

## God's Mercy and Forgiveness

During the time of Jesus, some of the religious leaders of the Jews seemed to forget the loving forgiveness that God had shown their ancestors and they kept reminding the people only about God's *justice*; that he punishes every sin that we commit. They spoke of God as if he were a merciless judge who found joy in condemning everyone - except the most learned and religious of people!

Jesus however preached to these very people, that God is full of *mercy* and *forgiveness*. **Mercy** means that God has love and tenderness toward weak mankind. Our Lord, God-become-man, showed this mercy in his dealings with sinners.

Jesus never ignored sinners or treated them as outcasts. Rather, He made them feel wanted and loved; he even made friends with them. Jesus' kind attitude toward sinners made the leaders of the Jews very upset and one day, they complained to his disciples saying, "what reason can the Teacher have for eating with tax collectors and those who disregard the law!" (Mt 9:11).

Overhearing this remark Jesus said to them: "People who are in good health do not need a doctor; sick people do. . . ! Jesus is the Divine Physician who has come to heal the sickness of sin in our souls. He has come to offer forgiveness and freedom from sin to each one of us. (Mt 9:12-13) says, I have come to call, not the self-righteous, but sinners"

## God Loves the Sinner but Hates the Sin

Jesus loves each person because he was created by God, who commands us to love all men. However, Jesus hated each sin and never told anyone that he approved of his sinfulness.

Recollect the story in the Gospel about the woman caught in the act of adultery; some of the Scribes and Pharisees were about to kill this woman but Jesus reminded them that they, too, were guilty of sins.

He said to her, "Go, and sin no more" (Jn8:11).

## We All Need a Change of Heart

All of us stand before Jesus as sinners who come to him for forgiveness. We go to Him in Confession and leave the sacrament freed from sin. How can we "go and sin no more"? By having **a *change of heart*** - This means that we MUST honestly try to do good and avoid sin, even when it is difficult. It means that we try to see things as Jesus would: giving God first place in our life, second to our neighbor, and last to ourselves.

How can we strive for a change of heart?

Through **Examination of conscience**- which is a review of one's past thoughts, words, actions, and omissions.

1. Spend a few minutes every night in thinking about our day and review the Commandments of God and see if we have obeyed them. This will enable us to know which sins we commit most often. This will help us to avoid these sins in the future.
2. The best way to change our hearts is to *go to Confession* often, at least once a month. In this way, we will have our sins forgiven, and we will receive the strength we need to avoid them in the future. Although Confession is necessary only when we have committed mortal sin, confessing our venial sins gives us the sacramental grace which helps us particularly in avoiding the sins we have confessed, even venial sins. The priest will also give us good advice on how to live a better Christian life.

At death, we will go to one of three places: Heaven, Purgatory, or Hell. Heaven is for those who have tried to know, love, and serve God with all their heart and all their strength; it is never-ending happiness in God's presence. Purgatory is for those who wanted to love God and serve him on earth, but who did not really try as hard as they could. It purifies them of their selfishness and prepares them to enter Heaven. Hell, is for those who died without any love for God. In life, they tried only to satisfy their selfish desires and gave little thought to loving God or obeying his commandments. Hell, is never-ending punishment for sin; those in Hell are separated from God forever.

### **Take up Your Cross and Follow Me**

One day, Jesus said to his disciples: "If a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross, and begin to follow me" (Mt 1:6:24).

Jesus calls us to do the same thing through acts of **penance** – which means that we must learn to deny our selfish desires. Some examples of penance are not eating between meals or volunteering to do help others when it is not expected of us. to them.

Saint Dominic Savio, the popular teenager saint, was able to accomplish a change of heart in this way. He learned to hate sin and love God by examining his conscience every night, by going to Confession weekly, by receiving the Eucharist often, and by denying his selfish desires through acts of penance. You can have a change of heart too!

**Words to note:** mercy, change of heart, examination of conscience, penance