

END OF PSALM 50

You are Psalms

Some people think you never get discouraged, but the fact is, when you do, you know where to run. Your prayers are open and honest because you realize that God already knows your heart, He's just waiting to hear you spill it. And when you do, what starts out as heavy ends up becoming a song of praise. You may struggle... and often you do... but each time, you grow in your understanding of God's faithfulness. You're just a song waiting to happen.

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PSALMS (SONGS OF PRAISE)

TRUST
IN THE
LORD *and do good;
dwell in the land and
enjoy safe pasture.*
PSALM 36: 3

PSALM NUMBER: 50

**The repentance and confession of David after his sin.
The fourth penitential Psalm.**

1. Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity.
2. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
3. For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me.
4. To thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before thee; that thou mayest be justified in thy words and mayest overcome when thou art judged.
5. For behold, I was conceived in iniquities: and in sins did my mother conceive me.
6. For behold, thou hast loved truth: the uncertain and hidden things of thy wisdom thou hast made manifest to me.
7. Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.
8. To my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness; and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.
9. Turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
10. Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels.

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11. Cast me not away from thy face; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.
12. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit.
13. I will teach the unjust thy ways: and the wicked shall be converted to thee.
14. Deliver me from blood, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall extol thy justice.
15. O Lord, thou wilt open my lips: and my mouth shall declare thy praise.
16. For if thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it: with burnt offerings thou wilt not be delighted.
17. A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.
18. Deal favorably, O Lord, in thy goodwill with Sion; that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up.
19. Then shalt thou accept the sacrifice of justice, oblations and whole burnt offerings: then shall they lay calves upon thy altar.

The Psalms are songs of praise and cover a period of about 1000 years, from the time of Moses (ca. 1400 B.C.) to the Israelites' return from exile (ca. 450 B.C.). They deal with selected events of that period and provide us with the thoughts and feelings of those who went through the experiences recorded. After being made a Cardinal by Pope Clement VIII, Saint Robert Bellarmine, prepared for posterity his very own commentary on each of the Psalms. Enclosed are his interpretations on each of the Psalms.

PSALM NUMBER: 50

EXPLANATION OF THE PSALM

1. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity." The Prophet begins with a prayer, asking forgiveness of his sins, assigns his first reason for asking forgiveness, thinks he can move God to forgive; and afterwards assigns other reasons. "Have mercy on me, O Lord." Psalms 111 and 123, David acknowledges and declares himself miserable, on account of the sin he committed, notwithstanding the abundance of the gifts of nature he was then enjoying; as, on the contrary, he declares those only happy "who fear the Lord," and not those who abound in honors and riches; from which we may learn how erroneously the children of this world judge of misery and happiness. "According to thy great mercy." I dare to ask your mercy because I am a wretch, for mercy looks upon misery to remove it. He calls it "great mercy," because sin is a great misfortune; and because the mercy, through which God gives us temporal blessings, is but a trifling mercy compared to the forgiveness of sin; for God often confers temporal favors on his enemies, even on those he will condemn on the last day; the grace of the remission of sin he only gives to those whom he intends to

18. "Deal favorable, O Lord, in thy goodwill with Sion; that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up." The last reason assigned by David to appease God, to obtain perfect justice, and to make reparation after so grievous a fall; for he says, that as well as his fall proved an injury to the whole people, his recovery will be now a source of edification to them; and he, therefore, begs this favor for himself and for the whole city of Sion. "Deal favorably, O Lord, and thy goodwill with Sion." If I am not worthy of being heard, have regard to the city of which I am the head, and confer a favor on it by healing its head, "in thy goodwill;" in the goodwill, in which you were pleased to select this city as your own peculiar city. "That the walls of Jerusalem may be built up," meaning himself, who, like the wall, guarded and defended the entire people.

