

Fifth Sunday of Lent B March 18, 2018

- ◆ **Pope Francis has some questions for us as we examine our conscience**
- ◆ **Happy St. Patrick's Day!**

This coming Tuesday is our Lenten Penance Service for all who did not go to Confession last Sunday evening during the mission.

It's an old, but true saying that "Confession is good for the soul," i.e., for every soul, but especially for souls who may have neglected this Sacrament for a long time. Sadly, all too many good church-going Catholics have not been to Confession for many years. I often think: if good and holy people like Pope Francis, St. John Paul II, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta felt a need to confess, why might we give ourselves a pass on this area of our spiritual lives?

Some reasons people do not go to Confession

The following are some reasons most Catholics give for not going to Confession.

- ◆ *"I don't have anything much to confess."* The reason we say this is because we are spiritually blind (me too). Many people miss Mass for no good reason, gossip, don't pray a whole lot, are judgmental — and yet feel no reason to go to the Sacrament. Every time I go to Confession, I confess selfishness, neglecting prayer or praying badly, bad thoughts, etc.
- ◆ *"I'm not comfortable with confessing to another person, especially someone who knows me."* This is very real. I get it. But we should not allow this excuse to prevent ourselves from receiving the grace of this Sacrament. All of us have heard the saying "no pain, no gain." No one really enjoys showing their dark or imperfect side to another. But humility is the foundational virtue of the spiritual life, and confessing our sins is a very good way to grow in humility.
- ◆ *"I don't believe that I need to go to another person to have my sins forgiven."* I actually agree. Most of the time, the vast majority of us confess directly to God. But, on occasion, we should also confess directly to

a priest. If Christ did not want this to be a part of the Christian life, he would not have said to the Apostles on Easter Sunday evening, *"Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven"* (John 20:23). If great saints and holy men and women have used this Sacrament to deal with sin in their lives, why do we think we don't need it?

- ◆ *"I find myself confessing the same sins over and over."* Me too. But that should not keep me from going to Confession. The need to take our car in for a checkup again and again or the need to repeat visits to our dentist does not keep us from going again and again. Spiritual cleansing is very important.

Questions Pope Francis invites us to reflect on

- * Do I attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation?
- * Do I begin and end the day with prayer?
- * Am I embarrassed to show that I am a Christian?
- * Do I rebel against God's plan?
- * Am I envious, hot-tempered, biased?
- * Am I honest and fair with everyone, or do I fuel the "throwaway culture"?
- * In my marital and family relations, do I uphold morality as taught in the Gospels?
- * Do I honor and respect my parents?
- * Have I refused newly conceived life? Have I snuffed out the gift of life or have I helped to do so?
- * Do I respect the environment?
- * Am I part-worldly and part-believer?
- * Do I overdo it with eating, drinking, smoking and amusements?
- * Am I overly concerned about my physical well-being, my possessions?
- * How do I use my time? Am I lazy?
- * Do I want to be served?
- * Do I dream of revenge? Do I hold grudges?
- * Am I meek, humble and a builder of peace?

Catholics should go to Confession, the pope said, because everyone needs forgiveness for their sins, for the ways "we think and act contrary to the Gospel."

"Whoever says he is without sin is a liar or is blind," he wrote.

Confession is meant to be a sincere moment of conversion, an occasion to demonstrate trust in God's willingness to forgive his children and to help them back on the path of following Jesus, Pope Francis wrote.

Reflections on this Sunday's Readings

Today's first reading from Jeremiah ends with these consoling words:

*"I will forgive their evildoing
and remember their sin no more."*

When people confess sins that they have already received absolution for, it is as if they do not believe that God has forgiven them. The truth is that once we have shown even *imperfect* sorrow for our sins, we are forgiven. Imperfect contrition is motivated by the 'fear of losing heaven' and the 'fear of going to hell.' *Perfect* contrition is being sorry because we have offended and failed our God who loves us so much. Isn't it awesome to know that God has a poor memory for our sins once we have repented of them?

Recalling some sins is not all bad—especially when it helps us not to fall into them again. A recovering alcoholic's memory of his/her disastrous past would, hopefully, convince him/her not to ever drink again.

"Jesus offered prayers and supplication with loud cries and tears."

The above verse is from Hebrews 5, today's second reading. How many of us think of Jesus, the powerful miracle worker, who confronted the church and civic leaders of his time, crying out loud to God with tears? Scripture scholars tell us that this Hebrews verse is a reference to Jesus' agony in the garden as he struggled with the cup of suffering handed him by God. Isn't it consoling to know that our Lord and Savior struggled with the difficult and painful circumstances of his life? Jesus' crying out to God shows us that even though he was divine, he was also *fully* human. There is nothing in our human experience that Jesus is not acquainted with. Someone once said that *there is nothing that we suffer that has not first passed through the heart of God in Jesus: poverty, exile, betrayal, loneliness, rejection, abuse, abandonment, etc.* Isn't it comforting to know that our God does indeed know in his heart everything we experience and feel? Can you imagine the impact that this might have on our relationship with Jesus if we

took into our being this very human dimension of Jesus' life on earth? The God spoken of in these verses from Hebrews (5:7-9) is not some aloof or distant God, but a God totally *in sync* with our pain and suffering.

