

If asked to choose the favourite or popular psalms, I doubt many Christians would identify Psalm 50 as one of them. Most in fact would probably pick Psalm 51 among the top five Psalms about which I am not going to speak in this mini-series on psalms. Perhaps, because of its close vicinity to Psalm 51, it has been neglected rather unfairly.

Yet Psalm 50 is quite unique in the book of Psalms. It is unlike the majority of the Psalms, in which man is found speaking to God, Instead it is God himself who is represented as speaking to man: *'Listen my people, and I will speak: O Israel, I am God, your God, and I will give my testimony.'* (v.7) In other words, this Psalm is more like the witness or writing of the prophets. We can draw a parallel between this Psalm and some of the books of the prophets. Here are the same themes – a vision of God in the sanctuary; criticism of the sacrificial system taken as the be-all and end-all of religion; judgement on the hypocrites, who think that the profession of piety will cover their misdeeds. All this is familiar in the prophets.

But the Psalm's main message, I believe, is best described by this famous phrase often quoted, 'Let God be God.' God says in verse 21, *'You thought that I was another like yourself.'* No other words can best be described as sin other than these. This is at the very heart and root of man's sin. The Bible tells us we are created in the image of God, but verse 21 puts the picture the other way round – man makes God in his own image, and so he tries to make use of God for his own advantage. He thinks that God can be hoodwinked by his own specious piety, or bought off by sacrifices when his honour has been affronted. All that is idolatry.

This message of 'Let God be God' still has its relevance today. It is because idolatry is still by and large prevailing all over the world. Of course our idolatry is much more advanced than the Old Testament time. We no longer worship the sun and moon, we think it is primitive. Instead we worship our own body in terms of sexuality whether it is heterosexuality, homosexuality and even bisexuality. We no longer worship hill and valley. Instead sport becomes the religion of the day. Fewer people attend church on Easter Day and Christmas Day! I don't have to tell you where they are! Of course – at the beach.

Why do people worship idolatry instead of God? Let me give you an illustration. There is this T.V. advertisement on a particular brand of beer. It depicts an ordinary anonymous person who imagines himself becoming the hero of a sport, such as rugby league or boxing. He imagines himself playing in the grand final and scoring the decisive try or the boxer who, in the championship bout, gives his famous opponent no chance to hit back. That is idolatry already. Idolatry gives people a sense of worth and value. The idols give people a sense of enlargement; I feel more myself when I am with it. I have grown in my own eyes. I am a new person. Idolatry of this sort really enables me to feel taller than I really am. Ask a teenager, what is most important thing in life? I suspect his or her answer will be an iPhone!

We talk a lot about economic inflation, but don't we know there is religious inflation. We may not like to have economic inflation but we certainly do want the feeling of being taller and bigger. Late-modern people tell us the story of Babel Tower in Genesis 11 is a myth. But the idolatry of the contemporary world is Babel Tower repeating itself: humans decide to make themselves taller and taller. But sadly, late-modern folks did not see that it is their own idolatry that is really the

myth! After the events of September 11, we notice nationality turns out to be idolatry as well. What the members of the congress sang, as they gathered emotionally on Capitol Hill, was not 'O God Our help in Ages past,' but 'God Bless America.' Patriotism demands Americans to put their hope in their country rather than in the coming of Jesus to judge the living and the dead.

So what are we to do about idolatry? Usually there are two solutions offered. The first method is simply to identify the idols which we are worshiping; we name them what they are; and we choose not to worship them any longer. All we have to do is repent of our folly and blindness and mend our ways. Sounds easy, doesn't it? Many so-called social reformers try this method but fail utterly. You cannot change something by simply adjusting the nuts and bolts on the outside of the machine.

The second method to get rid of idolatry is what I call the replacement method. What I mean is to replace the existing idols with the new ones. That is what Western people have been doing in the last few decades. We discard our traditional religion and search and embrace Eastern mystical religions. That is why Dali Lama always attracts a large crowd in the West and not in the East. We even switch to New Age. We simply change from one idol to another. Both methods are unsatisfactory.

Psalm 50 offers us the right solution. Let God be God. In other words, God can never, ever, be identified with anything that is human. God is totally other; he is radically different; he cannot be found by human wisdom.

But how, then, do we know anything concerning God? If we cannot know God through human efforts, how can we know him? If there is an unbridgeable

chasm fixed between God and men, how can we gain access to him? The story of Babel tower illustrates the impossibility and futility of trying to reach God from our side of the great divide. You see, idolatry is basically creating one's own God with one's own image. If we cannot reach God, then we create our own God!

At the beginning, I said the message of Psalm 50 is unique among the majority of Psalms because it is God speaking to people rather than the other way round, people speaking to God. In other words, it is God who takes the initiative to make Himself known to us. God has indeed made Himself known to us in His son Jesus Christ. If God is something or someone who we have to find or discover or even create, then He is no God but an idol. As the Psalmist says, 'You thought that I was another like yourself.' No, we have to let God be God. It is God himself who takes the initiative to reveal Himself and to seek us. When we confront God who seeks and saves us, what can we do but humbly adore and unconditionally obey Him.

Our Eucharistic Service is a classic example. Please do not think you take the initiative to come to Church this morning. It is God who extends His invitation to each one of us to come into his presence and enjoy the Holy feast with Him. If we let God be God, then you will experience this God is truly a loving and forgiving God.