

“To the upright I will show the saving power of God” (Ps 50:23b). Psalm 50 offers a lesson from God about right relationships. “The sacrifice God really wants is the sacrifice of praise accompanied by genuine obedience” (Note Ps 50).

One must do more than recite the right words. If the external prayer is not matched with an internal love and devotion to God, then the words are meaningless. The sincere person shows appreciation with both words and a thankful heart. When we call on the Lord for help, He answers and delivers us. God feels most appreciated when we respond with a grateful heart.

Not all are thankful. Some have wicked hearts. With their lips they recite the Lord’s statutes. They recall his covenant, but they do not live it. In their hearts, they hate discipline. They show their true colors through thievery, adultery, and lies. They tear down their brother with words. They spread gossip about a mother.

God sees and observes quietly. The arrogant man thinks that God does not notice. However, God sees all and will reprove the wicked man in due time. “When you do these things should I be silent? Do you think that I am like you? I accuse you, I lay out the matter before your eyes” (Ps 50: 21).

Even when God threatens punishment, there is always mercy available. God would rather forgive a truly repentant sinner than follow through with a just punishment. When the citizens of Nineveh responded with contrite hearts, the Lord discerned their genuine sorrow and saw no need to carry out the punishment. “I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance” (Lk 15:7).

The sinner who repents is gladly forgiven by God. However, there is often more work to be done. The Prophet Isaiah offers this advice: “Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan’s plea, defend the widow.” In penance, we continue the work of forgiveness by reconciling with our brothers and sisters whom we have acted against in the folly and blindness of our evil deeds.

In our Gospel, we see how the Pharisees missed the boat. As teachers, they say the right things, but they do not do the right things. They fail to teach by proper example. We all must be careful to follow good words with good deeds and a true intention in our hearts.

We call to mind the washing of the feet by Jesus of his apostles. “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:14-15). The humble servant is exalted by God.

Reference: Kriegshauser, Laurence. Praying the Psalms, pages 131-132.