

Homily based on the readings from June 16, 2026 (1 Kings 21.17-19;  
Matthew 5.43-48)

There is an interesting connection between today's first reading, from the First Book of Kings, and the psalm we heard immediately afterwards. In case you did not recognize it, the psalm was the Fifty-First – one of the most important prayers in the Jewish and Christian traditions:

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;  
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.  
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt  
and of my sin cleanse me.

This text – which is recited almost every Friday as part of Lauds, or Morning Prayer – is one of the most brutally honest acknowledgments of human sinfulness anywhere in Holy Scripture. It is commonly believed to have been written by King David, in the aftermath of his horrific betrayal of his loyal servant, Uriah the Hittite. As you may recall, in his

lust and his arrogance, David chose to have an affair with Uriah's wife Bathsheba. When Bathsheba became pregnant, and David's attempts to hide his own guilt were unsuccessful, he arranged to have Uriah killed in battle. Once he was finally called to account for his misdeeds, part of David's repentance was composing this lament for his own wickedness.

The first reading, of course, presents a remarkably similar situation.

Instead of David, we see another Israelite King – in this case, Ahab, who ruled about a century later. If you were at Mass yesterday, you probably heard the first part of the story – how Ahab allowed his wife, the vicious Queen Jezebel, to murder an innocent man named Naboth, so that Ahab could take ownership of his vineyard. Where David had acted out of lust, Ahab was motivated by avarice – but the effect was largely the same. In both cases, the King of Israel – who was supposed to represent the paragon of earthly righteousness – took the life of another human being simply to satisfy his own appetites. In due time, both kings were confronted by a man of God – David by the Prophet Nathan and Ahab by the Prophet Elijah. When they were presented with evidence of their

own wickedness, both men repented of their evil ways, and – while still having to suffer the consequences of their actions – received a measure of forgiveness.

Most of us will never rise to the same level of authority as David or Ahab – and most of us, God willing, will never fall to the same depths of depravity. Nevertheless, whenever we succumb to our evil inclinations – as we are all bound to do – we know that, after the Lord *chastises* us for our faults, he will always offer us an opportunity to *atone* for our sins. Only once we *acknowledge* our offenses and *plead* for God's forgiveness can we proclaim, together with the Psalmist himself, that our *guilt* has been washed away and *souls* made whiter than snow.