19. "Then shalt thou accept the sacrifice of justice, oblations and whole burnt offerings: then shall they lay calves upon thy altar." The works of justice that please God as true spiritual sacrifices are the effect of justification, according to the apostle, Hebrews 13, "and do not forget to do good, and to impart, from by such sacrifices God's favor is obtained;" in 1 Peter 2, "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ – "then," when I shall have been thoroughly renewed and justified, "shalt thou accept the sacrifice of justice;" all the good works of mine and my people, "oblations and whole burnt offerings." All which good works will be so many spiritual oblations, so many spiritual holocausts. Spiritual oblations are the offspring of one's substance or property in alms for the love of God; and spiritual holocausts are the dedication of one's self entirely to do God's will and commands, according to Romans 12, "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God, your reasonable service." – "Then shall they lay calves upon thy altar." When it shall be seen that such sacrifices of justice are the most acceptable to you, people will vie with each other in loading your altar, not with the ordinary sacrifices, but with the most precious; for that of the calf was considered the sacrifice most valuable; and thus the "laying calves upon the altar" means the offering of works of the most perfect justice to the Lord God.

adopt as his children, and the heirs of his kingdom. David, then, not content with the small amount of mercy, through which he had got a noble kingdom, immense wealth, a large family, and dominion over his enemies, and the like, asks for the "great mercy," which he knew consisted in the forgiveness of his sins, and the restoration of grace. "And, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity." He repeats and explains the same expression; "blot out my iniquity" being a mere repetition of "have mercy on me, O God:" and, "according to the multitude of thy tender mercies" being a repetition of "according to thy great mercy;" inverting the order of the expressions, and thereby giving certain elegance to the verse. Those words, then, "according to the multitude of thy tender mercies," give us to understand how unbounded is the mercy shown by God to his beloved children; for the Hebrew word, strictly speaking, signifies the tender love of a father, which the Scripture is wont to express by, "the bowels of mercy;" and the Church, and the Collect of the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, thus expresses, "O God, who, through the excess of your love, go farther than even the merits and even the prayers of your supplicants." For, in fact, so great is love of God for us, that he not only grants much more than we deserve, but even more than we dare to hope for. He shows that in the parable of the prodigal son. The father not only forgives the penitent but he runs to meet him, embraces him, kissing him, orders the most valuable clothes, and a precious ring for him, kills the fatted calf in compliment to him; and, finally, shows more marks of favor and love to him, after squandering all his property, than if he had returned after having achieved a signal victory over his enemies. "Blot out my iniquity," refers to the sin and the stain left after it. David knew that he had not only incurred the punishment of everlasting death by his sin, but that it also left a stain on this soul that rendered it dark, deformed, and hateful to God; and the expression, "blot out," refers to both. When a debt is forgiven, the deeds are said to be cancelled, a blotted out; and stains are said to be blotted, when the thing stained his washed and purified. David, then, begs of God not to deal with him in the rigor of his justice, but with the mercy of a father, to forgive the sin, and wash away the stain left by it, by restoring the brightness of his grace.

2. "Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." Though the sin may be forgiven, the grace restored, there still remain in man the bad habits of vice, and the very concupiscence of the flesh, that make a man infirm and weak, just as he would be after having recovered from a heavy fit of sickness. The bad habits are gradually corrected by the practice of acts of virtue; but concupiscence, though they can be lessened, ordinarily speaking, is totally eradicated by death alone. And though our own earnest desires and endeavors go a great way to root out our vices, and to diminish our concupiscence, the grace of God, without which we can do nothing, with which we can do everything, is the principal agent therein. David was fully aware of all this, having written in Psalm 102, "bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all he hath done for thee, who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." And, in this passage, after he had asked for the forgiveness of his sins, and, through Nathan the prophet, got this answer, "the Lord also hath taken away thy

sin, thou shalt not die," again begs to be washed and cleansed to be more and more justified by additional graces; that, by the victory over his bad habits, and the repression of his concupiscence, his soul may become more fair and beautiful, and better able to resist temptation. He, therefore, says, "wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin;" that is to say, I confidently hope my sins are blotted out through your grace, and that my soul is washed and cleansed from the filth and stains left upon it by the action of sin; but I ask, beg, and desire to be washed again and again by a fresh infusion of grace, that my soul may thereby be both purified and strengthened. A simpler explanation would be, to make this second petition turn on the magnitude of his sins; as if he said: had my sin been an ordinary one, a simple ablution would suffice; by being a great, grievous, enormous one, I need additional ablutions to wash away every vestige of my sins.

