

## Sin and Mankind

When God created the first human beings he gave them sanctifying grace and other special gifts. Adam and Eve however sinned by disobeying God; this caused them to lose the gift of God's life in their souls. Due to this they found it very difficult to obey God's commands; instead, sin made selfishness rule in their hearts.

We too, experience the frustration of a *fallen* human nature, that is, a body and soul that are weakened because of sin. In (*Rom 7:15,19*) Saint Paul revealed how much this bothered him: "*I cannot even understand my own actions. I do not do what I want to do, but what I hate. . . .What happens is that I do, not the good that I will to do, but the evil I do not intend.*"

Like this great saint and apostle, so often we cannot understand our behavior. We often face questions like - why did I take advantage of others? Why did I lie to my friends? Why does it seem to be so hard to obey the Ten Commandments etc...?

The answer to these questions can be summed up in two words: original sin. It has weakened us and inclines us to choose our own desires over those of God. It leads us to think of ourselves as the most important person in existence. In other words, it is nothing but bad news.

But Jesus brought us Good News - the news that we can be free of original sin and overcome its bad effects! All we have to do is accept Baptism, receive the sacraments, obey his teachings, and grow in prayer. He will do the rest. But there are still a few things that we have to watch out for as we try to live this life in Christ: temptation and sin.

### The False Promises of Temptation

***Temptation*** is the enticement to sin. It always comes before sin and tells us that what is wrong will actually be good for us. There are three things that lead us into temptations: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The *world* means those persons or created things that lure us away from Jesus' teachings. For example, a friend who has no value for Christ or His Good News. He thinks that parties and the misuse of sexuality are more important than God or religion. Whenever you are with him you seem to do more wrong than usual. In your heart you know he is a bad influence on you. This person would be one example of how we are tempted by "the world".

The *flesh* means our own inner urges. There are seven basic disordered inclinations that lead us to sin:

Pride: An exaggerated opinion of oneself.

Greed: An uncontrolled desire for earthly goods, such as money, clothes, etc.

- Lust: An uncontrolled desire for sexual pleasure.  
Anger: An uncontrolled feeling of displeasure and antagonism.  
Gluttony: An uncontrolled use of food and drink.  
Envy: Unhappiness or discontentment over the good fortune or success of others.  
Sloth: Laziness or carelessness in doing right and practicing virtue because of the work and effort needed to do so.

The *devil* means Satan and the other bad angels who try to make us disobey God and who hate the Christian life. Saint Peter warned all believers to be on guard against Satan and his spiritual attacks: "Stay alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, solid in your faith" (1 Pet 5:8-9).

Temptations often come to us through **occasions of sin** – which take the form of persons, places, or things that may easily cause us to sin. Some examples are: friends who do not respect religion; movies or magazines that promote sexual excess and the wrong use of our sexual powers; parties at which drugs and alcohol are used by friends. The first step in overcoming sin is to know what leads you into it. Then you will know what or who to avoid if you really want to reach Heaven.

### **Sin and Its Evil Effects**

**Sin** is an offense against God in thought, word, action, or neglect of action. For example, a real hatred for someone in your mind is a sin of thought. Using God's name disrespectfully is a sin by word. Getting drunk or stealing something would be a sin by action. Not going to Sunday Mass without a good reason (such as illness) would be a sin by omission or neglect of action.

There are two kinds of sin, original and actual. Original sin, as we have seen, means the first offense committed by Adam. We all share in it because we are all their physical descendants. *Actual sins* are those which we personally commit. Actual sins can be either *mortal* or *venial*.

**Mortal sin** is the worst evil there is in the world because it kills God's life within us. Evils like wars, flood, earthquakes, disease only kill the body whereas, mortal sin kills the supernatural life of the soul and takes away the possibility of entering Heaven. The person who dies in mortal sin has only one place to go: Hell. This is because even one mortal sin tells God that we want nothing to do with Him or His holy law. God respects our free will: He will allow us to suffer forever in hell if that is what we want.

Therefore, it is very important that we know what makes something a mortal sin. There are three things that make a sin mortal:

1. The offense must be *seriously wrong*, or at least we think it is seriously wrong. To disobey the Ten Commandments or the teachings and laws of the Church is a mortal sin. For example, missing Mass on Sunday is a mortal sin unless we have a good

excuse such as illness or no church in the area. It is seriously wrong because God commands us to worship him and the Church says that we do this by assisting at Mass on Sunday.

2. We must *know clearly* that what we chose to think, or do, or say, or not do is seriously wrong. For example, if you really did not know that Sunday Mass was a serious duty, then you did not commit a mortal sin by not attending.

3. You must *freely choose* to commit the sin. Continuing with the example about Sunday Mass, if you miss Mass because the car breaks down on the way to church, you didn't choose not to go, and therefore you have not committed a sin. But if you are lazy and just do not want to get out of bed on time, and this causes you to miss Mass, then you have freely chosen not to go and so you are at fault.

**Venial sins** are offenses that are not serious breaks with God's holy law. They weaken our relationship with God, but they do not destroy it as mortal sins do. We should try to do away with these smaller sins, however, because they can form a bad attitude in us and even lead us on to commit worse sins. We should strive to love God so perfectly that we will not offend him even in small ways.

### **The Role of Conscience**

The Catholic Church has always said that men must follow their consciences in order to do good and avoid sin. **Conscience** is the ability everyone has, to judge right from wrong in human actions.

Since we are to act in accord with our consciences it is very important for us to form a *good* conscience. We do this by learning what the Church teaches and by listening to those whom God has placed over us to guide us, such as our parents, our priests, and our teachers. If you are confused about what is right or wrong, you should ask your parents or a priest about it. Growth in knowing what is good from what is evil is an important part of the sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance).

**Words to note:** sin, temptation, occasion of sin, mortal sin, venial sin, conscience