



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

April 8, 2018 ~ Second Sunday of Easter

The Fifth Stage of Discipleship Formation

We continue working through the stages of discipleship formation. Two Sundays ago, we considered the fourth stage: the Lord's Sermon on the Mount (Gospel account of Saint Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7). Reading, studying, and praying with the Sermon on the Mount truly is the charter of the Lord's school of Christian living and discipleship – as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI says, the veritable self-portrait of Jesus Christ.

The fifth stage of discipleship formation then is: humbly recognizing and accepting that we are all sinners, and Jesus came to call not the righteous but the sinners to repentance, “for those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do.”

We are sinners; ergo, we are sick. Our sickness is sin. What is sin? And how does the Lord come to take away the sins of the world? Sin is a negation of what is good, a privation of that which is truly life-giving and life-affirming. To sin, on the one hand, is deliberately and freely to choose to commit an evil; on the other hand (and the flip-side of that very same coin) is deliberately and freely choosing *not* to commit a good. If one views pornography, for example, the evil that is committed is lust and the use of another person for one's personal gratification; at the same time, the good that is *not* committed is the opportunity to regard that other person as truly another *person*, a beloved child of God with all the worth and dignity belonging thereto.

How does Jesus correct and heal this, the sin that sickens us? He is the Healer Who gives us the medicine we need in order to be healed; that medicine is His grace (that is, His divine life). And at the same time, not only is He the Healer, but is also the Medicine. Because He gives us His grace, His very *life*, in very truth He gives us *Himself*. The Medicine is there in the Sacraments that He has instituted, the Sacraments that have been entrusted to His Bride, the Church, to be given to us, His brothers and sisters by the grace of adoption.

Our acknowledgment that we are sinners is our recognition that we are sick, that we need a Healer and His Medicine. Our humble reception of that Healer and His Medicine begins with our repentance. Repentance is joy that God is so gracious. Even more, repentance is *God's* joy.

We are exploring the stages of discipleship. Discipleship (following in the footsteps of the Lord) begins with conversion (turning *away* from our wayward path in order then to follow *the* path, *the* Way and not *our* way). And conversion is only possible when we can humbly admit to ourselves and recognize that *our* way is in fact *not* the right path...and that is repentance. Repentance first and then conversion: these are the first two steps on the path, the Way, the journey of discipleship.

Following the Lord, His school of life, is not only about imitating Him as the great example; it is also about the experience of redemption, about being made whole. It is about freedom from sin, the embrace of salvation, our release from the fetters of sin, our reason from captivity to the enemy...and all of *that* so that we then healed and thus made free to follow Him unreservedly.

The great gift and mercy in all of this is: Jesus Christ makes this possible, and He extends that possibility – that gift, that mercy – to all of us. Humility on our part is what empowers us to receive this great gift, and once received, humility blooms to become love, joy, peace, and all good things that await us who strive for and want to be active and intentional disciples of Jesus Christ.

~ Fr. Lewis