



Theme artwork by
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Lent at Lakeside: My Heart as Sanctuary My Life as Prayer Devotion for Saturday, February 17, 2018

Repentance* By Kathleen Norris

“Let your prayer be very simple. For the tax collector and the prodigal son just one word was enough to reconcile them to God.” –John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

When I’m working as an artist-in-residence at parochial schools, I like to read the psalms out loud to inspire the students, who are usually not aware that the snippets they sing at Mass are among the greatest poems in the world. But I have found that when I have asked children to write their own psalms, their poems often have an emotional directness that is similar to that of the biblical psalter. They know what it’s like to be small in a world designed for big people, to feel lost and abandoned. Children are frequently astonished to discover that the psalmists so freely express the more unacceptable emotions, sadness and even anger, even anger at God, and that all of this is in the Bible that they hear read in church on Sunday morning.

Children who are picked on by their big brothers and sisters can be remarkably adept when it comes to writing cursing psalms, and I believe that the writing process offers them a safe haven in which to work through their desires for vengeance in a healthy way. Once a little boy wrote a poem called “The Monster Who Was Sorry.” He began by admitting that he hates it when his father yells at him; his response in the poem is to throw his sister down the stairs, and then to wreck his room, and finally to wreck the whole town. The poem concludes: “Then I sit in my messy house and say to myself, ‘I shouldn’t have done all that.’” “My messy house” says it all: with more honesty than most adults could have mustered, the boy made a metaphor for himself

that admitted the depth of his rage and also gave him a way out. If that boy had been a novice in the fourth-century monastic desert, his elders might have told him that he was well on the way toward repentance, not such a monster after all, but only human. If the house is messy, they might have said, why not clean it up, why not make it into a place where God might wish to dwell?

*From *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*. Riverhead Book: New York, 1998, pages 69-70

Psalm 25:1-10

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Prayer:

○ God, you see our secret hearts.

You see through our vain attempts at righteousness,
when we do the right thing for the wrong reasons.

Forgive us when we seek to please others,
instead of pleasing you.

Do not see us for our faults,
and do not go away from us.

Keep us always in your presence
so that we may be restored to the joy of your salvation.

Sustain in us a willing spirit to treasure what you desire;
then our hearts will be opened in joy and gladness.

In Jesus Christ, our Treasure, we pray. Amen.

–From *Feasting on the Word: A Thematic Resource for Preaching and Worship, Lenten Companion*.
Bartlett, Taylor, and Long, editors. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2014, pages 183-84.