

Let us pray.

By Your grace, O God, grant us the forgiveness of all our sins. And by Your Holy Spirit enlighten our eyes to see both our own sinfulness and the holiness of Your Law, that our trust may not stand in the righteousness of works, but in Your grace which You have promised in Your Son, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to sanctify and cleanse us. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Each of the penitential psalms is a prayer for forgiveness.

These Psalms provide us the words we can use to confess our sin and receive Christ's absolution, His forgiveness.

Sometimes we really mess up—

and our sin is obvious and well known.

Sometimes we feel our guilt so strong that it eats away at our bones
and makes us sick to our stomach.

And sometimes we feel this way, even though we haven't done anything wrong.

Psalm 143 teaches us to confess the guilt we feel when others have hurt us.

This sounds strange, but I think this is a feeling we've all experienced at one point or another.

It's shame.

Shame can overcome us.

Sometimes it's depression.

Other times it's anxiety.

Sometimes we bring the shame on ourselves.

But sometimes we're ashamed by what others have done to us.

A startling, but very real example of this is when someone is a victim of abuse.

Whether rape, or child molesting, or any of the other horrible acts this world suffers from—
in each of these the victim also suffers shame.

They feel guilty: filthy, rejected, lonely, and scared.

Not only are they harmed in their bodies,

but as it says in verse 4 here:

“my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled” (143:4).

This feeling of being appalled:

of abandonment, violation, shame, and fear is what Psalm 143 teaches us to confess.

And while you in particular may not relate to these strong examples of being a victim,
others can and do.

So by praying this Psalm, you join your voice with all the victims who *need* a voice.
 Your prayer becomes their prayer.
 Your pleas for mercy, are theirs.
 Your cries against the enemy—
 against Satan and all his works and ways—
 are their cries as well.

And if there's one thing a victim needs more than anything else,
 it's the very presence of God Himself; the *real* presence of God.

All the victim sees is darkness and despair; God is nowhere in sight.
 Such a crime leaves one powerless; the enemy seems to win—even if justice is served.
 And where is God?

So the victim is taught to pray,
**“The enemy has pursued my soul;
 he has crushed my life to the ground;
 he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead”** (143:3).

Here we confess our brokenness.
 We admit that we can't fight back,
 we can't pull it together,
 we can't get back what was taken from us.

And yet the prayer throughout this Psalm is for the Lord to answer:
**“Hear my prayer, O Lord;
 give ear to my pleas for mercy!
 In Your faithfulness answer me,
 in Your righteousness”** (143:1).
**“Answer me quickly, O Lord!
 My Spirit fails!
 Hide not Your face from me,
 lest I be like those who go down to the pit”** (143:7).

These words give the victim hope.
 They call on the Lord even though He seems nowhere to be found.
 Because in the end, the victim trusts the Lord's steadfast love—
 as the Psalm says, **“for I am Your servant”** (143:12).

But is God absent?
 Do the enemies win?
 These questions get us right to the heart of what this Psalm is all about.

It's a Psalm of David, sure.
 It's a Psalm for victims, yes.
 But first and foremost, it's a Psalm of Christ.

This Psalm captures the questions that were asked on Holy Saturday.
 It's the Psalm for those walking along the Emmaus road with their heads hung low.
 It's the Psalm for those who saw the dead Christ carried off the cross and placed in the tomb.
 It's the Psalm for those who say, "what now?" "Did God fail?" "Has the enemy won?"

Where's God in all of this?

Who can make right the violence done to this innocent victim?

Why didn't God protect Jesus?

He was such a good man,
 so kind and always put others first.

He loved even those we thought weren't worth living.

And here He is: dead, falsely accused, guilty of the sins *others* committed.

And so Psalm 143 is the prayer of Christ.

It's *His* confession!

He asks the Father for mercy, for forgiveness, for righteousness, and justice, and
 deliverance from the enemies—

not for His sake, but for *ours*.

He is the true and great victim.

Who suffered innocently and bore the guilt of the world.

So here, Jesus prays for us and for all victims.

He prays that the Father wouldn't enter into judgment with us,

"for no one living is righteous before You" (143:2).

He prays that we would hear in the morning of His steadfast love,

and nourish our trust in Him (143:8).

He prays that we would know the way to go (143:8),

that we'd hear His word, learn His will, and be led by His Holy "Spirit on level ground"
 (143:10).

Jesus prays for us. He confesses for us. He gives Himself to be the victim *for us*.

Why?

Because in His suffering the guilt of our sins,

God let's Himself be known.

He reveals His will and love for us, He gives us His Spirit, He preserves our life,

and He causes His face to shine upon us—all in the death of Christ for us.

In Christ, the victims of this world are heard and healed, delivered and forgiven—
 even for what others have done to them.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit