

VISITATION OF PRISONERS

The Officiant may begin with the following exhortation.

Dearly beloved, know that Almighty God, whose never-failing providence governs all things in heaven and earth, has wisely and mercifully ordered the course of this world, that his judgements are often sent as fatherly corrections to us; and if we will receive those judgements with due submission, they will work for our good.

It is your duty, therefore, to humble yourself under God's mighty hand, to acknowledge the righteousness of his sentences, and to work that this visitation, by his grace, may lead you to sincere and complete repentance. The means by which you should do this is to examine your life and manners by the rule of God's commandments; and wherever you find that you have offended by will, word, or deed, you should there confess your sinfulness to Almighty God, intend on the amendment of your life. If you see that your offenses are not only against God, but against your fellow man, then reconcile yourself to them. Be ready to make right, as you are able, all the injuries and wrongs you have done to others, and be ready to forgive those who have offended against you, just as God would forgive you of your offenses to him.

To this repentance and change of heart you must add a living and strong faith, and you must depend only on the merits of the death of Christ, and abandon yourself to the will of God. If you do not repent and believe, I can give you no assurance of salvation, but if you sincerely repent and believe, God has declared that "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;" and though your sins have surrounded you, they shall not be your destruction.

We ask you, therefore, in the name of God, and of his dear Son Jesus Christ, our Savior, as you cherish your own salvation, to take warning of these things in time, while the day still lasts; the night comes, when no man

can work. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be a son of the light, that you may not be cast into outer darkness, that you may not knock when the door is shut, and cry for mercy when the hour of judgement is at hand. You will be the object of God's mercy if you turn to him with repentance and true faith, but if you neglect them, you will be the object of his justice and vengeance. You may claim the merits of Christ, but if you die in sin, his sufferings will condemn you yet greater. Beloved, consider today how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, when you can neither flee to his mercy for protection or to the merits of Christ to cover you.

P S A L M 5 1

All kneel. Psalm 51:1-17 is sung or said.

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, in your great goodness; *
according to the multitude of your mercies wipe away
my offences.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness *
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my faults, *
and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against you only have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight, *
so that you are justified in your sentence, and blameless
in your judgment.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in wickedness, *
and in sin my mother conceived me.

6 But behold, you desire truth in the inward parts *
and shall make me understand wisdom secretly.

7 You shall purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; *
You shall wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 You shall make me hear of joy and gladness, *
that the bones which you have broken may rejoice.

9 Turn your face from my sins, *

- and blot out all my misdeeds.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, *
and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11 Cast me not away from your presence, *
and take not your holy Spirit from me.
- 12 O give me the comfort of your help again, *
and sustain me with your willing Spirit.
- 13 Then shall I teach your ways unto the wicked, *
and sinners shall return unto you.
- 14 Deliver me from blood-guilt, O God, the God of my salvation, *
and my tongue shall sing of your righteousness.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips, *
and my mouth shall show forth your praise.
- 16 For you desire no sacrifice, or else I would give it to you; *
but you delight not in burnt-offerings.
- 17 The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; *
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you shall not despise.

The Officiant says one or more of the following collects.

Let us pray.

O God, your nature is always to have mercy and forgive: Receive our humble petitions, and though we are bound with the chain of our sins, grant that you may loose us with the pity of your great mercy, for the honor of Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Advocate. **Amen.**

O Lord, we pray that you would mercifully hear our prayers, and spare all those who confess their sins to you; that we, whose consciences by sin are accused, by your merciful pardon may be absolved; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

O God, your mercy is everlasting and power infinite; Look with pity and compassion upon the sufferings of your servant, and enable him by your

grace to submit himself to your holy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Almighty God, we beseech you to grant that we, who for our evil deeds worthily deserve punishment, may by the comfort of your grace be mercifully relieved, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

O God, you spare when we deserve punishment and remember mercy in your wrath; We humbly pray that you, of your goodness, would comfort and succor all those who are reproached and in need of mercy in this house of bondage. We ask you not to correct them in your anger nor chasten them in your great displeasure, but to give them a right understanding of themselves, your warnings, and your promises, that they may neither cast away their confidence or place it anywhere but in you, O Lord. Relieve the distressed, protect the innocent, and awaken the guilty, and forasmuch as you alone can bring light out of darkness and good out of evil, grant that the pains and punishments which your servants here endure in their confinement may tend to setting free their souls from the chains of sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

For those condemned to death

O holy Jesus, in your infinite goodness, you accepted the conversion of a sinner on the cross; Open your eye of mercy upon this your servant, who desires pardon and forgiveness, as he turns to you in his last hours. Renew in him whatever has been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil, or by his own carnal will. Consider his remorse: accept his repentance; and as he puts his full trust in your mercy, do not punish him for his former sins, but strengthen him with your blessed spirit, and when you are pleased to take him up to you, take him into your favor; through thy merits and mediation, O Lord, our Savior and Redeemer. **Amen.**

It is appropriate to offer the Ministry of Reconciliation as well as the Ministry to the Sick at this point.