

CONTRITION

The word contrition is derived from Latin root "*contritio*"; signifying remorse, regret, repentance, grief, dismay etc. We all have this experience of experiencing pain when something wrong is done. It is a spontaneous reaction to the wrong one has done. In fact in an authentic person contrition happens immediately like when there is a physical hurt inflicted the entire body is in the process of trying to minimize the pain and looks for healing the hurt.

Relationships between people are sensitive, vulnerable and fragile. These are bound together with the thin strings of the human spirit; that is why relationships are so easily shattered over an argument, harsh words and betrayal. When someone is guilty of damaging a relationship or causing its demise, it is difficult to simply pick up the pieces and make them fit together once more. Wrong actions can inflict gaping wounds in any healthy relationship – also in the one between God and his children. Guilt and debt can destroy a relationship.

In the relationship between God and people, the wrong actions leave one to become guilty before God. We may call this sin. Sin in this context refers to the attitude of opposing all the activities of God, not acknowledging Him, and doing what is not His will. In other words, to sin means to move further and further away from God in the journey of one's life. It amounts to a kind of alienation that becomes visible in the attitudes and acts of people.

In the entire Scripture we have innumerable examples of contrition and repentance. Most of all the Psalm no. 51 that enshrines within it the entire history of Salvation and personal contrition of sins and a powerful plea for forgiveness. What God did with Israel in history, he also does for the individual. A collective experience attains individual meaning in this context. The author of Psalm 51 harks back to the work of God and the promises he made to his people Israel and makes it applicable to the praying sinner. In the psalm we hear of various aspects of God's salvific work for his people: there is the forgiveness of sins (Is 43:25; 44:22; Jr 31:31-34); the matter of renewal (Is 43:1-21); the deliverance from exile which brings joy (Is 35:1, 10; 51:3, 11); the creation of a pure heart and a new spirit (Ez 11:14-20; 36:24-28) and the partaking in God's spirit (Ez 37:1-14). It appears that the psalmist knew Israel's history within and even after the Babylonian exile. In the light of this history he hoped that God would forgive him his sin and guilt.

In order to find out how an act of contrition be done, we need to look at Psalm 51 again, where David pleads God for mercy and kindness with a contrite heart.

The heading immediately connects this psalm to the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11-12. In particular verses 3a ("Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love" - cf. 2 Sam 12:22), 6a ("Against you, you only, have I sinned" - 2 Ssm 12:13) ("The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" - cf. 2 Sam 12:15-17) connect the psalm to David's history of shame wherein this model king of Israel commits adultery and

murder; gets his soldier Uriah drunk, ignore the standard protocol of fighting a war; and dismisses the death of his soldier as something insignificant after Uriah died fighting in the front line of the king's army. In the heading we find not only an allusion to David's great burden of sin and the confession of his sinful deeds. It also calls in remembrance the Lord's merciful forgiveness granted to the model king. In Israel, adultery and murder was committed on pain of death (Lv 20:10; Dt 22:22; Nm 35:30-31). Subsequent to his transgressions, David could not have made recompense to Bathsheba or Uriah. Nor could he restore her purity, or his own life. His burden of guilt implied damnation. He commits the sin in the midst of a war in which he and his army found themselves engaged in (2 Sm 11-12). As is the case with the psalmists of Psalms 52-64, this individual's life is threatened by death, yet God saves him from his seemingly inevitable fate.

Hence, the word contrition finds its real meaning when a sinner comes back to God. The Prodigal son in the parable of the two sons in Luke's Gospel is a great example of contrition when he settles himself for a punishment from his father to consider him as his slave and not his son at his arrival. We have other multiple examples in the Gospels: the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector, the woman at the feet of Jesus anointing his feet and with her own tears, the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well etc. Contrition is nothing but going back to one's heart and sincerely feel the pain for the wrong things that are committed. Contrition paves way to repentance and forgiveness of sins and invites God's abundant mercy.

Deity:

a generic term used to refer to one or more supernatural beings. It can refer to a single God, as is Judaism and Islam; a pair of gods, as in Zoroastrianism; a Trinity as in Christianity and Hinduism; a God and a Goddess as in Wicca and other Neopagan religions, etc. Plural form is "*deities*."