

THE FIRST ROAD LEADING TO FORGIVENESS

—by St. John Chrysostom—

How do I know, you will ask me, that if I confess my sin I will erase it? I will respond: In the Holy Scriptures you will find both him who confessed and erased his sin, as well as him who did not confess it and was condemned.

Cain murdered his brother due to jealousy. At some point later, God asked him: “Where is your brother Abel?” (Gen. 4:9). He asked him not because the all-knowing God was unaware, but because He wanted to lead the murderer to repentance. However, Cain answered: “I don’t know. Am I perhaps my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9). Fine! You were not his guardian; but why did you become his murderer? You were not looking after him; but why did you kill him? How do you dare respond in this manner? This is why God said to him: “The blood of your brother cries out to Me from the earth” (Gen. 4:10). God punished him immediately; not so much on account of the murder, but more so on account of his insolence. Because God does not abhor the person who sins as much as the person who is shameless. And so, even though Cain was filled with remorse later, he was not forgiven because he did not confess his sin first. He was punished because of his shamelessness. He was condemned because he did not confess his sin. Had he confessed it, he would have erased it.

Now look at how another person confessed his sin and erased it. The prophet and king David fell into two sins: adultery and murder. A prophet fell into adultery; a pearl ended up in the mud. What did God do? He sent the prophet Nathan to him, who said: “My king, I want to ask your opinion on a certain matter. There was a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had many sheep and calves. The poor man had nothing other than a small lamb. Some day, a visitor came to the rich man; but instead of slaughtering one of his own animals, he slaughtered the poor man’s lamb in order to provide hospitality to his guest” (2nd Kings 12:1-4). What was the king’s reaction? Assuming that it was someone else, he became enraged and said to Nathan: “This person must be put to death!” (2nd Kings 12:5-6). What a harsh ruling! This is how people are. They easily condemn others exceedingly strictly and harshly.

“You are the person who did this,” responded Nathan. And David at once admitted: “I have sinned before the Lord” (2nd Kings 12:13). He did not say, “Who are you to criticize me? Who told you to speak to me with such impudence? How dare you accuse me?” Rather, he senses his sin, and he admits: “I have sinned before the Lord.” This is why Nathan assured him: “And the Lord has forgiven your sin.” God forgave him because he blamed himself. He erased his sin because he confessed it valiantly. Confession, therefore, is the first road leading to forgiveness.