

Message From The Pastor

March 14, 2021

A Consequence of sin: Temporal Punishment

The following is found in our Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Sin has a *double consequence*. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand, every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain (Catechism #1472, hereinafter CCC).

The first consequence, “eternal punishment,” is one which we have heard and learned about often throughout our lives as Catholics. However, the other consequence, “temporal punishment,” does not seem to have been heard and learned about as frequently.

How does one expiate for our sins by undergoing “temporary punishment?” The Catholic Church has traditionally identified three major ways—prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Any good work or sacrifice expiates sin, as well as patiently bearing our sufferings and offering them up in satisfaction for our sins (CCC 1459-1460). We may also take it upon ourselves to do voluntary penance. Some saints have done austere penances in satisfaction for their sins. Although efficacious, most Christians should strive to follow the penitential spirit of the saints while performing penances carefully. So, with thoughtfulness chose those penances suitable for you.

But, what happens if one has not fully expiated his sins before dying? Such a person, before going to heaven, would have to expiate his sins in purgatory (CCC 1030), where love for God is perfected through our sufferings there. Therefore, to lessen the experience of being in purgatory to expiate our sins, undergoing the expiation of them in this life is advantageous.

Unquestionably, Christ paid a debt we cannot pay. He died for all of our sins so that we might be saved. But the effects of sin against brother and sister, or even self, at times still need to be corrected. To have the opportunity to undergo the correction in this life is certainly a blessing!

Peace,
Fr. Marc