

Gifts of Grace

- Jonah 3:1–10;
- Psalm 51:3–4, 12–13, 18–19;
- Luke 11:29–32
- Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. 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 sustain in me a willing spirit. —Psalm 51:10–12

Most of us have wished at one time or another that life had a “do-over” button (or an “unsend” button for e-mail). This was true even of King David, the second king of Israel, whom God called “a man after my heart” (Acts 13:22). As today’s penitential psalm, attributed to King David, reminds us, even spiritual giants like David sinned spectacularly at times (see 2 Samuel 11–12).

It’s difficult to say, really, what David might have regretted most about his dalliance with Bathsheba, which was replete with arrogance, lust, and deception. Was it the dereliction of duty that caused him to be idly strolling alone on the rooftop of the palace, gazing lasciviously over the palace wall (2 Samuel 11:2–3)? Was it the abuse of power that led him to pressure Bathsheba to submit to his desire (11:4–5)? Murdering her husband Uriah in a desperate attempt to cover their adultery, and then marrying the widow in unseemly haste (11:14–27)? Or was it simply the knowledge that his actions had fooled no one, least of all God (12:1–15)?

And yet, what is most remarkable about this story is that, despite the child’s death, we still get a glimpse of God’s lavish grace. Upon learning that the child Bathsheba bore him had died, he said:

“While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said ‘Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me, and the child may live.’ But now he is dead.... Can I bring him back again?...” Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba,...and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon. (2 Samuel 12:22–24)

In other words, King Solomon, the wisest man who had ever lived (see 1 Kings 4:30) and the future architect of the first great Temple, was a gift of unmitigated grace in the face of overwhelming guilt.

“Create in me a clean heart, O God,” David pleads, remorseful beyond measure. It is this urge to be reconciled to God, this firm resolve to

## Mother Teresa



**Mother Teresa** (26 August 1910 – 5 September 1997) also known as **Teresa** of Calcutta, MC, was a Roman Catholic religious sister and missionary. She was born in Skopje, Macedonia, then still in the Ottoman Empire, into a family of Kosovar Albanian ancestry

mend the breach that has torn the relationship asunder, that fills the heart that is truly penitent. In those moments of remorse, we do not merely seek relief from the guilt (or “fire insurance” from the prospect of eternal damnation); instead, we hope, like David, to be once more truly united to the heart of God.

I have no doubt that at times Mother Teresa felt this urgency to be reconciled with her Beloved, though we do not know what forms her weaknesses and sins may have taken. We do know that she struggled through times of great desolation, though these spiritual “dry spells” are often a sign of divine favor, an opportunity for growth. Mother Teresa certainly understood the need to keep short accounts with God, to keep her heart clean and open to receive him:

A clean heart can see God, can speak to God, and can see the love of God in others. When you have a clean heart it means you are open and honest with God, you are not hiding anything from Him, and this lets Him take what He wants from you.

Through the Church, we have the ability to receive a visitation of grace, especially through the sacrament of reconciliation, if we are prepared to be honest with God and make a good confession. We can approach the sacrament at the lowest point of our lives, with sins as serious as those of King David, and receive absolution. We can also open our hearts to receive these graces simply because we want to experience union with God, as did St. Teresa. Either way, we can be assured of one thing: out of the generous heart of God spring gifts of grace based not on what we deserve, but on how much he loves.

### **A Moment to Reflect**

- Can you think of a time today when God was generous with you? When God looks at you, what do you think he sees?
- Do you anticipate encountering anyone who needs to experience God’s unmitigated grace? What can you do to help that person receive what is needed?

### **A Moment to Pray**

Almighty God, whose ways are often so mysterious, whose mercies are new every morning, go before me and show me how to share the story of your abundant grace in my life. Let me be a sign of hope to all those I encounter. St. Teresa of Calcutta, pray for us!"

Hedi Hess Sexton. “Gifts of Grace” Lent with St. Theresa of Calcutta. 2017.