal truth, when it says:

*For my transgressions I know, and my sin (is) ever before me;
against You, You separately, have I sinned,
and the evil in Your sight I have done;
so that You are righteous in Your sentence,
blameless in Your judgment.¹⁰*

Isn't it wonderful that God's Word allows us to confess rightly our sinful state before God? What mercy God has shown us in that we don't have to hunt for the right expressions in order to receive His mercy!

⁹ Psalm 51:7 MT

¹⁰ Psalm 51:5-6 MT.

The very words of the Psalm cover all violations, we, you, might commit against His Word. The Hebrew word (פֶּשַׁע) translated, “transgression,” is used to describe any and all “tearing apart,” or “breaking loose,” from God and His Word. The Hebrew word (חַטָּאָה) translated, “sin,” defines any and all deviations from all things that are well-pleasing to God. A third Hebrew word used in the Psalm elsewhere (עוֹן) translated, “iniquity,” can be used to define any perversion, distortion, or misdeed when weighed against God’s Word.

That means that, in this one Psalm, any believer is given all he or she needs to confess to God every breaking loose from His Word; each deviation from that which is pleasing to Him; all perversions of His Law that we may commit. This Confession Psalm gives us the right words to declare our human struggle for certainty of His forgiveness.

It then declares that such struggle is led to victory through the knowledge of and belief in God’s mercy and loving-kindness for sinners. That leads to our response to God’s grace in the ending Psalm verse for today:

I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners to You will return.¹¹

Did a living St. Valentine teach that? We cannot know for certain. What we do know is that Jesus teaches that, even today, through His recorded Word. Because He paid the price God demanded to rescue sinners from sin, and from their sins, sinners like you and me can daily return to Him.

As you are forgiven in Christ, you may teach God’s ways to sinners, that they may return to Him. That you are freed to do in Christ, for you are washed clean of sins’ stains by His blood. Lord, have mercy!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Ash Wednesday PM (LSB One-year series)

¹¹ Psalm 51:13.

Psalm 51:1-13; Joel 2:12-19; II Peter 1:2-11; Matthew 6:16-21

February 14, 2018

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

TRANSLATION, THIRD DRAFT

To (the) Choirmaster,
(a) Psalm to David.¹²
In (the) coming to him (of) Nathan the prophet,
when he went to Bathsheba.¹³

Let it be, O Elohim, as to Your steadfast love, as to Your abundant mercy blot out
my transgressions; cause to thoroughly wash me from my iniquity, and from
my sin cleanse me.¹⁴

For my transgressions I know, and my sin before me (is) ever;
against You, You separately, have I sinned,
and the evil in Your sight I have done;
so that You are righteous in Your sentence,
blameless in Your judgment.¹⁵

Behold, in iniquity I was brought forth,
and in sin did me conceive, my mother.
Behold, truth You desire in (the) inward being,
and in secret heart wisdom cause to teach me.¹⁶

Purge me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and than snow I shall be whiter.
Cause me to hear joy and gladness,
let rejoice bones You have broken.
Cause to hide Your face from my sins,
and all my iniquities blot out.¹⁷

Heart clean create in me, O Elohim,
and steadfast spirit renew within me.
Do not cause to cast me away from Your Face,
and Spirit Your Holy do not take from me.
Cause to restore to me joy Your Salvation,
and spirit of willingness me uphold.¹⁸

¹² Psalm 51:1 MT.

¹³ Psalm 51:2 MT.

¹⁴ Psalm 51:3-4 MT.

¹⁵ Psalm 51:5-6 MT.

¹⁶ Psalm 51:7-8 MT.

¹⁷ Psalm 51:9-11 MT.

¹⁸ Psalm 55:12-14 MT.