

The Divine Service: Offertory & Offering

16th C.

■ Create in me a clean heart, O God,

Psalm 51:10–12

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. Amen.

History tells us that in the Early Church the singing of a psalmody accompanied a procession of laypeople to the altar, as they brought various offerings from their livelihoods to support the ministry and the poor. This *offertory* reflected a *sacrifice of praise*, the devotion of our hearts to God and our hands to our neighbors in consideration of what Christ does for us in the Divine Service. In the medieval era, a more complicated offertory ritual developed. In it, this *sacrifice of praise* became mixed up with the idea of the Mass as *atonement sacrifice*—that the priest or the people doing this, and not only the death of Christ on the cross, made satisfaction before God for sins. When Luther reformed the Divine Service he removed this corrupted ritual, which distracted people from the fact that Christ alone atones for sin, that no priest and no human work can save. The forgiveness of sins distributed in the Divine Service comes from Christ's cross alone!

Our offertory is simple. David's words of his great Psalm of repentant faith, Psalm 51, remind us of the truest *sacrifice of praise*, which is that, "[o]nce faith has strengthened a conscience to see its liberation from terror, then it really gives thanks for the blessing of Christ's suffering. It uses the ceremony itself as praise to God, as a demonstration of its gratitude, and a witness of its high esteem for God's gifts. Thus the ceremony becomes a sacrifice of praise." (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV 74). Our singing of David's Psalm is part of that; our gifts and offerings are another, a sacrifice of praise offered in response to Christ's singular atoning sacrifice. We praise God by giving to his work and to those in need. But even more than that, we praise him by coming to receive what he died to give us. And that is the focus of David's words! Read the whole Psalm. When did David sing it? Why do we sing it at this point in the service? Of what twofold message from God has the Sermon reminded us?

The Offertory reflects on what has been, and looks forward joyously to what will be! What are we about to receive with certainty, as David did, but through even more profound means? (2 Sam 12:13)

Read the rest of David's Psalm 51, from which the Offertory is taken. How does David, in repentant faith, "teach sinners God's ways" about what sacrifice God desires? What other words from Psalm 51 find their place in part of the Church's "daily sacrifice of praise?" (Hint: see *LSB* 219)