

AGAINST YOU AND FOR ME

PSALM 51

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our text for tonight is Psalm 51, which we prayed earlier in the service. We will also be examining the explanation of the Office of the Keys as we prayed from the catechism earlier as well.

King David had it made. He had Bathsheba. Uriah was dead. The whole kingdom thought that he was the kind and wise king for taking care of poor Bathsheba. What a good king we have!, they exclaimed. He takes care of his poor dead soldier's wife. It appears that God had nothing to do with any of this. Or did He?

God knew. God knew that David's unbelief had driven him to lust, adultery, and murder. So God sent David a prophet to preach the Law to him. Nathan came to David with a story, which we heard before. When David heard this great misdeed that the man had done, he declared the man guilty, and condemned him to death. Nathan then said the most pointed Law in all the Scriptures: "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7). David's response gets to the heart of the matter: "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13).

But wait a minute. I thought David had sinned against Uriah. I thought he had sinned against Bathsheba and against the people of His kingdom. What did this have to do with God? This gets at Psalm 51. David wrote Psalm 51 when Nathan confronted him with his sin and God forgave him. The line from Psalm 51 rings as true now as it did then: "Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight" (v. 4).

David in Psalm 51 shows us that any sin is fundamentally sin against God (v. 4). When we confess our sins to God, we are saying in effect that He has every right to condemn us, that we deserve nothing but hell and punishment. Many believe that God is arbitrary and unjust in His punishment, but we confess in this psalm that He is right and just in condemning us for the sin we have done against Him.

All sin is ultimately against God. All sin finally is against the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods." That is the terror of sin that troubles the conscience. That was Peter's sin from our reading. His pride would not let him see himself as a weak sinner who needed Jesus. It is that same pride that eats away at you and I when it comes to confession.

Some visitors to our church on Sunday morning are offended by the Confession and Absolution at the beginning of the service. "It is negative. I want my religion to be joyful and happy. I want to give God my best; I don't want to wallow in self-pity." If visitors are offended and scandalized by this, going and confessing your sins to God before the pastor is even more offensive. What business does God have with my sins?

But confessing my sins is not self-pity. Remember the words of the psalm: "For You will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; You will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17). So hear again the words from the catechism:

What is confession?

Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

Notice that it doesn't say, I confess my *sin*, singular or even generally speaking, but my *sins*, plural. Now God does call on us to confess our sinful nature. But what this catechism section is getting at is that when I confess my sins, what specifically I have done that troubles me, that leads me to understand my sinful nature. So what this is talking about is that God wants me to actually confess my sins. In other words, God wants you to know and acknowledge with your lips what you have done wrong, and that you deserve to be punished for it. But then God desires that you ask for His mercy and forgiveness, which He gladly and willingly gives.

Perhaps an illustration is in order. Part of the discipline of teaching children right from wrong is getting them to recognize that what they did was wrong. So you ask them to tell you what they did wrong. Now the parent knows perfectly well what the child did wrong. This isn't for the parents' benefit; it's for the child's benefit.

It is the same way with confession. God desires you to confess your sins not for Him (He knows perfectly well what you did and will continue to do) but for you. God wants you to see yourself as a sinner. Why? Because He wants you to know that you need Jesus. For Jesus came to seek and save the lost, the sinner, the contrite, the messed up, the ones who know that they live and move only by God's everlasting mercy. That is why God wants you to confess your sins.

But even that is not finally the point. God wants you to confess your sins and see yourself as a sinner, true. But He wants *that* so that He can forgive your sins. That's God's work. God's proper work is to forgive, to love, to show mercy and pity. God wants to forgive your sins. "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (Psalm 51:12). What a great prayer! God, give me back the joy of living in You.

God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, comes to restore your joy, to blot out your sins, and to save you. He comes to open your lips to sing His praise. He comes to give you a new life in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. In other words, God comes to you to forgive you. He comes to absolve you and free you from your guilt of sin. If God can forgive David, He can forgive you. So we can pray and sing with the whole Church on earth and in heaven:

"Sing praises to the LORD, O you His saints, and give thanks to His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. . . . O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever!" (Psalm 30:4-5, 12b).

In the name of Jesus. Amen.