

## “Ponder”

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Do you remember Edgar Allen Poe's story, "The Telltale Heart"? In that story, the main character committed a murder and he buries the body of the victim in his basement. But the murderer is unable to escape the haunting guilt of his deed. He begins to hear the heartbeat of his dead victim.

A cold sweat pours over him as that heartbeat goes on and on, relentlessly, getting louder and louder. Eventually, it becomes clear that the pounding which drove the man mad wasn't in the grave below but in his own chest!

Open to Psalm 51. You get the same sense as you look at this Psalm, that's how David felt. The guilt he felt became unbearable. Sin will haunt you and haunt you!

We gather on this First Sunday in Lent to once again take a Lenten journey. Who? Didn't we just finish celebrating Christmas? In some ways, yes! It feels as though we just completed our journey to Bethlehem. But this journey is very different. It's a bit more subdued, a bit more reflective, a time to quiet ourselves, our lives and ponder.

During Lent, you're asked to **Take an Honest Look in the Mirror to See the True You!** You need to recognize that it's God's grace that allows you to do that. But when you do, you cry out with David in Psalm 51. Verses 1-2, *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!"*

Frederick II was an 18th-century king of Prussia. During an inspection tour of a Berlin prison, he was greeted by the whimpers of the prisoners who fell on their knees, protesting their unjust imprisonment. While listening to their pleas of innocence, Frederick noticed a solitary figure in a corner, unmoved by the king's presence. "Why are you here?" Frederick asked him. "Armed robbery, your majesty." "Are you guilty?" the King asked.

"Oh, yes, your majesty. I entirely deserve my punishment." Hearing the prisoner's honesty, Frederick called for the jailor. "Release this man at once," he said, "I will not have him kept in prison corrupting all the fine, innocent people who occupy it!"

We find this story a little amusing. But could this be a story that asks us to hold a mirror to the illusions we create when we "cover up" our true self with a fig leaf of innocence? That's what Adam and Eve did when they were confronted by God for turning against Him and sinning in the Garden.

Lent can be a really powerful experience as we continually look at the cross and all Jesus does for us. He takes our sin on Himself, and gives Himself so we might be forgiven. There are many things that show the power of the Lenten journey! The power of the Lenten journey is **Naming your Sin**, and **Pondering your Need for God**.

Beginning with ashes, Lent's a journey that takes us to the wooden cross and victoriously, the empty tomb. Lent is our opportunity to say, *"Yes, Jesus, I am guilty. I'm lost in the wilderness of my sin and in need of redemption."*

We ponder this time of Lent, because it's **A Time of Renewal** as we look more closely at the words of the Psalmist. This song of David recognizes brokenness and a need for God's restoring mercy and grace. King David's adulterous affair and tragic

cover-up is exposed by Nathan. David ponders his own betrayal of God's community. Pride and lust caused him to take what was not his. David also betrays the trust God has placed in his leadership.

Verses 10-12, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."* This Psalm is **A Reflection of Raw Honesty**. No one can hide from God! David hides nothing in his confession! But note—there's no bargaining chip, or whimper of innocence, or excuse! We hear only a cry for God's mercy and forgiveness!

We take this Lenten journey by putting our busy and distracted lives on pause. We ponder our relationship with God and with each other. David's heartfelt cry for mercy is our cry of need, pondering our sin realizing it's **A Time of Confession** as well.

Renewal, the path "home," the path to our true self, calls us to return. We discover once again a God whose love frees us—no matter how far we stray in our own journeys.

Open to Ephesians 4. Paul speaks of the change in our lives which happens as we begin to follow Jesus Christ. There's a change of heart! Verses 22-24, *"Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*

Centuries ago, when Leonardo Da Vinci was painting his masterpiece *The Last Supper*, he selected a young man to sit for the character of Jesus. Pietro Bandinelli was his name. Pietro was chosen because of his humble and gentle spirit. In Da Vinci's mind this is how he imagined Jesus.

Da Vinci was known to start many projects and not bring them to completion, so the painting took many years to be finished. He had only one character yet to paint, Judas Iscariot. Leonardo found his model on the streets of Rome, a man who matched his image of a betrayer with shoulders bent to the ground and an expression that was cold and surly.

At his sitting while Da Vinci painted, the man was agitated. He looked around the studio and suddenly his expression turned to sadness. Da Vinci asked, *"Why can't you sit still? What's wrong with you?"* The man walked over to the painting, pointed to the image of Jesus' face and said, *"These years have betrayed me, maestro. Look how much I have changed in 25 years. Today you chose me to model as Judas Iscariot but 25 years ago, I, Pietro Bandinelli, was your model for Christ!"*

This tragic tale of a lost life was for Pietro his season of Lent. There is a Pietro and a King David in all of us and we have the mark of sin to prove it! In this time of confession, we aren't to beat ourselves up, but to be free from the chains that bind us.

We can stand up straight because **We have been Forgiven by Jesus Christ**. Let the light of Jesus Christ shine in and through our broken lives.

**What a Gift of Grace to Ponder!** May this quiet journey, this journey of pause and pondering, lead you to mercy, renewal and the celebration of being claimed and named by God as you live Lent as a person of the resurrection!