

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent: Cycle B: 2024: Jer 31: 31-34; Ps 51; Heb 5: 7-9; Jn 12: 20-33

***“Create a clean heart in me, O God”***

***Blessed are the pure (clean) of heart, they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). How do we arrive at this single heartedness in relation to the Lord, both in Lent and throughout the year?***

1. In today’s first reading from the prophet Jeremiah, we hear the Lord God telling the Prophet that in the days to come, *“I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God and they will be my people. ... All from the least to the greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.”* **How does this process begin?**

When we acknowledge our sinfulness and cry out like the Psalm, *“Create a clean heart in me, O God.”* We need to do this both in daily prayer and in the frequent reception of the Sacrament of Confession: to not to let the paralyzing emotion of fear keep us from the Lord’s healing and forgiveness. Don’t hide from God like a little dog or child when they do wrong, but if you must hide ☺ - hide behind the screen in the Confessional and get rid of what is causing you to feel ashamed.

2. Once we become aware of our need for God to heal us of our spiritual blindness and hardened hearts, we will ask Him like the Psalmist to wipe out our sin in His kindness and renew within us a steadfast spirit. To be spiritually steadfast means to persevere in the Lord’s ways in the face of obstacles: external and internal.

**What are those obstacles?** They are many: *family problems, health problems, fear of death for ourselves or others; fear of being rejected by others; our desire to be in total control of our lives; our own frustration with our weaknesses and sinfulness and the weaknesses and sinfulness of others; not taking time to pray more when we know we should; being afraid to go to Confession; compromising our Catholic Faith in the face of difficult moral decisions, etc.* God in His kindness will give us a **steadfast spirit** if we ask Him, but **the way** He will bring it about usually is by helping us to unite our sufferings (the cross) with Jesus. God permits us to suffer in this world, and often doesn’t take those sufferings away even when we pray for this intention, because He knows united to Jesus and in His grace, those sufferings will purify us of sin and weakness and will be

transformed into a crown of holiness for us, as well as to help the souls in Purgatory and the conversion of ppl in mortal sin on earth - if we offer it for them - per Our Lady of Fatima. As the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading says today, *“He learned obedience from what he suffered.”* **We learn obedience to God by what we suffer in love. And we are taught by Jesus that obedience, rooted in love, is the narrow path to salvation.** *“Father, if it be your will, take this cup (of suffering) from me; yet not my will but yours be done (Lk 22:42).”* Jesus urgently prayed this in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane on Holy Thursday night, and we are called to do the same in our agonies of life. It is not easy to stay with the Lord amid great suffering. He knows that - so His grace is always there to help us - if we open our hearts to its mysterious workings, because the Cross is truly the narrow path to union with God and eternal life. Jesus also taught us to pray for this every time in the **Our Father** - *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”*

3. Finally, as Jesus teaches us in the Gospel today, *“Amen, Amen, I say to you unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. 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.”* **What is Jesus saying?** That the end all and be all is not our life in this world: doing what we want, getting as much pleasure out of life as possible – esp. when it means sinning: disobeying God and the Church and hurting others and ourselves in the process. Using the comparison of a grain of wheat dying and coming to life, we must also be willing to die to our sinful nature and put on Christ Jesus and His new way of living by embracing our Cross in love on a daily basis. **Are we terrified of suffering in all honesty?** Fear of suffering really holds us back in the spiritual life; in fact, it does hold back many otherwise good souls from becoming the saints God calls us to be. Fear paralyzes us - in that way it is a tool of the evil one. Let’s ask the Lord to strengthen our weak spirits. **We never suffer alone - Christ is always with us!** Never forget that, for the good of our soul and for the other ppl we offer our sufferings for. God bless you.