

Homily Penance Service 3/19/18

It is kind of hard not to notice the decreasing numbers of people who feel a need for the Sacrament of Penance.

There are a lot of reasons this might be happening but I suppose one of the main reasons is that when people ask themselves if they have any sin they usually can't think of any bad things or sins they actually commit. I mean people who would go to Confession would normally be your regular church-goers and most church goers are at least trying to live in the world like Jesus did. Most church-goers are pretty good people leading good lives. Most church-goers are honest people and I think they really take sin seriously and when asked what they do wrong they generally answer "nothing" and this for most people is an honest reply.

I think, however true these words are, that most of us have a pretty poor understanding of what sin is.

This isn't really our fault. It is the way sin was presented to us.

Here is a target for shooting. You see a bulls eye at the center and then concentric circles going out from the bulls eye? The goal in shooting is to hit the center of the circle. The center of the circle is called the "mark." Any shot not hitting the mark is not "perfect".

The word "sin" (hamartia in Greek) means "to miss the mark", to miss the center. If I practice shooting and I do not hit the center I am not a bad person, I am just not a great marksman. The goal would be to keep practicing until I get better, until I can hit the mark.

Living in the world like Jesus lived in the world is the mark for Christians. We want to learn how to think like Jesus, how to act like Jesus, how to speak like Jesus, how to feel like Jesus. That's why we listen to stories of Jesus' life every weekend in the Gospels.

It seems to me from the stories I've heard that Jesus is a pretty understanding fellow. He is a wise teacher. He is not quick to judge but looks for the best in people. He seems to be pretty compassionate too. When Jesus sees someone who is depressed or anxious or sick or distressed in any way his first response seems to want to make life better for them. Jesus responds when he sees people hungry. Jesus responds when he sees someone being poorly treated. Jesus responds to evil by doing good. Jesus said *"You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well, Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. Love your enemies."*

You could say more about the life and teachings of Jesus than I just did because you have been listening to stories about him your whole life. Perhaps the most striking thing about Jesus is the way he responded to abuse. He did not get angry with his abusers but actually prayed for them. This seems to me to be the hardest part of imitating Jesus—this forgiveness thing. It seems to me you almost have to be a god to forgive like Jesus did.

Which brings me back to our conception of sin. Jesus is calling us to be like God because that is who Jesus is.

Jesus is God. Jesus is perfect.

So, when someone asks you if you have any sins we are asking you to think of whether or not you have hit the mark yet. Are you acting like God in the world or are you missing the mark somehow. Having said this you can understand the statement that "EVERYONE is a sinner," that is, every one of us is imperfect in some way, we "miss the mark" on living like God did in Jesus.

That is why we are here tonight. We are not here because we are bad people. We are here because we want to be better people. We want to be like Christ.

That is his challenge to us---to be like Jesus, to literally become the body of Christ on earth.