

“Be Holy for I, the LORD Your God, Am Holy”

☼ **The mirror** (vv.1-2, 15-18)

✚ **The Promise** (v.2)

➤ **The guide** (vv.15-18)

In the name of Jesus, foreshadowed in the law of Moses, our Savior-Messiah, dear fellow believers:

Imagine the overwhelming sadness and frustration. You’ve heard your home was flooded with foul sewage and mud. After weeks of anxious waiting you can finally survey the damage. Seeing your city and neighborhood like this is almost too much to bear. But walking closer, the dreadful stench nearly overcomes your self-control. And when you open the door, you nearly faint. How can you shovel filth so deep? How do you strip walls to the studs and rebuild? What do you do?

The home of a hurricane victim is also a picture of our hearts in the glaring light, **The mirror** of God’s holy law. Many people run from church, away from pastors who confront them with their sin because it isn’t pretty. Overwhelming sadness and frustration well up from the sewage and mud of sin, too deep for any shovel. All of us must face the truth about ourselves, either now or at the judgment seat of God. But like a homeowner with wealth for recovery, we are rich beyond measure because of **The Promise**. We even have **The guide** to pattern our lives and protect us in future storms. Out of distress comes real help and strength from the One who says, “**Be Holy for I, the LORD Your God, Am Holy.**”

☼ **The mirror** (vv.1-2, 15-18)

The Israelites were just three months into a forty-year journey through the vast and dreadful deserts of Sinai. They had already been terrified by the thunder and lightning of God’s presence on the mountain. They had begged their leader, the LORD’s prophet Moses, not to let that happen again. And the LORD agreed to speak to Moses and let him speak to God’s people. We’re still listening today.

The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.’” The ancient Israelites knew something modern scientists, public schools and many churches deny. God created Adam and Eve to be holy. They enjoyed total happiness in Paradise with God, completely satisfied in His image being holy in their emotions, their intellect and their will. God was still showing Himself to be holy by delivering the Israelites from cruel slavery in Egypt. He parted the Red Sea for them to cross overnight on dry ground, so that Pharaoh and his super power army could drown the next day. God gave them manna on the desert floor in the morning and plenty of quail to eat at night. No doubt, it tasted like chicken. You could grill it, barbecue it, bake it and eat it in perfect health and happiness with God. Their shoes didn’t even wear out in forty years.

But God’s patience did. Moses was still on Mount Sinai when Israel broke the Ten Commandments by worshiping the golden calf. They proved they had completely lost God’s image in Adam’s fall and deserved death for sin. And the fact that the statistics are the same for us, one death for every single soul, makes us look in **The mirror** at our own hearts and minds. You and I “*pervert justice*” by enjoying life, but not defending the innocent unborn and those who cannot speak up for themselves. We “*show partiality to the poor,*” “*favoritism to the great*” when we pour out gifts for hurricane victims because our leaders tell us we should, but then neglect the schools where our future pastors and teachers need to be trained. We “*spread slander*” in our families either with our tongues or with our ears by listening. We “*endanger [our] neighbor’s life*” by carelessness and instead of frankly rebuking his sin, we bear grudges that plug up our hearts and lives with bitterness and resentment. We confess our sins together in church and pray for forgiveness, but then fail to see our how our dark thoughts about certain people prove we are not forgiving as we have been forgiven. We excuse ourselves for not forgetting and

try to ignore the stench of bitterness rotting out our heart. You and I never, not for a single moment, have ever loved our neighbor as ourself. Our city, our neighborhood, the home of our heart is buried in stinking sludge too deep to shovel, too foul for us to live. In this we could but die eternally.

✝ **The Promise (v.2)**

Such spiritual fatigue reminds me of climbing a mountain. Every step up seems to slide back ten as the air gets thinner. You want to lie down and die. Here in Leviticus we're on the mountain of God's law. Good Hebrew writing style, puts the climax here in the middle book of Moses' five, the Pentateuch. In the middle of Moses' middle book of Leviticus we find the reason not to run away. The answer to our filth, our guilt, the sludge of our sin, God called the great Day of Atonement, which Jews still called Yom Kippur. You can read the details in Leviticus 16. In sacrifice and scapegoat the Israelites could see pictured for them once each year **The Promise** of the Savior to come, the Messiah who would sacrifice Himself as *"the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). Today God wants each of us to know what this means for our hearts and homes, our neighborhoods, the land we love and long for here and hereafter.

What if in the midst of your despair looking inside that door, you felt a cool refreshing breeze behind you? What if a firm, but gentle hand shook your shoulder and lifted you up from where you had fainted in such deep distress? His smiling face could sooth your soul without a word, and yet He speaks as the Word of God, *"I am the Lord who makes you holy"* (Leviticus 20:8). He doesn't even bother to pick up the little plastic shovel you dropped in the mud when you fainted at the door. With His own strong arm He sweeps away the mountains of mold and mildew on every wall and floor and ceiling. With nail-pierced hands He cleanses everything to give a fresh new look for your eyes, an aroma of life for your senses. You just crossed over from the pain and despair of death to the life of peace and joy with God through **The Promise**. Our first parents heard it in the Garden. God pictured it for the Israelites in the ceremonies and sacrifices of Moses' law. Then He fulfilled His **Promise** on the cross and in the empty tomb. Jesus lives! And because He lives in our hearts by faith through the Gospel in Word and sacraments, our homecoming with Him now and forever is fully assured. Thankfully we enjoy...

➤ **The guide (vv.15-18)**

When I see how Jesus washed away the stain of my sins with His holy, precious blood, you know what? I don't want to sin anymore. I hate sin for what it does to me and to the people around me. I hate what my sin did to Jesus when He died for me on the cross. But now God's justice is on our side. So my attitude has changed to love for God and my neighbor. I do not want to *"pervert justice"* or *"show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great."* I want to *"judge [my] neighbor fairly,"* and forgive him mercifully as God has forgiven me. God says He wants this to start at home? Then I'll begin each day with my wife and children to carry out the garbage of their sins against me and throw them in God's dumpster right next to all my sins.

Now let me ask you, do you tie a rope to that dumpster? Do you put a homing device on it so you can find the landfill and recover all those stinking sins when they have really rotted for a few weeks and years in the sun? Of course not. You forget about it! Forget it – that's what God does with our sins and that is **The guide** for our new life of gratitude to God. If you really forgive as God forgives you, then you will not *"go about spreading slander among your people."* *"Anything that endangers your neighbor's life,"* is out of the question because you worship *"the LORD."* You allow no hatred for *"your brother in your heart."* You *"rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt."* You refuse to *"seek revenge or bear a grudge against one "* of your family, because in Christ each day you make a new beginning to *"love your neighbor as yourself."* *"I am the LORD,"* the God of free and faithful grace, the Savior-God. **The guide** He gives, **The Promise** He is, **The mirror** He supplies – all these are gifts of God's grace that cleanse us now and forever through Jesus Christ, our holy God and Lord. Amen.