

THE MISERERE (PSALM 51) IN PRAYER AND MUSIC

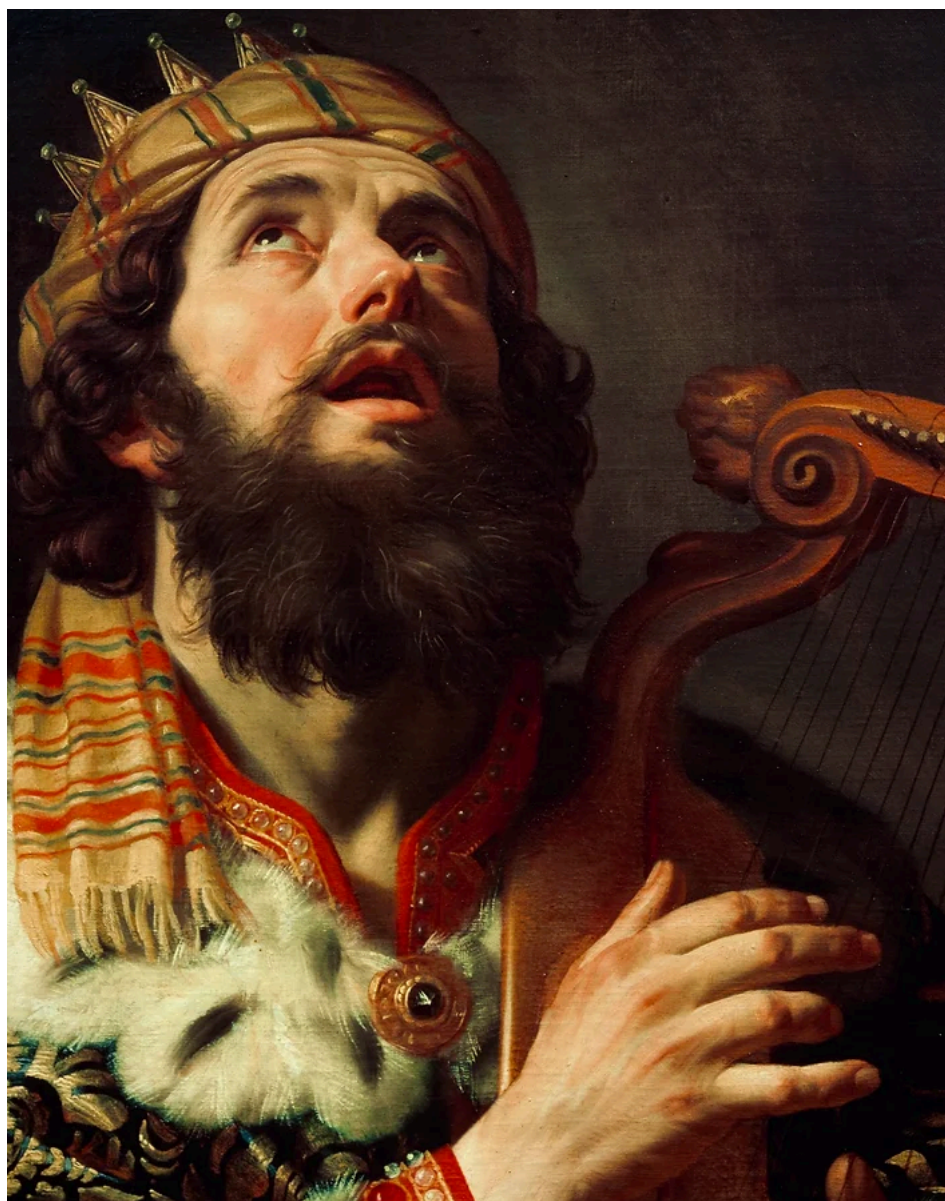
March 7, 2024 | 4:30 PM

4:30 PM LECTURE BY **DR. MATTHEW HALL**

5:30 PM MUSIC SUNG BY THE **THE BOYS AND SCHOLA OF SAINT PAUL'S CHOIR**

AND THE **FERRIS CHORAL FELLOWS OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY**

DIRECTED BY **RICHARD WEBSTER**, INTERIM DIRECTOR OF MUSIC OF THE SAINT PAUL'S CHOIR



ST. PAUL'S PARISH | HARVARD SQUARE

PSALM 51(50) TRANSLATION AND NOTES

Vulgate

1 In finem.¹ Psalmus David,
2 cum venit ad eum Nathan propheta,
quando intravit ad Bethsabee.
3 Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam;
et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam.
4 Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea,
et a peccato meo munda me.
5 Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco,
et peccatum meum contra me est semper.
6 Tibi soli peccavi,
et malum coram te feci;
ut justificeris in sermonibus tuis,
et vincas cum judicaris.
7 Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum,
et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.
8 Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti;
incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae manifestasti mihi.

