

The Sentinel-February 2019



"Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God"

King David wrote: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit* (Psalm 51:10-12).

You recognize these words, don't you? These words serve as our Offertory. It begins a new and prevaillingly sacrificial part of our worship as we respond to having heard the sacramental reading and preaching of the Word. We offer ourselves to God (2 Corinthians 8:5), our substance (2 Corinthians 8:2-4) and our praise (Hebrews 13:15-16) in an act in which we rededicate ourselves and offer Him our thanksgiving.

It's funny what you hear when you are a kid; what you think you hear anyway. I remember singing these words in worship and being concerned that I might have offended God and that He would take away His "presents" away from me. I did not want that! I know I deserved that. I realized everything I had came from Him and I'd be in a world of hurt if He took His presents/His gifts from me.

As I learned to read, I realized King David says "presence" over the word "presents." Maybe I wasn't so wrong, after all. His present to you and me is His presence and with His presence comes joy – the JOY of our salvation. I like how St. Augustine once said it: "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You." Jesus is JOY! And our hearts experience JOY when we live in and through Him. It is a JOY that the world and Satan can't take away from us no matter the circumstances.

As I grow in my faith, I realize just what a poor, miserable sinner that I am. Growing in the Faith doesn't mean that I sin less. It means that I see my sin that much clearer and I cling ever tighter to the Savior who was willing to shoulder them for me that we might be together forever. I know that Jesus is our Immanuel, our "God with us." Christmas and Epiphany proves it. It means that He gifts us with His presence to sustain us in this earthly journey until He brings you and me to our true home. I can't wait until that time I see Jesus face to face in the JOYS of paradise. This hope of my salvation brings me JOY.

Until then, I/we have work to do, don't we? "While we press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14) we work together so that His name is made known to the nations. We are steadfast, immovable in this work, aren't we? Knowing that in the Lord our labor is never in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58) We work diligently to maintain our mission and ministry within our church and school, among our District and within our Synod. All of which take sacrifice. And all the while we labor and sacrifice faithfully in response to His "presents," we do so with JOY in our hearts for His ongoing presence.

God be with you,
Pastor Szczesny