



Homily for 9/30/2018

26th Sunday Ordinary Time, Year B

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Repent and Believe in the Gospel

From the Responsorial Psalm:

“The law of the LORD is perfect,

refreshing the soul;...

yet who can detect failings?

Cleanse me from my unknown faults!

From wanton sin especially, restrain your servant;

let it not rule over me.

Then shall I be blameless and innocent

of serious sin.”

The Responsorial Psalm spoke to me first. “From hidden sin save me; From wanton sin restrain me.” It got me to thinking about the difference between hidden sin and wanton sin. Hidden sin and unknown faults have all sorts of meanings. But what I would propose is that in this context it signifies a humility of the sinner before the Lord and his law. A humility that desires to act in accord with God’s will, even if we do it imperfectly. This humble sinner says, “I know I am a sinner, and Lord, I need your help! I want to follow your law, but I need your grace!”

But wanton sin, from which the psalmist especially asks the Lord to restrain him, is a very different thing. In other translations it is called ‘arrogant sin’ or ‘presumptuous sins’. Wanton, arrogant and presumptuous sin stems from the deadly sin of pride. It is deliberate sin. It is spiteful sin. It is the brazen insistence on doing that which we are told is wrong. It is when all authority in our life has called something a sin, and we wantonly and brazenly defy that authority and call it good anyway. It is this type of sin that will always kill the soul. It is one thing to have an addiction. It is entirely different to call that addiction good.

Now the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached as a Gospel of repentance: Repent and Believe in the Gospel! To repent means to stop calling that which is bad “good”. It doesn’t necessarily mean that one has conquered the sin, nor that one, by repenting, automatically becomes a perfect human being. Rather, it is the essential first step that says, “where I am is not where I am supposed to be.” The hidden sin is the interior struggle for perfection, while the wanton sin is the open rebellion of the soul against God and his law.

When we say that the Church is a refuge of sinners, it means a refuge of the repentant sinner. God loves all of his creatures even those who wantonly disobey him. But loving us doesn’t mean condoning all our behavior or praising every desire of our heart. His will is for the conversion of the sinner, not his death. The wages of sin is death. Persistence in sin without repentance leads to eternal death. Yes, contrary to the permissiveness in our society, this includes persistence in sexual sins. But it also includes persistence in the embrace of sins against the dignity of the human being like the mistreatment of immigrants, legal or illegal, the cruel oppression of those we have termed



“our enemies,” the unjust and cruel treatment of someone based on the color of their skin or the creed they profess. Now a word on this. Persistence in sin is very different from addiction and concupiscence and moral failings. The gate of mercy is open to prostitutes and drunks and even Neo-Nazis - if they repent. That is, if they stop calling their profession, their addiction or their ideology good. There may be re-lapses. There may be difficulty in breaking the cycle of addiction, there may be world-views and disordered instincts to overcome, but the first and essential step has been taken. “I don’t want that sin anymore.” Call a spade a spade- call a sin a sin. Repentance.

Many accuse the Church of talking too much about sexual sin, as if that were the only thing she is concerned with. But the Gospel and the church are not just concerned with the libidinal appetites of man. Rather, it is the heart of man that she is after, that is, man’s soul. And the reality is that the soul and the body are united and what happens in the body has effect in the soul and what happens in the soul has a similar effect in the body.

Likewise, our savior Jesus Christ stated clearly, “Where a man’s treasure is, there is his heart.” After matters of the 6th and 9th Commandments, the second most despised topic for a preacher to preach on is money. If the Church is accused of talking too much about what happens in the bedroom, she is outright castigated for speaking about the transactions of the wallet. At the same time that we speak of the right ordering of libidinal attitudes we will also speak the truth about the proper attitude towards the goods of this world; especially material wealth and the soul’s attachment to it.

From the Letter of St. James:

“Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries.
Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten,
your gold and silver have corroded,
and that corrosion will be a testimony against you;
it will devour your flesh like a fire.
You have stored up treasure for the last days.
Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers
who harvested your fields are crying aloud;
and the cries of the harvesters
have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.
You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure;
you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter.
You have condemned;
you have murdered the righteous one;
he offers you no resistance.”

Greed is as much a deadly sin as lust. Again, the Church is not after the wealth of man, but rather she wants to possess his heart. Many modern expressions of faith have forgotten the reason why the Church cares about sin in all its forms. Many have reduced themselves to merely social justice



concerns but have forgotten eternal justice. We work for justice because God will judge our souls even on our participation in society. We don't feed the poor because it makes us feel good. We feed the poor because they are God's own. We feed the poor because if we are honest, we are poor before God. Do unto others as you would have them do to you. The measure with which we measure is the measure that will be measured back to us! The Catholic Doctrine on social, sexual and financial matters is not about trying to create a perfect society but is rather focused on the right ordering of the heart of man. The happy side effect is that society slowly becomes perfected the more we rightly order man to God's will!

However when the members of the Church start preaching a worldly gospel that accommodates greed and lust, she becomes ineffectual in her mission. Those who do so deprive the Church of the long-term fruit of conversion in exchange for the quick approval of the current reigning fad. It is a short-sell and devalues the Gospel. Again, the Church's mission is not about condemning the world or condemning the sinner. It is about desiring the life of man: true, full and authentic life that can only be had by doing the will of God who created us. This can only be done by the mortification of the flesh and the subordination of worldly desires to heavenly aspirations. This will make us unpopular. It means we espouse moral teachings that say, "do not oppress the foreigner in your midst - even if he is here illegally." It means that even the worst criminal still retains an intrinsic dignity and his life is still to be respected. It means that no one should be condemned or mistreated or called names because of his race, creed, sex or even sexual orientation. But at the same time it means that we profess with faithful clarity that sex is meant for marriage between one man and one woman, that the marriage act has both a unitive and a procreative foundation that must not be thwarted with contraception intention. It means that there is never an instance when direct abortion is allowed.

Now Catholics fall into all of those sins mentioned above. There are people who violate the rights of immigrants, there are some who use slur words for groups of people they don't like, there are people in the Church who fall into sexual sin and who struggle with the Church's teaching against artificial birth control. Struggle, fall, repent, confess, fast and pray. This is the normal paradigm of Christian living. Repentant sinners are the Church's treasure! There is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous people. But whatever sinful behavior we have, we must beg the Lord to rid our hearts of wanton, arrogant, presumptive sin. Wanton sin is the Church's bane. The world can call us whatever it wants: bigots, haters, and subversives. But we will continue to preach the Good News the Lord has entrusted to us for the world's salvation. If we didn't, it would be better that a millstone should be tied around our necks and we be drowned in the sea. The Church will preach the truth because she is the true lover of sinners. The world wants the soul to feel good about itself. The Church wants the souls to actually be good. She wants the conversion of the sinner, not his death. And so the Church will continue to preach the unpopular truth because she knows hell is worse than the ridicule of man, and heaven is worth chopping off vanity and pride. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts! Repent and believe in the Gospel!