

Fifth Sunday of Lent
Passion Sunday (Latin Mass)
April 3, 2022
Year of Saint Joseph

“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, IBooks by Apple, p.193)

In the eighth chapter of Saint John’s Gospel, we are introduced to the mysterious woman who has been paraded in front of Jesus after having been caught in the act of the sin of adultery. Various traditions have given this woman a name, but this is not necessary for our reflection this day. What is necessary is the statement of Jesus directed toward those who have trapped this poor miserable creature. In a word, Jesus reminds those leaders of a particular sin we fail to reflect upon enough in our daily lives. This particular sin is the sin of presumption.

Owing to the fact that on this first weekend of the month we choose to reflect upon some aspect of our Catholic faith, I considered this topic one which could provide us much introspection. Let us begin by defining our terms. We will define the sin of presumption as the effort to “minimize” the gravity or seriousness of our sins. We most often attempt to minimize sins when we excuse our behavior as a reaction to some real or perceived insult, either in word or action, committed against either ourselves or those we love. Have we not all done this at one time in the confessional as we state to the priest the reason why we sinned? I chuckle to myself as I reflect upon my own statements in the confessional. Instead of saying – “Forgive me Father, for I have sinned,” if I am honest, I should have said – “Forgive me Father, had it not been for (insert any reason), I would not have sinned.” Yes, I know the statement – you cannot control the actions of others; you can only attempt, through Divine Interaction, to attempt to mitigate your reaction.

I believe I could stop at the end of the previous paragraph and consider this a decent reflection. Yet, a thought occurred to me that the sin of presumption (minimizing the gravity of one’s sins) in both your life and mine may actually be growing due to a particular attitude that we have seen fostered within our Catholic church. I summarize this attitude with five words – “You are a good person.”

“I am a good person.” How often have I heard those words? How often have I said these words to you, our parish family? Has this statement fostered an attitude which limits us in being completely honest with ourselves? As I reflected upon these questions, I am reminded, through scenes flooding back into my mind, of the many times I have been rather apathetic in my duties as a Catholic toward God most regrettably in offering of the Divine Liturgy, the Mass. Please forgive me for the many times I have sped through the offering of this Sacrament

of the sacrificed Body and Blood of God's Son. It pains me to recall the hours spent in idle talk and self-absorbed activity, unreflectively hurrying through this Divine Moment which elevates us all into that Divine Love found ongoing in Heaven, so that I may return to those wasted functions with the words "I am a good person" echoing in my ears. I speak about the current lack of belief in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ truly present in the Eucharist, while hindering the movement of the Holy Spirit in your lives and mine all because I/We have gradually placed more stress on the hours which follow this hour. All this and so much more I/We excuse because, well heck, "I/We am/are a good person/people."

My dear family, it has become so very easy to excuse our lack of reverence in this moment, our repeated inaction to correct our attitudes towards dress, time of arrival, speech; all these things. Why? Because "I am a good person; We are good people." Lent provides us an opportunity, through the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to examine ourselves and seek to improve upon our faults. I pray that these words will find that fertile soil present within my heart and yours, beckoning us to inch ever closer toward a more authentic representation in our daily lives of the holiness required to become saints in heaven.