

3 Advent B SML 2020
IS 61:1-2a, 10-11
JN 1:6-8,19-28

An elderly wise priest once told me from his deathbed, “Dan, take care of the soul.” And there’s no better care for the soul than sacramental grace.

“To proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord” - one of the most beautiful verses of scripture as found in the Prophet Isaiah who wrote about the Jubilee Year, described in detail in the Book of Leviticus:

Let the trumpet resound. Every 50 years, you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all the inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for all of you, when every one will return to his own property, to his own family estate. In this year, you shall not work, you shall not sow. All debts will be forgiven. You will have food in abundance so that you will live there without worry. I will bestow such blessings on you that you will have enough to eat for three years during this year. If a man has lost his land in payment of a debt, it shall be returned to him. All slaves and hired hands will be released from their masters and return to their kindred and to the property of his ancestors. Prisoners will be brought out from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness. (42:7) (LEV 25)

Stated simply, “all the . . . all the outs in free,” says Leviticus, “All the . . . all the outs in free,” says Isaiah. However, there is no reference in Leviticus, no reference in Isaiah, no reference in the entire Old Testament for that matter, that the Jubilee was ever celebrated, and since Isaiah, the Jubilee was never mentioned again . . . until Jesus. Luke, Chapter 4:

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. Jesus said to them, “Today, this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

The Jubilee could not have been celebrated from a practical point of view. Says the Prophet Amos, “When will this new moon be over that we may sell our grain, and the Sabbath, that we may display our wheat?” They couldn’t wait for the Sabbath to be over, let alone an entire Jubilee Year, so greedy they were to make money! At the most recent Jubilee in 2000, mainline Church authorities, Catholic and non-Catholic alike,

asked major developed countries to forgive the debts of third world countries, but Congress passed the buck to private investors. And as far as letting hardened criminals go free because of Jubilee – that would not make for a Jubilee. That would make for utter fear, chaos and bloodshed. Celebrating a Jubilee, as described in Leviticus, in its completion, is not very pragmatic.

But a Jubilee Year fulfilled in our Blessed Lord, has little to do with the physical or the financial but has everything to do with the soul. Celebrating a Jubilee in our Blessed Lord, having everything to do with the soul, is very practical. To quote an elderly wise priest, “Dan, take care of the soul.” And there’s no better care for the soul than sacramental grace.

The Gospels of last week and this week spotlight John the Baptist’s call to a baptism of repentance leading to a forgiveness of sins. What John was preaching was more than simply being sorry, more than a repetition of Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy. He was talking about “*metanoia*,” a complete change of heart by taking a good hard look, not at sinfulness in general, but at particular, concrete sins – sins you can name, sins you can name, “this” sin, “these” sins. And we all commit them. I know what mine are.

You know what yours are. And the minute you say you really don't have any is the minute you say you have no need for Jesus Christ, because he came for sinners. He did not come for the righteous. He came for sinners. John talked about the forgiveness of sins plural. John wants you to look at your sins. What are you going to do about your sins?

The grace that you receive in the sacraments is particular grace. In other words, when you get married, every day of your married life, you receive particular grace to help you be a good wife and a good mother, and a good husband and a good father. When I got ordained, every day of my priesthood, I receive particular grace to help me to be a good priest. The grace is particular. When you go to confession, you receive particular grace to help you overcome "this" sin, "this" sin at which John the Baptist is telling you to take a good hard look.

We are the only Church that has sacramental confession: a sacrament that forgives sins. It's a luxury. And in my experience, you know gives the greatest testimony to confession? Non-catholic teenagers. When I was a chaplain at Monsignor Donovan High School, we use to take the students on Kairos Retreats and confession was part and parcel of the retreat. When I was involved in CYO at St. Rose in Freehold, I

used to have overnight lock-ins and in the middle of the night, we would have Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and then confession. And at every single retreat, the non-Catholic students, the non-Catholic friends of our kids would come into the confessional to talk. They knew they couldn't receive the sacrament because they weren't Catholic, but they came in just the same. "Father, 'this' is what I'm dealing with and I have no place to go with it in my church."

There is such a thing as Baptism by Desire. Every RCIA candidates who will be baptized at Easter have received Baptism by Desire. If they got hit by a bus between now and Easter, they would be considered baptized. If there were such a thing as Confession by Desire, these kids would have received it. You could tell some of those kids, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, went through a real "*metanoia*," a real change of heart.

Take a good hard look at that particular concrete sin. "This" sin. "These" sins. Approach the sacrament of penance looking for and expecting a real change of heart, a real "*metanoia*," and you will celebrate the Jubilee: liberty from the captivity of sin, release from the prison of sin, and a year of favor from the Lord."

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