

The Second Sunday of Advent
December 5, 2021
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #47)

“The whole history of Jesus Christ is marked by mercy and compassion for suffering humanity. From the moment of His incarnation till the hour of His death every thought and word and act of His Divine life was directed toward the alleviation of the ills and miseries of fallen man.”

(James Cardinal Gibbons, The Faith of Our Fathers, p.277)

As we continue our reflection upon the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I would like to pose two questions for this weekend that I will attempt to answer for all of you. The first is this - What is sin? The second - How does God act to save sinful humanity? It is my hope that slowly formulating a reasoned affirmation of the Catholic Church's teaching concerning the Sacrament of Reconciliation would provide each one here the “sometimes necessary push” to deepen your own spiritual relationship with God through the use of this great sacrament.

Let us begin by answering the first question in a relatively brief way. What is sin? Sin is the free choosing of a good, or something we view as a good, which, once chosen, disobeys the laws of God. Or put another way, we freely choose a perceived good for the purpose of doing something which we know goes against what God wills for our lives. Returning to the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve perceived the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil to be a good. They were able to make this decision through the use of their “informed” conscious. Please remember, our conscious, put simply, is that inner ability to distinguish right from wrong. We inform our conscious which assists us in making decisions concerning various perceived goods. We do this in three ways: (1) the teachings of God found in our Catholic Church, (2) under the prayerful and reflective guidance of God's Holy Spirit, and (3) the wise council of those who have our best as their primary intentions (parents, guardians, honorable individuals). Adam and Eve, possessing an informed conscious, still chose to disobey the command of God and eat of the fruit of the Tree thereby committing the first sin, the original sin.

As we have already studied during this year long reflection upon our Catholic Faith, God, Himself, must be the one who reconciles now fallen humanity back to Himself. For fallen man can never reach the supernatural heights of God's heavenly abode using his own limited, natural intellect. Man can only respond;

God must initiate. And God does this through a gradual self-revelation of Himself in the Old Testament. This self-revelation will reach its pinnacle moment in the incarnation of His Eternal Divine Word, His Son Jesus born of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It is in a dream concerning the Annunciation of the Incarnation of His Word into the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that the angel informs Saint Joseph of how God will act in a more profound way to reconcile His wayward children to Himself. *“But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for **he will save his people from their sins.**’”* (Matthew 1:20-21). For it was with these words that God established the principal object of the mission of Jesus – He will be born to die. Through His death, the relationship between God and His children, once destroyed by the willful disobedience of man, would be both restored by the God/Man and improved upon. Next week, we will reflect upon how Jesus establishes His Church to continue this ministry of reconciliation once He has returned to the right hand of His Father.