3. "For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me." The second reason assigned by him for obtaining forgiveness is, that he admits it, confesses it, and punishes himself by keeping it constantly before him. Pardon me, "for I know my iniquity;" I neither excuse nor deny it, I freely acknowledge it, and I am constantly grieved in thinking of it; for it "is always before me," staring me in the face, and piercing me like a javelin. An example for us in the recitation of the penitential Psalms. We should be able truly to say, "my sin is always before me." This we can do by keeping up a recollection of the sins that, through God's goodness, have been forgiven, for thus we will be constantly reminded of our great ingratitude to so great a benefactor.

4. "To thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before thee; that thou mayest be justified in thy words, and mayest overcome when thou art judged." The third reason for his asking pardon of God is, that he has no other judge to fear. "To thee," not against thee, he says, "have I sinned." He had sinned against Urias, whose death he caused. He had sinned against Bethsabee, with whom he had committed adultery, and against the people, whom he scandalized; yet he says, "to thee only have I sinned;" as being the only judge before whom he could be convicted. There was no one else to sit in judgment on him, and if there were even, he could not be convicted, for want of evidence; for, though common report condemned him, there was no judicial proof of his guilt; still, he stood convicted before God, for his own conscience bore testimony against him before that God who searches the reins and heart; and he, therefore, candidly avows, "and I have done evil before thee;" for, though he did the evil in private, in the darkness of a closed chamber, he could not evade the all seeing eye of his Maker. "That thou mayest be justified in thy words." I confess myself a sinner, thereby acknowledging the justice of the words you pronounce upon me by Nathan the prophet, when he accused me of murder and adultery. "And mayest overcome when thou art judged," a repetition of the same idea; as if he said: there is no use in denying my crimes, for, if put upon my trial, I must acknowledge them; you will gain the cause, I will be cast therein.

brute animals; and if such sacrifices were pleasing to you, I would not hesitate in offering them. It is not to be inferred from this, that sacrifices of brute animals were in no respect pleasing to God, when it is clear, from the book of Leviticus, that they were instituted and ordered to be offered by him; but they are said to be of no value essentially, as if the slaughter of cattle were, in itself, a thing agreeable, or useful, or necessary to God. They are also said to be of no value in comparison with the sacrifice of the Eucharist, as appears from Mal. 1, where the old sacrifices, it is said, will cease, when "the clean oblation will be offered in all nations." Sacrifices are also said to be of no value when they are offered by sinners, as we have in 1 Kings 15, "obedience being more pleasing to God than the offering of victims." Finally, sacrifices are said to be of no value as regards the expiation of sin; for, as the apostle says, "it is impossible that sins court be taken away by the blood of bulls and goats;" and it is in such sense that David says here, "if thou hadst desired sacrifice," for the remission of my sins, "I would indeed have given it;" but because "with burnt offerings thou wilt not be delighted," so as to forgive me my sins through them, therefore "my mouth shall declare thy praise;" for, as we said in the explanation of the last Psalm, such sacrifice is the one most acceptable to God, be lighted on the altar of the heart with the fire of charity.

