

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

We hear these words from **Psalm 32:5** **“I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.”** So far the word of the Lord...

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Lent is not meant to be a season of gloom. God created us to experience joy in communion with Him, to love all humanity, and to live in harmony with all of His creation. But sin separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, and so we do not enjoy the life our Creator intended for us. By our sin we grieve our Father, who does not desire us to come under His judgment, but to turn to Him and live. God desires for us to be happy - not necessarily as the world views one who is happy, but as the Psalmist states: **“Blessed** (or another way to translate the Hebrew) *Truly happy is the one whose transgression is forgiven”* (Ps 32:1). Yes, God desires that our sins be forgiven that we might be truly happy.

It shouldn't be difficult to recognize that we are all sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God. But oh how often we want to deny that we are indeed sinners who daily are in need of the forgiveness of our Lord! To deny this is to deceive ourselves. And what does the Psalmist say?!? **“Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit”** (Ps 32:2). When we deceive ourselves, we stand in opposition to the truth. We stand in opposition to Jesus - the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We stand alongside the Jews who were rightfully rebuked by Christ who said **“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies”** (Jn 8:44). And do you remember why these Jews were rebuked by

Jesus? Jesus made an offer of freedom: **“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31-32)**. Yet they denied that they had ever been enslaved: **“We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free?’” (Jn 8:33)**. Jesus gets right to the point: **“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.’” (Jn 8:34)**. We are all sinners. We are all slaves. To deny this is to deceive ourselves.

When we intentionally try to hide or cover our sin, it troubles both body and mind. I have little doubt that you are capable of relating to the feelings described by the Psalmist when you keep silent, bottling up your sins: **“For when I kept silent (in other words, when I refused to confess my sin), my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer” (Ps 32:3-4)**. God gifted each of us with a conscience for a reason. Even those who do not know the Scriptures experience this turmoil within their minds. As **Romans 2:15** says: **“They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them”** - the conscience tells you what should be done, and then it is up to your will to determine whether or not you will do it. May God grant us His grace to do what we would otherwise be unable to do! It is good when our conscience is pricked by our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. For it means that our conscience is working as it should be.

Yet, oftentimes when our consciences are pricked, what do we do? We attempt to brush off that feeling, to justify our actions, to excuse our behavior, blaming whatever we have thought, said, or done on someone or something else. Ashamed of what we may have thought, said, or done - we do our best to shove it under the proverbial rug in the back of our minds. Yes, many try to cover their

sin. Like David in his affair with Bathsheba, this can involve increasingly more serious transgressions to cover the prior trespasses. It may not escalate to the level of murder, but the results are usually similar: a snowball turns into an avalanche of deception and destruction. Some attempt to cover their sin by acting as if there's no such thing, that what they happen to be doing is perfectly natural and completely harmless. Excuses are inevitably made in an attempt to rationalize and cover up the ugly reality of what we've done. But this is merely a temporary smoke screen that quickly blows away and we are exposed for who and what we really are.

In addition to attempting to hide our sins, we can deceive ourselves by thinking: "*Compared to this or that person I'm not such a bad sinner after all.*" We aren't as bad as David, who committed adultery and murder. We're not as bad as some of the criminals who make today's headlines. Don't buy into this lie! Without Christ we are all poor miserable sinners deserving nothing but punishment and death. When we ignore the conscience and willfully do evil, wicked, sinful things it results in death—spiritual, physical, and finally eternal death. We are born spiritually dead in trespasses and sin (Eph 2:1). Because of sin, we will die physically, **"for the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23)**, and unless our sin is forgiven, we will die eternally, separated from God forever in hell (Matt 10:28). Thus, the Psalmist correctly observes, **"Many are the sorrows of the wicked" (Ps 32:10)**. David knew those sorrows firsthand because of his unrepented sin.

(1 Jn 1:8) "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." We can try to cover our iniquities. However we will always fail in light of our judge, Jesus - the One who discloses the purposes of our hearts (1 Cor 4:5). God is faithful. He doesn't forsake us to our fallen state. God the Holy Spirit uses the Law and its impact on our conscience to bring us to repentance. God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David with his sin. David was convicted, no longer

deceiving himself - he responded: **“I acknowledge my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin”** (Ps 32:5). King David becomes truly penitent. To admit that we are sinners is to acknowledge the truth! Such confession of sin, which is made to God, is contrition itself. When confession is made to God, it must be made with the heart, not only with the voice, like actors on a stage. Confession is contrition in which, feeling God’s anger, we confess that God is justly angry and that He cannot be reconciled by *our* works. Yet, we seek for mercy because of God’s promise.

(1 Jn 1:9) “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

We cannot cover our sins. Only God can, and He does. He is the one who covers our sins. He is the one who cleanses us from all unrighteousness. He is our hiding place. He is the one who preserves us from trouble and surrounds us with shouts of deliverance (Ps 32:7).

Truly happy is the one whose sins are forgiven! God does not desire that we continue living in our sinful ways. God desires that we repent, turning away from our sinful flesh. Abide in Christ and His Word - for in Christ we are given strength to resist temptation to sin. God says **“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.”** (Ps 32:8). Yes, God gives us crosses to bear, but these tests and trials are meant to strengthen and increase our faith. As St. James teaches us: **“God tempts no one”** (James 1:13). God will never lead you into sin. This should comfort you! He has His eye upon us with love and He instructs and guides us by His revealed Word, the same Word which pronounces our sins forgiven.

Yet, to be clear, we are not forgiven because we confess our sins or because we ask for forgiveness. To imagine that we receive forgiveness on account of anything we ourselves may do is also to deceive ourselves. There is no work that we can do to earn a righteous verdict from God. Rather, we are forgiven by faith in Jesus, the One who reconciles us to the Father by His death on the cross on our behalf. Paul cites Psalm 32 in **Romans 4: “And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.’”** Our faith in Jesus is counted as righteousness before God. It is His work that justifies us. We pray for forgiveness of sins that we may have confidence that our sins are indeed forgiven. Through penitence, which we saw last Wednesday includes both the confession of sin and faith in God’s gracious forgiveness, Christ’s objective justification, His death for the sins of the world, becomes subjectively applied to you and me. Jesus suffered and died for the sins of the whole world, which means that He died for you and for me. That means that our transgressions are forgiven in Christ. Our sin is covered in Christ. God has not counted our iniquity against us in Christ. That forgiveness and peace is ours through faith in Christ.

In penitence, God becomes our hiding place in trouble, for **“steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord” (Ps 32:10)**. In this world of sin and suffering, trouble will remain, but we are secure in God’s love. This is why the apostle Paul could write: **“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:38–39)**.

The penitent is blessed in the Lord, and in the Lord we live lives of joy. Therefore the Psalmist closes this Psalm by saying: **“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (Ps 32:11)**. We have reason to be joyous and truly happy - for in Christ our sins have been forgiven! Amen.

The peace which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.