

Scripture Reading

A Reading from the Gospel According to John (John 20:21-23) the Institution of the Sacrament of Penance

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you." And with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." The Gospel of the Lord. R. Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection ~ The Work of Satan Exposed

"And with that He breathed on them....." There are only two instances in Scripture when God breathes into human beings. In the first instance, during the process of creation, God breathes His life into the man He has created (cf Genesis 2:7). In this other scene, Jesus, the Son of God, breathes His life into His apostles so that through them He will 'breathe' His life into the souls of contrite sinners. In doing so, Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) and made His apostles the ministers of it. Wonder of wonders, He gives the authority to forgive sins to His apostles and priests!

The Kingdom of Satan. Satan is the personification and at the crux of sin. His name means 'Adversary.' He is against God and anything godly. In Revelation 9:11, he is called 'Abaddon' and 'Apollyon,' and both of these names, one Hebrew, the other Greek, mean 'Destroyer.' Satan knows that nothing can separate us from God's love except sin. Therefore, all of Satan's energy and work are aimed at achieving the committing of sin, making people feel sin is trivial and that sin is not sin. Let us see how sin separates us from God:

Sin destroys ideals. If we continue to commit the sin, we will at first feel unhappy about it, but gradually our consciences will adjust. Each sin unless repented and confessed, makes the next one a bit easier. Over time, the sinful behaviour will become acceptable. Unrepented sin is addictive like a drug. As the addiction becomes stronger, the ideal depreciates until it is completely gone. Full blown sin produces death (cf James 1:15).

Sin destroys the will to do right and the desire for holiness. Sin lures us to grasp what it can never deliver - pleasure, contentment, fulfilment. The pleasure is fleeting and never enough to produce the contentment and fulfilment one desires. Thus, people are forced into deeper perversions. Along the way, sin quietly produces hardness of heart. A hardened heart and attitude are not produced overnight, but are the products of a growing darkening and insensitivity of the conscience. The conscience is no longer the 'meeting room with God.' The person sees no need for repentance. Sin is no big deal for him. The will to do right is completely gone. The desire for holiness as exhorted by Christ is like from another world.

Sin undermines freedom to love God and others, and produces slavery. When a person sins, he is not really doing what he likes, but what sin likes! St. Paul says in Romans 7:17, 23: "*As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me...but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.*" Even though one may enjoy the sin while he is doing it, the person is not in control - sin is! This is doubly true when one sins with knowledge. We need to be very careful of this because Jesus warns, "*I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*" (John 8:34).

Sin produces more sin, and prevents us from reaching the full potential God intends us to be. People rarely stop at just one sin. Sins weaken us spiritually unless repented of. Thus, it is often not long before one sin is added to another, and yet another in the chain. This is why God uses leaven to symbolize sin. As leaven spreads and does its work in flour, so sin spreads and corrupts the lives of all it touches. Sin produces more sin unless we stop it by repenting.

Sin makes one unhappy, unfulfilled, and leads to sickness and pain. Sickness and death crept into the human race through the sin of our first parents in the beginning. Instances in Scripture point out the direct relation between sickness and sin. St. Paul warned the Corinthians to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus worthily, and attributes the weaknesses and sickness of many of them to the sin of receiving Holy Communion unworthily (cf 1 Cor 11:27-30). The episodes involving Jesus and the paralytics (cf Mark 2:1-10, John 5:1-8, 14) makes a distinct connection between sin and sickness. *Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."* (John 5:14).

Satan would very much like us to think sin is trivial (Jesus died a horrible death due to our sins!) but the saints know otherwise. If holy souls like Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II found it necessary to go for Confession once a week, who are we to say we do not need regular and frequent Confession? Are we easy bait for Satan?

Conversation with Our Lord

Precious Lord, thank You for the beautiful gift of the Sacrament of Penance. You desire to keep me close to You so that You may always guide me to Yourself, my eternal joy. Help me not to distance myself from You through sin. Help me understand that sin is the only thing that separates me from You. It is the only thing that prevents me from becoming my highest potential that You have designed for me. Give me the grace to always purify myself through the Sacrament of Penance, and that I may receive You in Holy Communion worthily. Mother Mary, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus. **He that covers his sins shall not prosper but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy (Proverb 28:13).**