

“A pure heart create in me, O God!” (Ps. 50:10). A Lenten Letter from the Ukrainian Catholic bishops in the US

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At the celebration of every matins service, we recite Psalm 50, the great penitential prayer of King David. King David was one of the most remarkable men who ever lived. He was a mighty warrior, a king, a prophet, a poet, a musician, a friend, and also a penitent. Throughout his life, David gave thanks to God for the many blessings he had received from Him. And when he sinned greatly, he prayed: “A pure heart create in me, O God!” He was aware that even his own repentance was a gift from God.

The most beautiful aspect of King David was not his many accomplishments and talents, but his simple and straightforward heart. The prophet Samuel said about him: “the Lord has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him ruler of his people.” (1Sam 13:14)

Jesus is often called by the title “Son of David”. In his simplicity of heart, David was an appropriate ancestor of our Lord, because Jesus says to us: “Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest.” (Mt. 11:29) In Matthew’s Gospel, we read that when his enemies plotted to kill him, Jesus withdrew peacefully, and the evangelist goes on to say that this was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the coming Messiah: “He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.” (Is. 42:3)

What a beautiful virtue it is to have a simple and compassionate heart! The depraved heart is never simple. It is always grasping, always manipulative, always putting on an act. The depraved heart is never satisfied, never happy with itself, and habitually angry at the happiness and success of others.

But the simple heart is compassionate and is able to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” and St. Paul writes. (Rm. 12:15) The simple heart is never lonely but finds companionship in everyone.

The time of Great Lent has lost its appeal and its relevance to many in our modern society. Could it be because Lent is so simple, and the world now is so complicated? We are bombarded by information from all over the world that comes to us on our smart phones in the palm of our hand. They are constantly dingling with texts and alerts and updates, informing us of the latest piece of news that can't be missed, always accompanied by enticing advertisements to buy something to fulfill our desires.

Lent, on the other hand, is so very simple. Lent means giving things up instead of acquiring more things. It starts with the simple idea of giving up food. From there we can simplify other things in our life as well. We can turn off the twenty-four-hour news channel, switch off the cell phone for part of the day, and stop checking things online.

And with this extra time, what might we do? For starters we might spend time with the One who is most important, the One who made us and watches over us, the One who desires us so lovingly.

We can read holy scripture and the lives of the saints. We can pray in church and at home. We can and must pray for our own conversion. We can pray for those we love and those in need. We can pray for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, because our peace-loving ancestral homeland has been forced yet again to defend herself against those who desire to enslave and destroy her. And we can pray for the conversion of those who harbor evil intentions for Ukraine.

God tells us in holy scripture that we cannot give ourselves a simple heart, only He has the power to do that for us. So, during this time of Great Lent let us beg God for a simple heart, a heart that does not deceive, a heart that is not greedy, a heart that rejoices in the good of others and weeps at their misfortunes, a heart that is pure and simple. Together with King David, let us pray: "A pure heart create in me, O God!"

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