

## Commentary to the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle B



A priest, writes Arthur Tonne, was called out for an emergency in the early morning hours. On his return, he was accosted by a mugger, "Your money or your life!" Then, when the thief saw the priest's Roman collar, he told him to put his wallet away. The relieved priest lit a cigarette and offered his would-be mugger one. The latter proudly said, "No thanks, Father. I've given up cigarettes for Lent." Like the thief, many Catholics lose sight of the forest because of the trees. We give attention to minutiae and turn our backs on the essentials. Unhappily for us, we are living our lives in an epoch which downplays sin. There is a danger, John Newman warned, of thinking God takes our sins lightly because we take them lightly.

A man told a priest. "I am a drunkard, a wife beater, unfaithful, a liar, and a thief. But I am a practicing Catholic." Pope Pius XII said, "The sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin." Pope John Paul II preached, "Secularism preaches there is no God and therefore no sin. Psychology advises us to resist our feelings of guilt. Sociology instructs us to lay all blame on society and think of ourselves as victims... Theological cliques jump on the bandwagon and define sin away." John Kiley observes that just as we have "no fault" insurance, so too do we have "no fault" lives. This attitude has become not only politically correct but also morally correct. Sophisticates advise us the examination of conscience is something quaint designed by the nuns of our childhood. But in fact the exam of conscience is not Christian in origin. It was first designed by the pagans.

Then it was passed on to the Jews. We in turn borrowed it from them. Today's Gospel mentions

specific sins that the Master would have us run by ourselves. They are fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, and pride. Clearly the Teacher looked upon sin not only as a social evil but also a personal decision. Christ, someone has put it succinctly, gives the sinner but two options - either to be forgiven or be punished. I know of priests who are considered village idiots for preaching about sin. It is no longer fashionable to refer to such unenlightened concepts. But, as Pope John Paul II says, "It is not we who have written the Gospel." Still, the favorite indoor sport of many of us is trading the Gospel according to ourselves for the Gospel according to Christ. St Augustine put the case this way centuries ago, "If you believe what you like in the Gospel and reject what you do not like, it is not the Gospel you believe but yourself." Some sins have been raised to the level of virtue.

Take fornication. It is commonly called pre-marital sex. Give me a break! Even third rate writers testify in their many forgettable novels marriage is the last thing on the mind of many people when they slip between the sheets. Oftentimes they have to tell each other their names in the morning. If you put yourself down as opposed to abortion and euthanasia, you are labeled by the media as right-wing and fundamentalist. Those terms are not meant to be complimentary. Let me share with you an examination of conscience worked up by the Hindu Mahatma Gandhi. It is a list of seven deadly sins. They are wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, commerce without morality, science without humility, worship without sacrifice, knowledge without character, and politics without principle. Which ones of these are we guilty of?

How about a trip to the confessional box for an eyeball to eyeball rendezvous with Jesus immediately? Remember Augustine reminded us that the confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works. A non-Christian wrote, "Our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world as in being able to remake ourselves." Or, as John Donne taught, "I am a little world. It requires all my energy to remake this little world of mine." Incidentally, it has been argued by a writer that you can learn more about a congregation in the parking lot than at the Liturgy. How do Massgoers behave once they have left the church? Is road rage waiting to appear? What kind of jokes are told? Who gossips about whom and with whom? We have just honored God with our lips in the church. In the parking lot, it is time to honor Him with our hearts. The aphorism teaches you cannot repent too soon because you do not know how soon it may be too late.

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