

“It is mercy I desire, and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). Sometimes the word mercy is translated as love, at other times loyalty. The verse from the Prophet Hosea is a clarion call to the chosen people to turn back to God. God loves the chosen people. He wants their love in return. God is ever faithful and he wants their loyalty in return. God is full of mercy, and he wants them to respond with mercy rather than any half-hearted sacrifice.

“It is mercy I desire, and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6) The responsorial verse from the Prophet Hosea is paired with Psalm 51, the famous plea from King David for forgiveness. We recall how King David was favored by God and yet he committed adultery with Bathsheba, plotted to have her husband Uriah the Hittite killed, and lied to cover his tracks. The Prophet Nathan helped David to see his sinful ways. He misused his fertility in siring a child in an adulterous relationship. He misused his strength by ordering that Uriah be placed at the front of battle so that he would be killed and the adultery covered up. David was unfaithful to God in his abuse of power for his own selfish means.

Psalm 51 expresses David’s sorrow for his sins in poetic language. “Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me” (Ps 51: 3-4). David expresses perfect contrition for his sins and God responds with his abundant mercy.

The Gospel of Luke contrasts two sinners in the temple. The lesser man by society’s standards is the greater man in the eyes of God. “But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner’” (Luke 18:13).

“It is mercy I desire, and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). Jesus died for our sins. He sacrificed his life out of love, loyalty, and fidelity to the Father that we might experience his love and mercy. God is filled with joy when we seek his mercy. This is joy of the father who welcomes home the prodigal son (Luke 15:32). It is the joy of the Shepherd who leaves the 99 in order to find the 1 lost sheep (Luke 15:5). It is the joy of the woman who finds the 1 lost coin (Luke 15:9). “In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

The Gospel of Luke contrasts two sinners in the temple. The greater man by society’s standards is the lesser man in the eyes of God. “The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity — greedy, dishonest, adulterous — or even like this tax collector’” (Luke 18:11) His prayer is empty. His fasting is an empty sacrifice. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. [But] these you should have done, without neglecting the others” (Matt 23:23). The Pharisee has no mercy and no compassion for the tax collector. He is a bit like a prideful and sinful King David until Nathan helps him to see his own sinfulness.

Jesus is not looking down on the Pharisee, he is addressing the parable to us. Do you resemble the Pharisee or the tax collector? Do you pay your tithes but neglect mercy and forgiveness? Or do you come to God with a contrite heart asking for mercy and showing mercy to others in return. God desires to share his mercy with us, but we must be merciful to others. Father, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

King David asked for forgiveness. “Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me” (Ps 51: 3-4). King David experienced the joy of forgiveness. And God was filled with joy as well. “It is mercy I desire, and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6).