

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Prophet's prayer is a cry for help in the face of the sinfulness of man. It is a cry that each of us has made – aware of our sins, ashamed of our sins, and yet trusting in the mercy and grace of God. Sinful man is no less in captivity than was Israel in Babylon – subject to a pagan ruler, enslaved, unable to free themselves.

And still, in the face of Israel's sins, with full knowledge of his own weakness and transgressions, the Prophet prayed. He was not afraid to approach God, for he trusted in the Promise. Note the prayer of the Prophet, and make his prayers yours: "O Lord our God, ...we have sinned, we have done wickedly..." He had sinned. His people had sinned. Their fathers had sinned.

And they were living with the earthly consequences of their sin – God had taken the Land of Promise from them. Pagans dwelt in the Land God had reserved for them. Unbelievers dwelt in the houses they built. Idol worshippers reaped the crops that they had planted. And they were captives in a land not their own.

So the plight of Daniel and Israel was not unlike the plight of the sinner in the world – you have experienced the same. Your ruler isn't Darius the Mede, son of Ahasuerus. You are not enslaved by a Babylonian monarch. But you have nonetheless known slavery – slavery to sin, captivity to do the very things that God forbids, unable to do the very things that God commands. Not Darius, but the devil, enslaves this fallen world, the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience. And there is no more cruel or deceptive or murderous a slave master than he.

To be trapped in sin is a horrible plight. And all men born of Adam's flesh are trapped in sin. Consider the tax collector of which the Lord teaches, and which St. Luke records. There is no sin in collecting taxes, if it is done ethically and according to civic law. But that is not the confession of the tax collector. He confesses that he is a sinner. How he sinned the Scripture does not reveal. But that he sinned is clear.

And his sins weighed heavily on him. He was ashamed of them. He earnestly desired to be free of them, to have them removed. And if you're honest, you'll confess that you have felt the same. You too should beat your breast, look down in shame, and pray "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

So before you this day there are three prayers – the proud prayer of the Pharisee, and the humble prayer of the Prophet and tax collector. Consider their prayers, and the condition of the hearts from which those prayers came – and then ask yourself: Which prayer have you prayed?

The prayer of the tax collector was the same as the prayer of the Prophet: "We have sinned, we have done wickedly...O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive!" "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" He looked down and beat his breast. Repentance has two parts: contrition and faith. His heartfelt shame over his sin is evident.

He hated what he had done, what he had thought, what he had desired to do. He was contrite. And that contrition was heart-felt. It wasn't a public show, like the conduct of the Pharisee. The

Pharisee was proud and unrepentant, and wanted other men to know what he had done. He took the best seat.

But not so the tax collector. He knew that God sees all things, that God had seen his sin. He went to the Temple not to be seen by other men, rather to humble himself before God. That's what faith does. So you, you who have come to this Temple this day to humble yourself before God, you too have shown the fruits of faith. For true repentance is contrition and faith. This day you have beat your breast. You have confessed your sinfulness before God and men.

But that you have done not seeking earthly reward, or the admiration of those around you. You have done it seeking God's grace. You have come, as did the tax collector, to the very place that God has promised to be, because you believe His promise. You have come to receive the mercy and grace that He alone can give. So you, like the tax collector, like the Prophet, have prayed the prayer of faith.

Faith must have an object. Saving faith is not the world's faith. Saving faith is not trust in self. It is not trust in works, in power of position, in your own intelligence or abilities. Saving faith is faith in Christ. So it is to you that the Apostle testifies: Christ died for your sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried, and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Believing that is to have saving faith. And together with contrition, that faith receives the forgiveness that Christ won on the cross.

So you can be sure, dear Christian, that Christ's forgiveness is your forgiveness. You can be sure that you are redeemed by His precious shed Blood. And you can pray with the Prophet in confidence, knowing that God indeed causes His face to shine on this Sanctuary, that God inclines His ear to you and hears; and that God sees what you suffer, what you endure. But like Daniel, you pray not because of your righteous deeds, but rather because you trust in the mercy of God, His great mercy, the mercy shown you in Christ Jesus your Lord.

It is He that endured the anger and fury of God, that it be turned away from you. And in Christ, God bids you to pray. And He hears your prayer, the prayer of faith, the prayer beseeching the Father, in the Name of the Son, by the Holy Ghost, the prayer placed in you by the indwelling of the Spirit of God.

As the Apostle confesses, so does your faith confess: By the grace of God, you are what you are. By the grace of God, and only by His grace, you are a baptized child of the God who is Love. By the grace of the God who alone is holy are your sins forgiven. In Him alone are you declared righteous in His sight. For His grace toward you was not in vain. God the Son won you back, dying for your sins, and rising for your justification.

And the same Son, Jesus Christ, True God and True Man, who died for your sins, who was buried, who rose again on the third day, who was seen by Cephas and then by the Twelve, who was seen by over 500 brethren at once, who was seen by James and all the Apostles, who appeared to Paul, the same Christ makes bread His Body and wine His Blood for you to eat and drink. Believing, you receive the Mysteries of God. Believing, the Promise of God, the Gospel Promise, is yours. And it is you, dear Christian, who go down to your house justified.

St. Luke 18:9-14

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity / Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, 2019 A. ✠ D.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.