17. "A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Explains more fully how acceptable to God is the sacrifice of praise; that sacrifice that springs from a contrite and humble heart, when man, acknowledging his own misery and God's mercy, humbles himself before his power, attributing all honoring glory to him, and confusion and disgrace to himself, as we read Daniel 9, "justice to thee, O Lord, but to us confusion of face;" and a little further on, "to us, O Lord, confusion of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers would have sinned, but to you, our Lord God, mercy and propitiation." The expressions, "afflicted spirit" and "contrite heart," are the same, and one Hebrew expression is only given for both, but the interpreter chose to vary the words, and the meaning is the same. The spirit is said to be aborted when the soul is affected with grief, and thus placed in trouble, by reason of sin committed against God; so also, the heart is said to be contrite when the soul, full of grief for the sin committed, is, as it were, torn asunder, and reduced into powder, from its strong hardness and insensibility. Such contrition is the sacrifice most acceptable to God, for as well as he is offended by our sins, he is appeased by our repentance; and very properly is now added, "a contrite and humbled heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise;" for God despises the proud, and resists them; but that the humble (who willingly submit to him) he always gives his grace, James 4.

13. "I will teach the unjust thy ways: and the wicked shall be converted to thee." The fruit of his justification, tending to the glory of God and the benefit of many. Having been taken into favor after so many grievous offenses, "I will teach," by word and example "thy ways," mercy, and justice, "for all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth;" and the consequence will be, that the wicked, following my example, will be converted to thee. David was so signal example to all posterity of God's justice and mercy; of his mercy, because, notwithstanding his crimes, the moment he exclaimed, "I have sinned before the Lord," they were all forgiven; and of his justice, for the Lord inflicted most grievous temporal punishments on him, not only in the death of his son born in adultery, but soon after, in his expulsion from the kingdom, the public violation of his wives by his own son, and the slaughter of his sons Amon and Absalom. His example was useful, not only to the people of his own time, but to all unto the end of the world; but this Psalm, composed by him, is in use, and will be in use: so long as the Church militant shall be in existence. David, then, carried out what he promised in this Psalm, for he taught the wicked the ways of the Lord, thereby bringing many sinners to God, and will, doubtless, bring many more. It is also most likely that David, upon his repentance, did preached up the mercy of God to many, and that through his exhortations many sinners were converted to God.

14. "Deliver me from blood O God, thou God of my salvation and my tongue shall extol thy justice." Having prayed shortly before for his sins to be washed away and having promised that he would teach sinners the ways of the Lord, he now prays to be free from the punishment which Urias' blood, unjustly spilt, called for, and promises to praise God's justice. "Deliver me; "save me from the voice of Urias's blood, which, unjustly spilled by me, cries out to thee and calls for vengeance; "deliver me," for he fancied he saw the blood, like a soldier in arms, staring him in the face; and, therefore, with great propriety he adds, "O God, the God of my salvation;" for the delivery from imminent danger is the province of a Savior; and this, is a reason for his adding, "and my tongue shall extol thy justice;" for true deliverance and salvation was then had through the merits of Christ in prospective, as the same is had now through the same merits as of the past. The merits of Christ have in them the very essence of justice, and deserves the most unbounded praises both of lips and of heart on our part.

15. "O Lord, thou wilt open my lips: and my mouth shall declare thy praise." The consequence of the perfect justification and salvation of the sinner is, that his lips, which were wont to praise God, but will closed by sin, through his pardon should be open again to praise and thank his Redeemer. He, therefore, says, "O Lord, thou wilt open my lips," by forgiving and pardoning my sins, and restoring my joy and confidence; you will open my lips, and then "my mouth shall declare thy praise," by proclaiming your mercy and justice, not only to the present but to all future ages

16. "For if thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it: with burnt offerings thou wilt not be delighted." He assigns a reason for offering the sacrifice of praise, because sacrifices of cattle are not pleasing to God; as if he said, "my mouth shall announce thy praise," because I know you to prefer such sacrifice to that of

5. "For behold, I was conceived in iniquities: and in sins did my mother conceive me." The fourth reason is derived from our first origin, and the transmission of original sin, making us infirm and prone to sin; and, thereby, the more worthy of mercy and pity. The iniquities and the sins alluded to could not have been the sins of David's parents, for his parents were pious and devout people; he alludes to the sins of our first parents, as is evident from the Hebrew.

