

## Meditative Reflections for Taizé Liturgy

### Psalm 51:1-12

This Psalm is a prime confessional resource, admitting our sin, longing for mercy, for forgiveness, for a change.

Today, it's located near the beginning because we're used to a rhythm of starting with confession. The season of Lent started also with this confessional Psalm, in Ash Wednesday worship.

We expect an aspect of contrition, of needing to feel bad about ourselves, or at least about sin and what we've done wrong. A default feeling of Ash Wednesday is that the greasy smudge is fitting attire to mark our inner state of being. That sense can pervade the season, mired in contrition, morose lament, groveling at how rotten we feel.

Or maybe in our efforts to be better, the disciplines of Lent you may still be trying to follow—the fasting, attention to prayer, donations of money and time, or whatever it is you try to do for the season. Later on, the Psalm would go on to reflect on “acceptable sacrifices,” saying it isn't a show of burnt offerings (and I just now thought about that as the burnt palm leaves on Ash Wednesday), but the sacrifice God desires is a troubled spirit and broken heart.

Starting a service, starting a season, with that emphasis on cleaning up your sin makes it seem the relationship starts with you and is dependent on you getting things in order.

Though you may get around to spring cleaning, I don't believe you can create your own clean heart. Notice in the Psalm that God does the laundry—the washing, cleaning, blotting out stains, scrubbing, cleansing. God the expert washer-woman is getting you all cleaned up and good to go.

### Hebrews 5:5-10

We've moved away from dour contrition, both in our start on reflections today and in this season; instead of starting with the confession of our sins, we've been building worship around a remembrance of baptism.

I hope that's emphasizing for you a focus on God instead of on your abilities, emphasizing God's promises to you, maybe even when you were a baby, perhaps asleep or perhaps wailing through worship, that it's not about your behavior but is about the kind of God you have.

Still, even when we put our focus on God, the insidious old ways sneak back in. Just after reminding you about God the washer-woman cleaning you up, still you went back to singing kyries, a plea and prayer for mercy, as if you had to beg in repetition.

Partly that's an aspect of Lent, silencing our canticles of praise as off-limits for services this season. With Taizé, we'd usually be singing lots of glorias and alleluias. Instead, I feel a little bashful even letting the A-word out of my lips during Lent.

But that silly practice contorts our relationship with God. A version of it comes in this peculiar Hebrews reading, which puts even Jesus into contortions with God, requiring his “reverent submission,” and that he had to learn obedience, which involved suffering.

Read the wrong way, it can be pretty gross stuff, sick and twisted, turning to a notion of punishing ourselves for God's sake. Or if not our suffering, then that Jesus needed to suffer, and since my sin is so bad he needed to be in miserable pain because of it.

That's not what this is about. So we're changing direction, a move away from kyries and pleading, away from commending suffering submissively to hierarchy.

Just so, we've not been begging for mercy, but remembering it is God's promise in baptism. We should be singing glory and alleluia and all our praise, maybe especially in this season and in this year we've been through, that God doesn't intend suffering. Instead it is God who “leads you into life.”

### John 12:20-31

In our task of reorienting, of re-understanding your relationship to God and therefore also how to see yourself, we'll notice that this Gospel reading doesn't talk about sin and punishment, with

somebody suffering as a substitute in your place. The judgment is not that God is angry and needing to be appeased. It's not that you need to feel so bad about yourself until you can earn God's good graces.

This is a culminating point in the Gospel of John. In his telling, it comes just after Palm Sunday. Jesus is being made known to the nations, part of drawing all people to himself. That's not because they'll go to hell without him. It's because he's good news, because in him we see a God who so loves us, a God who leads you into life. His death isn't to show that it requires reverent submission, but just the reverse, so that you can know you're not captive to evil and deadly powers, to bear this fruit, to share the blessings of eternal life.

His revelation is that life isn't scarce and to be hoarded; life is abundant. Even when it is being threatened and taken away, still it can spread and grow, in inspiration and more of giving itself, and in that is its glory. Death cannot stop this. This is big news; it's good news of what God is doing for you, and it's why we look to Jesus.

#### Jeremiah 31:31-34

So if you trust that God is actively striving to love you, to give you life, if you're ready to set aside the personal accounting of having to tally how good or bad you think you've been, if you're not interested in feeling miserable either for sin or for some sense of punishment and suffering, if you're ready to live into love, to lay hold of the life that God is offering to you, how do you do that?

I clearly don't believe the way to improvement is through lecturing, cajoling you to try harder, offering instructions. The futility of that effort fits God's own sense as we just heard declared through the prophet: "I will put my law within them [says the Lord], and I will write it on their hearts. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."

So, again, if it's not about teaching or laying down the law, how do you get there? Jeremiah sees it simply that God makes a new covenant, a binding

relationship that God promises not to remember the bad, not tracking iniquity. Instead God decides to give you new life, as new as if you finally had a heart that could pulse the blood of life through your arteries when all you had before was a useless rock in your chest, the very Spirit of God pulsing through you, enlivening you, so that you may be what God wills.

It is this sort of transformative life-giving promise that we remembered in our thanksgiving for baptism this morning, with the words "God wants the fullness of life for us, and we have access to this life in God's Son. Jesus is thus God's definitive 'yes' to us." God's yes to you, giving you love and filling you and leading you into life. That's where God is.