

2 Advent A 2019 SML MT 3:1-12

There are three possible attitudes after a fault. There can be either regret, remorse, or repentance.

Regret has no moral or ethical implications; it generally expresses itself as “What was I thinking?” or “how stupid I am,” or “How could I have done such a thing?” Regret always looks to the past, wishing that whatever was done could be undone. But with regret, there is a deep sense that the past is untouchable. It is the hard and fast, “the past is the past; what’s done is done.” What’s tragic about regret is the fault is irreparable, and nothing can be done to make amends.

Remorse is different. It does not regard the past as a broken egg which cannot be pieced together again; it desires a future that can undo the past. Remorse has an element of expiation, and a blotting out of the past, which is not present in regret. Remorse would like to hold the egg a second time so to never drop it again. However, remorse is always a prisoner of the past. It does not shrug its shoulders and forget it. The past is present. The fault is ever before the eyes, but there is no way to undo it. Remorse leads to despair because there is no road of escape. There are large numbers who sprawl

themselves out on psychoanalytic couches and explain the conflict in terms of parents and grandparents. But in the end, the fault lies not in the parents nor in the stars, but in the heart itself.

Finally, there is repentance. Of all the possible subjects for a sermon, the study of the Bible inevitably leads to the conclusion that the most important is repentance. Repent! It was the subject of John the Baptist's preaching as found in today's Gospel:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (3:2)

Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. (3:8)

Yet John the Baptist was in good company:

- ✓ Our Lord's first sermon was on repentance and repeats John the Baptist's sermon on today's gospel. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (MT 4:17)
- ✓ Our Lord gave repentance as the reason for His coming. "Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners." (LK 5:32)
- ✓ Repentance was the subject of Peter's first sermon to the Jews. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (AA 2:38)

- ✓ Repentance as the subject of Peter's first sermon to the Gentiles. "I earnestly bore witness for both Jews and Greeks to repentance before God and to faith in our Lord Jesus." (AA 20:21)
- ✓ Repentance was the subject of Peter's last sermon. "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 PTR 3:9)
- ✓ And repentance was the subject of Our Lord's last sermon as well. "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached to all nations." (LK 24:47)

Yet, the current tendency on the analyst's couch is rather to downgrade the need for repentance in order to make religion comfortable, which St. Paul refuted when he wrote, "Godly sorrow produces a helpful repentance without death." (2COR 7:10) That is, repentance lays hold of the past by undoing it through penance. Both Judas and Peter denied Our Blessed Lord, but Judas went no further than regret and remorse, and as a result, took his own life. Peter, repented to Our Blessed Lord, which produced a new man, a man who could preach from the heart about repentance as I mentioned earlier.

In taking a human nature and becoming a new Adam, Our Blessed Lord undid the sin of the first Adam, which is why the

original sin became a “happy fault,” for it ended in a greater gift than which was lost.

Only Our Blessed Lord who is outside of time can lay hold of the past and make it serve the future in a different way. Godly sorrow makes a man grieve because he has sinned and hurt someone he loves; worldly regret and remorse makes one wish that he never had to suffer and explain away on a couch.

The remorseful man considers himself stupid. The repentant man considers himself a sinner. Sin can be redeemed; but the past, as past cannot be recaptured by man alone. For man alone can only be passive on the couch. Whereas the repentant man can be active on his knees and realize that nothing in this life need be wasted. Even the faults of the past can be turned into goodness. But it takes more than a man on a couch to do it. It takes the Son of Man on the cross and the rest of us on our knees!