6. "For behold, thou hast loved truth: the uncertain and hidden things of thy wisdom thou hast made manifest to me." The fifth reason, derived from the truth and simplicity of heart for which David was remarkable; God, being truth himself, has a special regard for men of truth, and, by reason of it, revealed many of the future mysteries to David, for there is scarcely a mystery appertaining to Christ or the Church, that he did not foresee and foretell in the Psalms. He, therefore, draws upon his own truthfulness now, to which he still adheres in confessing his sins, and by reason of such adherence to it he asks God to forgive him. "Behold, thou hast loved truth;" you have loved truth and sincerity of heart, as well as you hate duplicity and wickedness. "The uncertain and hidden things of thy wisdom thou hast made known to me." Loving truth as you do, and having formed me most truthful, you have rewarded me by revealing to me the most secret, profound mysteries, proofs of your infinite wisdom. The word "uncertain" does not imply any of the divine mysteries to be uncertain, in the sense that there is a probability of their not coming to pass; but they are "uncertain" to us, in regard of the time of their fulfillment; thus, we say the day of judgments or of our death, is uncertain, though nobody questions the certainly " of both one and the other.

7. "Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow." He now discloses one of the "uncertain and hidden things of his wisdom," namely, that in the new dispensation men would be sprinkled with water in baptism, and thereby perfectly justified, alluding to the ceremony described in Numbers 19, with three things are said to be necessary to expiate uncleanness, the ashes of a red heifer, burnt as a holocaust; water mixed with the ashes; and hyssop to sprinkle it. The ashes signified the death of Christ; the water, Baptism; and hyssop, faith; for hyssop is a stunted plant, generally growing on a rock. In the typical expiation, the water purified, but by virtue of the ashes of the slain heifer, and the aspersion with the hyssop; thus, the baptismal water purifiers, by the application of the death and merits of Christ, through faith. It is, then, to the real, as well as the figurative expiation, that David refers when he says, "thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed;" for he asks for the cleansing which he knew was only emblematic, that by hyssop, which, however, he knew would be converted into the reality of the institution of Baptism. The show God was the primary author of such purification, he does not say, let the priest sprinkle me, but, sprinkle me yourself; to show the perfection of the thorough cleansing to be had in Baptism, destroying sin most effectually, and giving additional grace.

8. "To my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness; and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice." The effect and sign of perfect justification is, when "The Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God." The Prophet having known this by experience, asks for it again, saying, "to my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness." When you shall have perfectly cleansed me, you will, moreover, light up my interior with that spiritual joy and gladness that will make me feel my sins have been forgiven, and that I have been restored to your favor, and then "the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice;" "the bones" means the powers of his mind, not the limbs of his body; for he says, immediately after, "a contrite and humbled heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise;" and the meaning is: my mind, now dejected and weighed down, with them recover its strength, and rejoice when we learn that the fear that saddens and humbles us comes from God, and that it disposes the soul to the spirit of love that justifieth.

9. "Turning thy face away from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities." He now plays for the immediate accomplishment of what he predicted. He said previously, "thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed;" and also, "to my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness;" and he now asks for them at once; first, for the remission of sins; "turn away thy face from my sins." Do not look on my sins with a view to punish me, as Tobias said, "Lord, do not remember my sins." Such expressions are purely figurative, of God, from whom nothing can be hidden, can neither turn away his face from, nor forget, our sins; but he is said "to turn away his face" or to forget, when he acts as those do, who do not reflect or remember, and such people do not punish; "and blot out all my iniquities;" to make the pardon a lasting, permanent one, for he that turns his face away from a piece of writing, may look on it again and consider the matter of it, but when the writing is destroyed, "blotted out," it can no longer be read, a proof that when sin is forgiven it is thoroughly forgiven.

