

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT – YEAR B

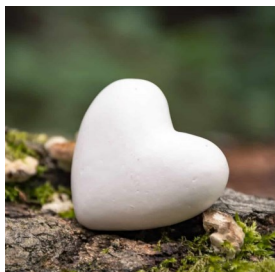
#### Psalm 50 (51)

This is probably the best known of the seven Penitential Psalms, often referred to as the *Miserere*. Loved by many great Christian figures, including St Augustine, Gregory the Great and Martin Luther, it is particularly familiar from the musical setting by Gregorio Allegri (d. 1682), made for the use of the Sistine Chapel in Rome during Holy Week.

In line with the caption preceding the psalm, tradition sees in this text the confession and repentance of King David. David sent Uriah to his death in a battle against the Ammonites, having first taken Bathsheba (who later became his wife) as his mistress. The prophet Nathan subsequently confronts David and makes him realise what he has done. (A full account of events can be found in 2 Samuel: 11–12.)

The psalm is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on an awareness of our sins and so the desire to confess our guilt. We see this very clearly in verses 1–2 where the penitent pleads for forgiveness through cleansing and purification.

The psalmist entreats God to forgive him using a series of verbs: *'have mercy; wash me; cleanse me; create in me; do not cast me away; do not deprive me; open my lips'* etc.



Over and above the psalmist's contrition is his complete trust in the steadfast love, compassion and mercy of God for his people, and for the psalmist himself. He utters a heartfelt appeal for spiritual renewal: *'create a pure heart'; 'give me again the joy of your help'*. In sin, he turned his back on God, but as a penitent he seeks renewed intimacy with God.

Although this psalm belongs to the group of individual lament psalms, it can also be read as coming from the whole community. Each person's sin has an effect on others, and each act of repentance makes a positive difference to the whole community: *'my mouth shall declare your praise'*.

## Gospel John 12: 20–33

### The last Passover

This section of the Gospel is part of the final episode in the 'Book of Signs', seven of which are miracles. Through these signs, John is revealing who Jesus is and what he has done. Our reading this Sunday is the key to the whole chapter.

### 'Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'

The 'hour' Jesus is speaking of is the time when he will be glorified through his death. This will have come as a shock to his listeners.

The Jews believed that the 'Son of Man' was a powerful conqueror sent by God, against whom no opposition could resist. They did not understand that glorification meant crucifixion on a cross.

### A rich harvest

John's theology echoes Isaiah 52: 13, the fourth song of the servant of Yahweh. The death of the servant is the means of his glorification. *'See my servant will prosper, he shall be lifted up, exalted, rise to great heights'*. The rich harvest has already begun to be gathered in.

The Jewish crowds have been joined by the first of the Gentiles (vv. 20–22). The crowd is gradually becoming the 'whole world' (v. 19).

### 'If someone serves me they must follow me'

Jesus equates his self-sacrifice to that of his followers. They are called to serve as he did.

### 'Now my soul is troubled'

Although John does not record Jesus's agony in Gethsemane, these words are reminiscent of Jesus's words and emotions at that time. Jesus again uses the term 'the hour' and once more identifies the reason why his death is necessary.

### The voice of God

God came and spoke to Jesus in the great moments of his life. Jesus heard the voice of God at his baptism when his ministry began (Mark 1: 11), and at the time of his Transfiguration (Mark 9: 7). This time God replies directly to Jesus's words, for the benefit of the people. He is affirming Jesus as he approaches his Passion and death.

### 'I shall draw all people to myself'

Jesus's final words in this passage (v. 32) reiterate his message. His being 'lifted up' from the earth i.e. his death on the cross, is the means by which all mankind can have eternal life.