Grail

1 [A Psalm of David]
2 When the prophet Nathan had come to him
because he had gone to Bathsheba.²
3 Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offense.
4 O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin.
5 My offenses truly I know them;
my sin is always before me.
6 Against you, you alone, have I sinned;
what is evil in your sight I have done.³
That you may be justified when you give sentence
and be without reproach when you judge.⁴
7 O see, in guilt I was born,
a sinner was I conceived.
8 Indeed you love truth in the heart;
then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom.

¹ *In finem* (unto the end): the whole psalm is attributed to David.

² This psalm expresses David's repentance after his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, her husband. Cf. 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Although the rebuilding of the walls (v. 20) evidently come from the period of Exile (i.e., some four centuries after King David), and the creation of a new heart and new spirit (v. 12) presuppose the message of the prophet Ezekiel, a later redaction of the psalm during the Exile does not preclude the possibility that it originated in some form in the First Temple period. Whatever the original context, the psalm clearly reflects the understanding of Israel in Exile that the Exile is the consequence of their grave sins, epitomized as the sins of David.

³ A truthful confession of one's sins constitutes the return to God, who is Truth. Stated oppositely, returning to God in sincerity opens one up to the gentle instruction and correction of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens all (cf. John 16:8). Cf. v. 8.

⁴ *judicaris* (you are judged): The Vulgate (against the Masoretic text and LXX, which the Grail translation follows) has a passive verb, which was interpreted by the Latin Fathers as referring to the innocence and equanimity of Jesus Christ at his trial. "He [Pilate] questioned him [Jesus] at length, but he gave him no answer." (Luke 23:9; cf. Isaiah 53:7)

Vulgate

9 Asperges me hyssopo, et mundabor;
lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor.

10 Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetitiam,
et exultabunt ossa humiliata.

11 Averte faciem tuam a peccatis meis,
et omnes iniquitates meas dele.

12 Cor mundum crea in me, Deus,
et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.

13 Ne projicias me a facie tua,
et spiritum sanctum tuum ne auferas a me.

14 Redde mihi laetitiam salutaris tui,
et spiritu principali confirma me.

15 Docebo iniquos vias tuas,
et impii ad te convertentur.

16 Libera me de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus salutis meae,
et exultabit lingua mea justitiam tuam.

17 Domine, labia mea aperies,
et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam.

Grail

9 O purify me [with hyssop], then I shall be clean;
O wash me, I shall be whiter than snow.⁵

10 Make me hear rejoicing and gladness,
that the bones you have crushed may thrill.⁶

11 From my sins turn away your face
and blot out all my guilt.

12 A pure heart create for me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.⁷

13 Do not cast me away from your presence,
nor deprive me of your holy spirit.

14 Give me again the joy of your help;
with a spirit of fervor sustain me,

15 that I may teach transgressors your ways
and sinners may return to you.⁸

16 O rescue me, God, my helper,
and my tongue shall ring out your goodness.

17 O Lord, open my lips
and my mouth shall declare your praise.⁹

⁵ This refers the blood of the Passover lamb, spread on the lintels with hyssop, a plant with curative properties (cf. Exodus 12:22); and therefore also the Blood of Christ, the Wood of the Cross, and the waters of Baptism. Blood is a cause of ritual uncleanness and thus an emblem of sin, but sprinkling in the blood of the sacrificial victim makes one pure and sinless. "For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God." (Hebrews 9:13-14ff) The saints have not been merely sprinkled, but even "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14)

⁶ This idea recalls Ezekiel's vision of the resurrection, in which the dry bones were put back together with flesh and sinew. Cf. Ezekiel 37.

⁷ Being created anew by God is the only way to avoid sin: "I will put my spirit within you so that you walk in my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep them." (Ezekiel 36:27) That is, righteousness can come only from God.

⁸ When we pray this psalm repentantly, the psalmist's vow is fulfilled.

⁹ The Divine Office begins daily with this verse.