10. "Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels." This verse corresponds with, "thou shalt wash me and I shall be made whiter than snow;" for he asks not only for a remission of his sins, but for such an infusion of grace as may renew his soul, and make it bright and beautiful, a petition, telling against those who may justify themselves to consist solely in the remission of sin. We are not to take it that a new heart is asked for, when he says, "Create;" the expression merely expresses a wish that his heart may be thoroughly cleansed and purified, and made, as it were, a new heart. The meaning, then, is: create cleanness in my heart; and there is a certain point in the word "Create," to imply that God finds nothing in the heart of a sinner, whence to form cleanness in it; but that entirely, through his own great mercy, without any merit on their part, it is, that he justifies men; for, even though sinners are disposed to justification by faith and penance, still, faith, penance, and all such things are purely the gift of God. "And renew a right spirit within my bowels," an explanation of the preceding sentence, for, to let us see that the meaning of "Creating a new heart," is nothing more than creating cleanness in the heart, he now adds, "and renew a right spirit in my bowels," instead of renew my bowels. The bowels mean, the interior affections of the soul; that is, the will, which was just now called the heart; a "right spirit" means, a right affection, in other words, charity; for

by avarice or cupidity the affections of the heart become distorted, to the creatures, especially the self, while charity or love directs them to the things above, especially to God. "A right spirit," then, "is renewed in the bowels;" when the heart having been cleansed by grace, an ardent love of God, that had been displaced by sin, is renewed in the soul.

11. "Cast me not away from thy face; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." He now, mindful of his frailty, asks for the grace of perseverance; lest, being too much raised up by grace, he may happen to fall again. The expression, "cast me not away from thy face," is used in the Scripture to designate those who are cast off by God, without any hope or chance of reconciliation. Thus, in 1 Kings 16, the Lord said to Samuel, "how long wilt thou mourn over Saul whom I have rejected?" And 2 Kings 7, "but my mercy I will not take away from him as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before my face;" and in 4 Kings 24, "for the Lord was angry against Jerusalem, and against Juda, till he cast them out from his face." He, therefore, says, "cast me not away from thy face." Allow me not to lapse again into sin, for fear you should deprive me of your grace forever. My having been washed, and made white as snow, and having a right spirit renewed within me, would be of little value, if I were ultimately to be "cast away from your face," with the reprobate. That such may not be the case, that it may not come to pass, "take not thy Holy Spirit from me," give me the grace of perseverance, causing, through your grace, to make the Holy Spirit constantly abide in me, and thus preserve a "right spirit in my bowels." Hence we learn, that God deserts nobody, until himself is first deserted; and that he does not withdraw his Holy Spirit from the just, until they extinguish it in themselves by sin; still, man must get the gift of perseverance, to enable him to avoid sin, and extinguish thereby the Holy Spirit, as the apostle says, "pray that you may do no evil;" and it is to such gift this passage of the Psalm refers, but when David says, "take not thy Holy Spirit from me;" he does not mean, don't take it if I shall fall into sin; but, don't take it, that I may not fall into sin.

12. "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit." This verse corresponds with the words, "to my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness;" for, as he had predicted that and interior joy, borne testimony to by the Spirit speaking within him, would be the consequence of true and perfect justification, he now, after having asked for remission of his sins, and the infusion of grace with the gift of perseverance, asks for the sign and effect of such justification, saying, "restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." Through sin I have lost grace, and the joy consequent on it; and as I asked for the restoration of grace, I now, consequently, ask for the "joy of thy salvation;" the joy that arises from the salvation you bestow on me; and for fear he should be over joyful, and thereby lulled into a dangerous security, he adds, "and strengthen me with a perfect spirit." I have you to strengthen and confirm me in my good purposes by an inspiration of your perfect Spirit.