

In our first reading, we heard St. Peter announce to the people of Jerusalem: “God has made both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified.”

In other words: “You have sinned. But it brought about your redemption.” Or another way to put it: “Oh oh, sinner. Why don’t you answer? Somebody’s knocking at your door.”

The passage in Acts continues: When the people of Jerusalem heard this, it cut them to the heart. God reigns. We are piles of dust and ashes, stumbling around. God took the human race to Himself, like a bride. And we killed our Maker and Lord. But He conquered; He rose from the dead. Which gives us a second chance.

We behold Jesus Christ, the Savior who suffered and died for us, and rose from the dead for us. We gaze by faith at this celestial shepherd Who wills that we have abundant life. We contemplate the man-God, bearded, gentle, and majestic. And we ask: What ought I to do? What ought we to do?

Everyone knows the phrase, “state of grace?” Once the original work of becoming a Christian gets done—baptism, anointing with the Holy Spirit, communion in Christ’s Body and Blood—once all that gets done, the individual human being participates in the redemption of mankind. Every

moment of every day. “The state of grace.” And if a Christian sins gravely, when he or she repents, confesses, and returns to friendship with God—again, the state of grace.

Extremely important concept, this idea of getting into, and remaining in, a state of grace. No one wants to mangle long OUTSIDE the state of grace. Because trees do fall on people. We used to think of deadly plagues as something “from the old days.” But the fact is: People died suddenly in the old days, and people die suddenly now, too. And no one wants to go to meet the Judge outside the state of grace.

But we have a tricky situation at the moment. Everyone has missed Mass. Missed Mass like it’s going out of style. But it’s not a mortal sin, since you can’t go to Mass.

In other words, the world abounds with good Catholics who haven’t gone to church in seven weeks. Good Catholics lollygagged at home through Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, and most of the Easter season, without committing a mortal sin.

Amazing. The world has never before known a time when so many bad Catholics somehow managed to remain perfectly good Catholics, and so many good Catholics acted like bad Catholics, and totally got away with it.

Now, no one needs to panic about this. But, by the same token, we can't live in a dream world. This situation is far from ideal. Let's meditate on it like this: Rocky Balboa did not get into the ring with Apollo Creed after taking seven weeks off. Michael Jordan did not dunk on Gary Payton after spending seven consecutive Sunday mornings on the couch.

No. The fact is: During the course of the past month and a half, a few of us have gotten a great deal holier. And most of us have gotten spiritually sloppy. A few of us have lived with the discipline of St. Benedict. And the rest of us have slacked off.

If you show up for Mass on our first Sunday back, after the quarantine, with a huge mop of hair on your head, no problem. If you have forgotten how to tie a tie, or how to put on eye-liner, don't worry. No sense worrying about stuff like that.

But: We must train ourselves spiritually for the moment when we come together for Mass again. We have to come back hungry and eager. We have to stride up to church that day, ready to dunk on Dennis Rodman, so to speak. What I mean is: Arrive at church after a long hiatus, having prayed daily. Having sought from God the strength and grace we need to persevere through all the spiritual challenges we will face.

Because the devil will dance all over the place, once we can go back to Mass, to make it seem hard. The demons will tempt us with thoughts like: Watching Mass on my phone or tv—that's cool. Or: Let me just check the pope's twitter, and be done with it. Or the big one: I will get back into the habit of going to church. NEXT weekend.

Which is why we need to do our spiritual exercises NOW. Today we must pray, to stay in the state of grace. Today we must long for Jesus, Holy Communion, heaven. Today we must keep training our knees to bend before the Host, and our eyes to greet our fellow Christians with selfless love.

Come to Mass in sweats on our first Sunday back together, if you like. No problem. But let's not show up with listless, lazy hearts. Let's show up with focused hearts, trained by daily prayer.

Do we think LeBron James has been sitting around drinking milkshakes? We have to be just as ready to pray the Mass as Lebron will be to dunk over Kwahi Leonard, when the quarantine is over.