Vulgate

18 Quoniam si voluisses sacrificium, dedissem utique;
holocaustis non delectaberis.

19 Sacrificium Deo spiritus contribulatus;
cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicias.

20 Benigne fac, Domine, in bona voluntate tua Sion,
ut aedificentur muri Jerusalem.

21 Tunc acceptabis sacrificium justitiae,
oblaciones et holocausta;
tunc imponent super altare tuum vitulos.

Grail

18 For in sacrifice you take no delight,
burnt offering from me you would refuse.

19 my sacrifice, a contrite spirit,
a humbled, contrite heart you will not spurn.¹⁰

20 In your goodness, show favor to Zion:
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

21 Then you will be pleased with lawful sacrifice,
(burnt offerings wholly consumed),
then you will be offered young bulls on your altar.¹¹

¹⁰ This is not a rejection of sacrifice altogether, but of insincere sacrifice. Public ritual penance is meaningless without inward contrition.

¹¹ The psalmist affirms that with inward contrition (which the Fathers understood to be expressed allegorically as the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem), then public corporate ritual is not only acceptable, but actually the very best and highest way of giving thanks for the new life that God has given by inward grace.

CHORAL SELECTIONS

MISERERE MEI, DEUS
Psalm 51(50), verse 3

William Byrd (1543 - 1623)

MISERERE MEI, DEUS
Psalm 51(50), verses 3-9, 14-21

Gregorio Allegri (1582 - 1652)

MISERERE MEI, DEUS
Psalm 51(50), verses 3-17

Josquin des Prez (c. 1450 - 1521)



Portrait of Girolamo Savonarola (1524)
Moretto da Brescia (c. 1498-1554)



Book of Hours, Use of Rome (circa 1470)



Nathan Admonishing David (1653)
Rembrandt van Rijn (1606 - 1669)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, March 23rd, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

Workshop: Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*

with Dr. Michael Marissen

Co-Presented by the Harvard Catholic Forum, Emmanuel Music, and Saint Paul's Choir School

Register at <http://www.harvardcatholicforum.org/st-matthew-passion>

Saturday, March 23rd, 4:00 PM

Emmanuel Music presents Johann Sebastian Bach - *St. Matthew Passion*

with the St. Paul's Boys Choir

<https://www.emmanuelmusic.org/performance-info/j-s-bach-st-matthew-passion>

Sunday, March 24th, 4:00 PM - Concert at Boston University with soloists from the St. Paul's Boys Choir

April 8 - 14th - St. Paul's Boys Choir and Music Scholar Tour to Chicago:

with concerts and services at Holy Name Cathedral; St. John Cantius; St. Vincent de Paul; St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Evanston; and Chicago Union Station

Sunday, April 21st, 2:00 PM - Parish Choir Spring Concert

with the St. Paul's Church Parish Choir and Associate Director of Music, Brandon Straub

Thursday, April 25th - Honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary in Prayer and Music [Livestreamed]

4:30 PM EDT Lecture; 5:30 PM EDT Concert

*with Dr. Elizabeth Lyon Hall (COLLIS/Cornell). Music by the Boys and Schola of Saint Paul's Choir and soloists
Directed by Richard Webster, Interim Director of Music*

Co-Presented by the Harvard Catholic Forum and the Saint Paul's Choir School

Register at <http://www.harvardcatholicforum.org/honoring-the-virgin-mary>

Saturday, May 11th - 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM Lecture, 8:00 PM Performance

Felix Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*, a Pre-Performance Lecture and Discussion: The Biblical Foundations of Mendelssohn's Apostolic Drama

with Fr. Peter Grover OMV

8:00 PM Performance by the Harvard Chorus with professional orchestra and soloists, directed by Edward Jones, part of the Harvard Arts First Festival.

Register at <https://www.harvardcatholicforum.org/mendelssohns-st-paul>

Sunday, May 12th, 3:00 PM - Canticum pro tua Matre (Music for your Mother) on Mother's Day

St. Paul's Church

The St. Paul's Boys Choir and Schola in works by Palestrina, Langlais, Schubert and Britten

Sunday, May 26th, 4:00 PM - Concert at Jordan Hall, NEC

with the St. Paul's Boys Choir and Boston College High School Choir

ST. PAUL'S PARISH | HARVARD SQUARE

Today's event was presented by the Harvard Catholic Forum, including:

Deacon Tim O'Donnell, S.T.L., Obl. OSB., *Executive Director*

Shani Agarwal, *Program Director*

Emily Theisen, *Director of Marketing & Media*

Dr. Matthew Hall, *Sacred Music Area Advisor*

The music at today's event was led by

The Boys and Schola of St. Paul's Choir

The Ferris Choral Scholars of Harvard University

Edward E. Jones, *Choirmaster*

Richard Webster, *Interim Director of Music, St. Paul's*

Brandon Straub, *Associate Director of Music, St. Paul's*