Today's Gospel

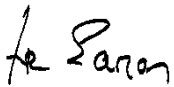
In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of his 'special hour,' the 'grain of wheat dying,' 'hating one's life,' and other things. The following are eight comments on today's Gospel.

1. Jesus begins his discourse by speaking of his "*hour*"—a reference to his return to God. He will pass through death, be raised up, and return to his Father.
2. Jesus uses the analogy of a *wheat grain* to speak of life and death. Just as a grain of wheat must first die before it bears fruit, so too must Jesus die prior to his Resurrection, and so too must we die to sin and selfishness before we bear godly fruit in our lives. Married couples know this more than other people. For the marriage to grow, each spouse must frequently die to his/her own desires.
3. "*Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life will preserve it.*" This implies that those who cling to their lives, concerned only about themselves, will eventually lose out on the meaning of life, which is to love and serve others. Thomas Merton talks about our *true self* and *false self*. The *true self* is that part of us that seeks to follow God and his ways. The *false self* is that part that wants to be independent of God and his ways, the part that is self-centered, controlling, jealous, etc. This self we must 'hate'—or we might say 'deny'—and not allow to control our lives. This false self must be transformed by praying, fasting and penance.
4. "*Whoever serves me must follow me... The Father will honor whoever serves me.*" Serving Jesus means, among other things, being willing to lay down one's life for others—to die to the desires of the false self. To serve Jesus is to follow him in his path of love and to carry one's cross. Such service and love will honor the Father.
5. "*Save me from the hour*" is a reference to Jesus' agony in the garden. It is a beautiful statement about Jesus' humanity. As a person who loves life and people, he has no desire to die; he recoils from it. Yet, if going through this "*hour*" is what he must do, then he is willing to embrace it.
6. "*Then came a voice from heaven*" is reminiscent of the voice that spoke at Jesus' baptism and Transfiguration. "*I have glorified the Father.*" Jesus gives glory to the Father (and so do we) by following the will of God. Jesus goes on to say: "*I always do the things that please the Father.*"

7. "Now is the time of judgment in this world. Now the ruler of this world will be drawn out." The judgment is our 'Yes' or 'No' to Jesus. When we say 'Yes,' love is released into the world, and darkness and evil are overthrown, and vice-versa.

8. "When I am lifted up, I will draw everyone to myself" is a reference to Jesus' Cross and how the power of his love will attract and draw people to him.

Have a blessed week,



The "Breastplate"

The central role Christ played in St. Patrick's life and in its outpourings, which can be seen in his missionary work, is perhaps most evident in these two excerpts from his Breastplate, also known as The Lorica of St. Patrick:

I arise today

*Through the strength of Christ's birth
and His baptism,*

*Through the strength of His crucifixion
and His burial,*

*Through the strength of His resurrection
and His ascension,*

*Through the strength of His descent
for the judgment of doom.*

*Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me,*

*Christ in me, Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,*

*Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,*

*Christ in the heart of every man
who thinks of me,*

*Christ in the mouth of every man
who speaks of me,*

Christ in the eye that sees me,

Christ in the ear that hears me.

In the prayer, St. Patrick concedes that he did all his evangelizing not through his own power but through the strength of Christ's Life, Death, and Resurrection. Additionally, he selflessly desired that the splendor radiating from his catechizing the Druid land be for the greater glorification of Christ. This is important for the new evangelizers

of 2016 (us!) to keep in the forefront of our minds. Bringing Christ into the world is not about winning an argument or getting our way, but bringing the reality of Incarnate Love into every aspect of our lives and the lives we encounter in our every day.

AN IRISH TOAST

**May you have many friends
and may they be as mature in taste
and health and color,
and sought after as the contents of this glass.
May you have warm words on cold evenings,
a full moon on a dark night and
the road downhill all the way to your door.**

**May every hair on your head turn into
a candle to light your way to heaven.
And may God and His Holy Mother
take the harm of the years away from you.
And...may you have no frost on your spuds,
no worms on your cabbage;
may your goat give plenty of milk,
and if you should buy a donkey
please, God, she be pregnant!**

An Irish Friendship Wish

**May there always be work
for your hands to do;
May your purse always hold
a coin or two;
May the sun always shine
on your windowpane;
May a rainbow be certain
to follow each rain;
May the hand of a friend
always be near you;
May God fill your heart
with gladness to cheer you.**

Happy St. Patrick's Day

