

**5th Sunday in Lent, Cycle B**  
**March 29, 2009**

**Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:7-9; John 12:20-33**

**Create a Clean Heart in Me, O God**

*“Create a clean heart in me, O God.”* (Ps. 51:12) This was the psalm response we sang this morning after the first reading. A clean heart is important because Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount: *“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.”* (Mt. 5:8) And of course there should be no greater goal in life than to see God in heaven. Having a clean heart is also important because we hear this morning that in the new covenant the law will be written on our hearts and not on tablets of stone as it was in the prior covenant with God. And that new covenant began when Jesus offered Himself up for us on the Cross. St. John tells us: *“When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.”* (John 19:30) Jesus drank the final cup of the Passover that started at the Last Supper. The old covenant was over and the new covenant began. Jesus was the grain of wheat that died and fell to the ground to produce great fruit. Jesus made a great sacrifice to win for us a great prize.

And so it is important to reflect on how well we can read the law written on our hearts. Are our hearts clean, or are they covered with dirt and marks and smudges and splotches that prevent us from clearly seeing what God has written there? If we cannot read our hearts we will get lost on our way to heaven and might not see God in all His glory. So let’s look again at our responsorial psalm, a part of our weekly scriptures that we often overlook.

Our first verse states: *“Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.”* We start by asking for God’s help. We ask for His compassion, forgiveness, and mercy. And God does this for us through the sacrament of Reconciliation. I know many of you attended the communal penance service last Monday and took advantage of that opportunity. I encourage all those who have not gone to confession yet during this Lenten season, to make a special effort to do so. It is a big step toward having a clean heart.

The second verse of our responsorial psalm says: *“A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.”* In this verse we ask for God’s gift of the Holy Spirit to be a steadfast guide on our journey so that we do not go astray and are not cast out from the Lord’s presence. Through Baptism we became temples of the Holy Spirit. Keep your temple pure and clean and the Holy Spirit will live in you and give you wisdom and comfort on your journey through life. Reflect on your fasting practices this Lent. Are they teaching you better self control so that you are better able to keep your temple clean and pure?

And the final verse of our psalm states: *“Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me. I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners shall return to you.”* In this verse we recognize our own responsibilities of evangelization and ask for God’s strength to help carry them out. We ask for the courage to live lives that

Speak the Good News to others so that we can lead them to Christ. Reflect on whether your Lenten practices of alms giving, of performing works of charity and mercy, are leading others to know Christ better?

Having a clean heart so that we can see the face of God is one of the most important things we can do. And as with most things that are important to us, we must be willing to make sacrifices. We must put our love of the next life ahead of our love of this life. Jesus tells us this morning: ***“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.”*** It is all about service, not being served.

This Lenten season we do, as we should always do, work to put God first in our lives; our neighbors second in our lives; and ourselves last. We are called to be servants. We strive to put into perspective the shortness of our time here on earth; that only by dying and falling into the earth do we receive the fullness of life. It is not an easy thing to do, for sure. We are troubled and anxious; we fear death and do not know when it will befall us. But we take comfort, however, in knowing that Jesus became one of us and shared our human emotions. Jesus said in the gospel this morning: ***“I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour.”***

Know what God wants you to do in this life, your purpose, and then pray for the strength and courage to carry it out. But to know what God wants, we must start with a clean heart. So let this prayer be on our lips: ***“Create a clean heart in me, O God.”***

**Deacon Joe Hulway**