

Did you guys notice anything strange in today's gospel? How about the last thing Jesus said about the end of the world? "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, **nor the Son**, but only the Father." You would think Jesus would know when he was supposed to return in glory, but that's not the case. Although Jesus is always the divine Son of God, he is also fully human. In taking on our human nature, he willingly embraced our limited knowledge. He did this in order to show us how to trust more deeply in God. He also likely did this so that he could dissuade his disciples--including us--from thinking we can predict the end of time. Since nobody knows when the end is going to come, we must remain awake and always be prepared.

Jesus also speaks about recognizing the signs of the times. He wants us to recognize the signs because they are warning us to get prepared. He stresses this over and over again because we have a tendency to get lazy. We can have the attitude: "Well...it's been 2000 years, he's probably not going to come tomorrow." Saint Augustine corrects that attitude in this way: "Jesus will come again whether we wish it or not. Do not think that because he is not coming just now, he will not come at all. He will come, you know not when; and provided he finds you prepared, your ignorance of the time of his coming will not be held against you." If we are prepared for his return, then we don't really need to worry about the date. It's like those dreaded pop quizzes in school. If you haven't done your homework, you're probably going to fail. But if you keep up with your assignments, you'll probably do okay.

How can we prepare for the end times--and by end times I mean Jesus' return or our own deaths? A good starting point is the sacrament of Reconciliation. The Church requires us to go once a year but more frequently is better. Whether you go yearly or more frequently, the key to a good confession is a good examination of conscience. The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are two good places to start. The USCCB website has several different examples of Examinations of Conscience. A link to those can be found on the sacraments page of the parish website or here:
<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examinations-of-conscience>

The key to a good examination of conscience is an awareness of what a sin is. Pope Pius the Twelfth said that the greatest sin of our time is the lack of the sense of sin. He said that around seventy years ago. Our situation has not

improved. A sin is anything that separates us from God and our neighbor. They can be things we do and they can be things we fail to do. The things we fail to do are called sins of omission and by their nature, they can be hard to pin down. The Sermon on the Mount can help us detect some of those sins of omission.

Whether our sins are something we have done or something we have failed to do, they fall into two categories: mortal and venial sins. Venial sins strain our relationship with God. Mortal sins break the relationship. The damage done through venial sins can be repaired by an act of contrition such as the one we said at the beginning of Mass. In order for the rupture caused by mortal sin to be repaired, we have to go to Confession. Unfortunately, I can't give you an exhaustive list of mortal sins; the Ten Commandments are a good place to start. The best suggestion that I can make is that if you are in doubt about the seriousness of a sin, just go to Confession.

I am sure some of you are thinking, "Saturday afternoons are not very convenient." I agree and understand but the inconvenience goes along with the penitential nature of the sacrament. Also, the knowledge that you are going to have to give up part of your afternoon to come down here and wait in line might make you think twice about that sin you are about to commit or it might make you try harder not to commit that sin again in the future.

That said, you can always make an appointment with me and, if you let me know ahead of time, I can usually hear a quick confession either before or after Mass. During Advent, there will be extended Confession times beginning at 2:30 on Saturdays. Although I'm not very happy about this, we won't have the communal penance services with multiple priests this year because of the Covid situation. Instead, I'll do what I did last year and offer some weeknight Confession times, but this year there will be Adoration on those evenings as well. They will probably be from 6 to 8 pm on the first three Fridays of Advent but I'll let you know for sure later.

The sacrament of reconciliation was established by Jesus when he appeared to the disciples after the resurrection. This is recorded in the 20th chapter of John's gospel. Jesus breathed on the disciples and then said "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." The forgiveness of sins comes about through Jesus' death on the cross, a sacrifice that he made for each one of us out of his love for each one of us. He did this so that we can experience the infinite mercy of his heavenly Father. Saint Mother

Teresa of Calcutta has told us that when Jesus said “I thirst” on the Cross he wasn’t just asking for something to drink. He was asking for our sins. He wants to take away everything that separates us from God by taking those sins on himself. That is what his rescue mission was all about. When we refuse to acknowledge our sins and seek his mercy, we are telling Jesus that the Cross doesn’t matter. Confession isn’t about guilt and shame. It’s about taking responsibility for our actions and bringing them to Jesus so that he can pay the price for us. It’s about experiencing God’s love and forgiveness.

Take advantage of the sacrament of reconciliation and immerse yourself in God’s mercy.