

Create in me A Clean Heart O God
 Diocese of Michigan
 Psalm 51
 March 21, 2021
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“It’s all about plaque.”

The author of Psalm 51 cries out:

“Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

It’s all about plaque: plaque in our arteries, plaque on our teeth, plaque in our souls. Plaque—that buildup of bacteria that clogs our blood vessels, nestles between our molars, and silts across our souls. Plaque that blocks the blood, denies tissue air, decays our teeth and stultifies our soul.

As my former dentist Lester Appell describes it—it’s the snowflake effect. All you need is a few small bits to stick to your teeth and then it roughs up the surface just enough for a few more bits to stick and the next thing you know, the crevice between your teeth, the gap where the tooth brush bristles once peeked through the opening, where the tip of your tongue used to explore is no longer a space, no longer a rough opening, but a smoothed over casing. A hard shell protecting the bacteria, enabling them to burrow down under those old fillings, beneath the gum line into the dark, moist recesses of our mouth.

It’s all about the plaque. It’s all about sin. It’s all about our souls. How’s that for a day brightener?

Knowing this the psalmist writes, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving kindness; in your great compassion blot out my offenses. Wash me through and through from my wickedness and cleanse me from my sin.

Jewish theologian and philosopher, Martin Buber, in his book *The Way of Man: According to the Teaching of Hasidism* tells the following story. It begins:

“Where is the dwelling of God?”

This is the question with which the Rabbi of Kotzk surprised a number of learned [ones] who happened to be visiting him. [Where is the dwelling of God?]

They laughed at him: “What a thing to ask! Is not the whole world full of God’s glory?”

Then he answered his own question: “God dwells wherever [humanity] lets [God] in.”

This is the ultimate purpose: to let God in. But we can let God in only where we really stand, where we live, where we live a true life.

(Martin Buber, 1966 *The Way of Man: According to the Teaching of Hasidism*.pp40-41.)

According to Buber and to the psalmist, we connect with God—have a holy moment—a sacred time—when we create a space for God in our lives.

“Create in me a clean heart O God, renew a right spirit within me.” But not just any old space—but a space where we really stand, where we live, where we live a true life.

A true life is one that has been flossed of our iniquities; a place that has been brushed clean of our transgressions. A true life comes, a whole life lived, when we clearly name our sins, our failings, and our flaws.

This accounting takes place in my own life when I pray in the quiet of the still morning, long before the rest on my house wakes up, or at night, before I sleep. Morning or night, I try to name and give to God, my joys, my happiness for sure, but also my sadness, my sins, those places and times when I have not been who I long to be, when I have not lived up to all God has given me. I try to name those moments before I sleep or before I begin a new day.

Renew a right spirit within me...

Once a year or so, I make a confession with a spiritual advisor, a priest, someone who knows me well. I find the act of preparing and then telling another person, even via zoom, of where I have fallen short, missed the mark and sinned, so very cleansing and healing.

If you've never done it, made a confession, face to face, I invite you to try it.

It can be incredibly helpful and illuminating to have a loving, more objective set of eyes join us in reviewing and digesting our ways in the world.

That trusted person can help us name a sin as a sin and help us distinguish actual sin—and falling short of perfection. Not being perfect and sinning are two different life events. Then sometimes, because the world is an imperfect place, parts of society can try to tell us that we are not good enough, because of how we look, or who we love—but again—that is not our sin, but the world's imperfections.

An extra set of impartial, objective, Gospel filled eyes can enable us to sort out our ways, the world's ways and God's ways.

With the right person, after we have examined our lives, hearing him or her offer God's forgiveness, remind us what God has given us, absolution and the ability to begin again, it is a thoroughly cleansing experience. It enables us as Martin Buber said, “to live a true life with God.”

Rinsing our lives of our sins, chipping the plaque away, creates more space for all that is Holy.

Then it is God who dwells in the cracks and crevices of our lives, a spiritual fluoride fortifying ourselves from decay.

Create in me a clean heart of God, and renew a right spirit within me. May we take the time in the morning, in the evening, to stop, breathe and pray.

Caste me not away from your presence and take not your holy Spirit from me. This lent, my prayer for us is that we make an opening for God to nestle into the crevices of our lives and the nooks of our souls. I don't know about you, but this year, this time, this now, I need God.

Open our lips O lord
And our mouths shall proclaim your praise.

Amen.