

Vespers, Wednesday, the week of Pentecost 15
Psalm 33

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Breathe in... Breathe out... Breath in..... Breathe out..... Breathe in..... Breathe out..... The ebb and flow of breathe, the taking in of air, of receiving the breath of life like A-dam lifted from the dust, and exhaling, infused with life as a newborn who howls like the wild animal that we all are, this is the work of God, the pattern for all that we are and all that we will be. *By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, by the breath of his mouth all the heavenly hosts.* Not a thing exists without his word, not a thing exists without his life-giving breath. Not a thing. *Nada. Neit. Nein.* No, not a thing.

Until we land in the hospital, flimsy green gown strewn across our battered body, nurses feet pattering across the room, relatives whispering between sobs...barely heard beneath the whoosh of the respirator that is breathing for us, until this happens, we generally don't think about breath, about this gift from the One who makes the stars to dance and the seas to glisten: the One who makes the dogs to bark, the cats meow, the lions roar, the elephants trumpet, the monkeys chatter. It all happens by breath. And we only come to this awareness when we've lost our own, when we've stopped breathing for a moment, when something of our mortality and frailness, our creatureliness sits like a lump in our throats and stings our eyes. Not even the strongest woman or man can be delivered from this by their own strength. Not even the commander of troops, of tanks and turbines, horses and howitzers can save us from our mortality. We are all destined for death, and it is only after death that we come to praise God for giving us life, for giving all the universe life.

I believe that grace is such a breathing after death. The forgiveness of sins and life everlasting, the work of the Holy Spirit, the One who hovers over the waters of every new creation. The communion of saints, the holy catholic church. The means by which we live and move and have our very being. When we hold on to our sins, our transgressions, our iniquities, call them what you will, when we hold on to the death that is a life lived apart from God, not only hiding from him but running like a rat that can't find the end of the

maze, seeking that place of oblivion, whether it be a physical or an existential opioid, as if anyplace in this world did not belong to him (*For he spoke and it came to be*) we will know only torment. But when we confess whatever we have done to hurt another living being, when we lay the foolishness of our pride, the meanness of our gloating, the stinginess of our hoarding (our highway storage units as silly as the man who kept building bigger barns), then we will know the power of the resurrection of the body, because though we deserve death, God is still breathing life into us, and then at last, we will rejoice in the life everlasting, the baptized life that has already died to death, the life that cannot die.

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous. It is good for the just to sing praises. Praise the LORD with the harp; play to him upon the psaltery and lyre. Sing for him a new song; sound a fanfare with all your skill upon the trumpet. For the one who is praising is united to the One who is being praised. Nothing can be held back in praise, the stoniest of hearts shouting out in love. The world and its inhabitants were made to praise the One who is upright and true, and if we pay attention to the gift God has given us in the fulness of the Psalter, we come to this psalm, Psalm 33 on the heels of a word the confession that breathes through Psalm 32, *Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not hide my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.* And so, then God is giving us his breath once again, breath to sing and play the music that mirrors the music of the spheres, the heavenly music, the new song. Composers hear this music in their dreams as distant as the murmuring of angels yet as near as the cooing of the morning dove. *Sing for him a new song:* A song of truth, a song without guile, a song of sweet mercy undeserved, a song of unwavering love.

There is a certain type of newness in this song, like the earnest voice of child filled with purity of heart, like the sound of the martyrs before the sword strikes. *Our soul waits for the LORD, he is our help and shield.* There is a certain type of newness in this song, a particular type of sound that is released when the seals of the scroll are opened by the lamb, a sound like the river that flows by the throne. That's the new sound, the new song God gives us to sing, risen from death in every day, the heavenly liturgy, right here, right now, in these bodies, in these voices. Breathing after death, we sing by his might, he who claims earth his

footstool and heaven his throne. *Behold the eye of the LORD is upon those who fear him, on those who wait upon his love, to pluck their lives from death and to feed them in time of famine.*

So breath in...and breathe out...breathe in...breathe out...breathe in...breath out.

Let your lovingkindness, O LORD, be upon us, as we have put our trust in you. Amen