



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** *St Peter's Square*

Wednesday, 30 March 2016 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

12. Mercy blots out sin at the root

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

Today we shall complete the catecheses on mercy in the Old Testament, and do so by meditating on Psalm 51[50], known as the *Miserere*. It is a penitential prayer in which the request for forgiveness is preceded by the confession of sins and in which the one praying allows himself to be purified by the Lord's love. Thus, he becomes a new creature, capable of obedience, steadfastness of spirit, and of sincere praise.

The "title" that the ancient Hebrew tradition gave to this Psalm refers to King David and his sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. We are quite familiar with the event. Kind David, called by God to shepherd the people and guide them on the paths of obedience to divine Law, betrayed his mission and, after committing adultery with Bathsheba, has her husband put to death. A terrible sin! The prophet Nathan shows David his sin and helps him to recognize it. It is the moment of reconciliation with God, in confessing his sin. Here David was humble. He showed greatness!

Those who pray with this Psalm are called to feel the same sense of remorse and of trust in God, which David felt when he mended his ways. Although the king, he humbled himself without being afraid to confess his crime and show his misery to the Lord, yet confident that the Lord's mercy was assured. What he had done was not a minor sin, a small lie: he had committed adultery and murder!

The Psalm begins with these words of supplication:

"Have mercy on me, O God, / according to thy steadfast love; / according to thy abundant mercy / blot out my transgressions. / Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, / and cleanse me from my sin! (vv. 1-2).

The invocation is addressed to the God of mercy in order that, moved by a love as great as that of

a father or mother, he have mercy, that is, grant grace, show his favour with benevolence and understanding. It is a heartfelt plea to God, who alone can free one from sin. Very descriptive images are used: blot out, wash me, cleanse me. Made manifest in this prayer is man's true need: the only thing that we truly need in our life is that of being forgiven, freed from evil and from its consequence of death. Unfortunately, life often makes us experience these situations. In [such circumstances] we must first trust in mercy. God is greater than our sin. Let us not forget this: God is greater than our sin! "Father, I do not know how to say it. I have committed many, serious [sins]!". God is greater than all the sins we can commit. God is greater than our sin. Shall we say it together? All together: "God is greater than our sin!". Once again: "God is greater than our sin!". Once more: "God is greater than our sin!". His love is an ocean in which we can immerse ourselves without fear of being overcome: to God forgiving means giving us the certainty that he never abandons us. Whatever our heart may admonish us, he is still and always greater than everything (cf. 1 Jn 3:20), because God is greater than our sin.

In this sense, whoever prays with this Psalm seeks forgiveness, confesses his sin, but in acknowledging it celebrates the justice and holiness of God. Moreover he asks to be granted grace and mercy. The Psalmist trusts in the goodness of God. He knows that divine goodness is immensely effective, because [God] creates what he says. He does not hide the sin but destroys and blots it out. He blots it out from the very root, not as they do at the dry cleaners' when we take a suit and they remove a stain. No! God blots out our sin from the very root, completely! Therefore the penitent person becomes pure again; every stain is eliminated and now he is whiter than pure snow. We are all sinners. Is this true? If any of you does not feel you are a sinner, raise your hand... No one. We all are sinners. We sinners, with forgiveness, become new creatures, filled by the spirit and full of joy. Now a new reality begins for us: a new heart, a new spirit, a new life. We, forgiven sinners, who have received divine grace, can even teach others to sin no more. "But Father, I am weak, I fall, I fall". — "If you fall, get up! Stand up!". When a child falls, what does he do? He raises his hand to mom, to dad so they help him to get up. Let us do the same! If out of weakness you fall into sin, raise your hand: the Lord will take it and help you get up. This is the dignity of God's forgiveness! The dignity that God's forgiveness gives us is that of lifting us up, putting us back on our feet, because he created men and woman to stand on their feet.

The Psalmist says:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, / and put a new and right spirit within me [...]. / Then I will teach transgressors thy ways, / and sinners will return to thee" (vv. 10, 13).

Dear brothers and sisters, God's forgiveness is what we all need, and it is the greatest sign of his mercy. It is a gift that every forgiven sinner is called to share with every brother and sister he meets. All those whom the Lord has placed beside us, family, friends, coworkers, parishioners... everyone needs, as we do, the mercy of God. It is beautiful to be forgiven, but you too, if you want to be forgiven, forgive in turn. Forgive! May the Lord allow us, through the intercession of Mary,

Mother of Mercy, to be witnesses to his forgiveness, which purifies the heart and transforms life.
Thank you.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, including those from England, Ireland, Norway, Nigeria, Australia, Indonesia, Pakistan and the United States. In the joy of the Risen Lord, I invoke upon you and your families the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!

Spiritually I embrace you, beloved *young men and young women* from various deaconates, parishes and youth groups of the Archdiocese of Milan, as well as those from the Diocese of Cremona, on the occasion of your *Profession of Faith*. To you and all your peers, my prayerful good wishes that you may fully live the Easter message, always faithful to your Baptism and as joyful witnesses of Christ who died and rose for us.

An affectionate thought to you, dear *sick people*, whom I encourage to look constantly at he who conquered death and may he help us to accept suffering as a precious occasion of redemption and salvation. Lastly, I invite you, dear *newlyweds*, to live family life each day with your gaze turned to the Risen Christ, who in the Paschal Mystery was immolated for us.