

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Oct 15th 2016

Memorial of Saint Teresa of Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church

At first read, the gospel passage leaves one stumped. What does Jesus mean by the unforgivable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit? Hmm, and specifically that would be . . . ? Confessors like having these things nailed down in advance.

Here the Scriptures and Church teaching seem to be on a collision course. The Catechism assures us God's mercy overcomes even the gravest evil, when there is sincere contrition.

The power of God is a mighty force, can go many places and accomplish amazing feats. The one thing, however, that can stop it dead in its tracks, time and time again, is the hardness of the human heart. Because God will not force.

But ours is a wily God who knows how to find a way.

Take Teresa of Avila, whose feast is celebrated today, for example. Willful and, at times, downright irreverent and impossible, she entered religious life quite young for what she later realized was the wrong reason: fear of purgatory. Not until she was in midlife did she awaken to mysticism and an entirely different relationship with God.

For most of us, mysticism lies far outside our experience. We can only contemplate it from the kind of distance one associates with deep space. We could never hope to get there on our own. But sitting in the dreamy light of the Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome and gazing upon Bernini's Ecstasy of Saint Teresa, one glimpses a human person overpowered by a God who loves us—overwhelmingly and exhaustively--down to the last atom of our being.

One might dare hope for such an experience -- but tremblingly, wondering if one could survive it. Perhaps that's what makes the mystics what they are: they can see the face of God and live.

But part of her life this writer can resonate with. "Prayer, in my view," she explained, "is nothing but friendly intercourse, and frequent solitary converse, with Him Who we know loves us." One doesn't have to be a mystic to be at home with that.

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