



Wednesday Prayer

5th Sunday in Lent – Mercy

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.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Psalm 51:1-3, 9-12

Desperation, pain and agony are communicated and felt deeply in this Psalm. “Hide your face from my sins” shares a level of shame and a sense of worthlessness. This prayer feels like a final desperate cry for help from one who thankfully knows that God’s abundant mercy is unfailing, even as it is so hard to believe while in the depths of despair.

In January, I was researching the traumatic effects of sextortion on young boys, girls, and non-binary youth. I was preparing for our annual January Education Event, this year titled “[Protecting Youth from Online Sextortion](#).” Sextortion is a form of child sexual exploitation where children are manipulated into sending a sexual image or video, then threatened and blackmailed by a person who demands additional sexual content, activity, or money from the child. What begins as an online friendship or romantic relationship quickly changes into a scary and desperate situation for the child. The exploiter has no issue with shaming the child and tearing them down, even to the point of tragically taking their own life.

Through this research, I became more and more committed to get the word out about this crime, to share with adults and youth that this **can be prevented**. I learned that once images are shared, young people may be too scared to come and tell an adult and feel there is no way out. Open conversations with young people – as young as 10–12 years old – can prevent this harm from happening. They can learn what signs to look for, they can be assured we are **always** there for them, no matter what. This is what God’s mercy can look like for a child.

Merciful God, we pray for children as they grow up with all the complexities of online relationships. Guide us to share your love and mercy endlessly so they may know that we will always be there for them. We pray for our work together as Cherish All Children, that we may reach young people and the safe adults who support them. Restore our joy and sustain our spirits. Amen.

Written by Joy McElroy, Cherish All Children Executive Director.

Learn more & find resources by watching our event [Protecting Youth from Online Sextortion](#).