

SIN & REPENTANCE

*Sin entered the world and with sin death,
death thus coming to all men inasmuch as all sinned. Romans 5:12*

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PART ONE: SIN

ORIGINAL SIN

By “Original Sin” we mean a sin that lodges itself at the core of human nature and that is the foundation of all other sins. Our understanding of Original Sin comes from the Book of Genesis. The teaching is set out in a primitive story found in chapters two and three. Don’t let the primitive story fool you, the message is very sophisticated and disturbingly accurate. It is not hard to decode the symbolism.

God sets man and woman in a “garden” (creation). He counsels them to eat freely of all the trees of the garden except one – the tree of “the Knowledge of Good and Evil.” (Genesis 2:15-17) It is not unreasonable to suggest that the other “trees” whose “fruit” could be “eaten” are the knowledge of other things to be pursued. Basically God is saying to humanity that the universe is ours to discover. We are here to wonder at all created things and to pursue knowledge in every form, using that knowledge to foster and enrich life in every way (this is the meaning of access to the “Tree of Life”). We are to become creators and healers – “like God.” God warns, however, that there is one form of knowledge that we must never pursue. This is the knowledge of how to do evil with good (the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”). God warns that the pursuit of this knowledge will distort the human mind, unravel our relationship with our world, and throw the created world into chaos.

The Devil (the “serpent”) tempts humanity (Adam and Eve) to pursue this knowledge. (Genesis 3:1-5) It is necessary, he tells them, if they are to “be God.” Actually the Devil is selling humanity a false definition of God. God, the Devil says, is someone who can have anything he wants, when ever he wants, however he wants. This sounds good, and humanity ‘bit into it’ so thoroughly that even today most people will describe God as the one who gets whatever he wants, whenever he wants. This is of course not the truth about who God is. The Devil goes on to explain that in order to be “god” in this way, it is absolutely necessary for a person (or group) to learn how to lay hold of what is good and manipulate it for the advantage of himself over others, for the domination of others. The Devil doesn’t explain that everyone will want to be “god” in this way, and that this will set humanity at enmity with each other. After all, everyone knows “there is only room for one person at the top.” The biblical story ends with a description of the unraveling of humanity’s relationship with God, with each other and with the world of creation. All this is the result of the dark knowledge that has taken possession of their minds.

History clearly shows that we have headed full steam down the path of trying to grasp what we want, when we want it and the way we want it. We have become experts at manipulating good for evil. In the process we have turned the whole universal order of things upside down. Everything that had once been in a life-giving order was thrown into chaos, only to settle into new patterns of suffering and pain. Things that once worked together to create life and preserve health now work at odds with one another to deal death – within us, between us, and in the world around us. This is the “Original Sin” and the terrible truth about the consequences of it, and our responsibility for it.

Questions for Reflection

1. When have you given into the temptation to manipulate the good in others, and in the things around you, to get what you wanted?
2. When has your self-centeredness drawn the life out of another person, a situation
3. you were in, or a project you were involved with? Who were the people affected?
4. Are you ready to renounce the pursuit of whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want?
5. Are you ready to renounce the manipulation of the good in created things, in yourself and in others for the purpose of getting your own way?
6. Changing a deep seated attitude in yourself, especially when that attitude is everywhere in the world around you, is not possible without a deep faith in God's grace and a focused desire to seek the renewal of your mind (Romans 12:2). Are you willing at Mass each weekend to come before God with that desire in your heart?

ACTUAL SIN

“Actual Sin” is perhaps better called “Acting-out Sin”. Something from within is being “acted out” – put into words said and actions done. What is being “acted out?” Original Sin! Remember that Original Sin is sin that lodges itself at the core of human nature. It alters our human orientation to life. Original Sin wants what it wants, when it wants, the way it wants, and is willing to manipulate (do evil with) the good in order to get it. This results in a fundamental re-orientation of human nature inward. This self-centeredness or selfishness quickly advances to self-absorption and then to self-consumption. Our human faculties for “communion” (being able to connect in a living way with others and the created world around us) are destroyed. This brings us an ever deepening sense of isolation (aloneness). This prompts us to lay hold of the world and others with violence. We consume, manipulate and destroy life. The world dies and we die. The Bible says: “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

Actual Sins are things said and done, left unsaid and undone that damage you, others, a part of creation or the right order of things. Actual Sins are “objectively” wrong (i.e., they are wrong because they inflict damage – whether we knew they would or not, whether we intended to do harm or not, whether we did them freely or not).

God identifies these Actual Sins that damage the integrity of the human person, the integrity of a just social order, and the integrity of the right order of creation and its elements. They are set out in the Bible in places like:

the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17),
 the Social Commandments (like Leviticus 19:9-37),
 and in the preaching of the Apostles (Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:3-7; Colossians 3:5-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 2 Timothy 3:2-7).

While Actual Sin is “objectively wrong” (it damages the integrity of someone, something or the life-giving order of things), the fault or guilt of the person who does them is changed by

whether he knew what he was doing was wrong and whether or not he freely chose to do it. Personal guilt for Actual Sin is altered when it is done out of ignorance or without free consent. Sin, however, remains sin; and, as such, it has consequences. It always inflicts damage to someone, to something or to the life-giving order of things.

Examine yourself!
Test yourself to see whether you are living in faith!
2 Corinthians 13:5

God created man in His image; in the divine image He created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

- Do I take proper physical care of my body?
- Do I eat and drink moderately?
- Do I take chances with my life and health or with the life and health of others?
- Have I used alcoholic beverages to excess and caused my family pain or anxiety by my excessive use of them?
- Have I used drugs illegally or immorally?

The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden... to cultivate and care for it. Genesis 2:15

- Do I act to protect and preserve the environment?
- Am I prudent about the use of resources and contribute, as I am able, to their renewal?
- Do I support a social order that calls others to do so?

Love one another with the affection of brothers. Anticipate each other in showing respect. Romans 12:10

- Do I take the time daily, or often, to tell my loved ones that I love them?
- Do I come across to people as accepting, concerned, and open to life, or as moody, overbearing, mean or self- important?
- Am I open to the sincere challenge and advice of my family, friends and those who care about me?

Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you. Exodus 20:12

- Am I respectful of my parents? Do I make the time regularly to contact them, talk with them and spend quality time with them?

Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and that lust which is idolatry. Colossians 3:5

- Do I show respect for the sexual integrity of others in the way I look at them, the way I speak to them and in the way I act toward them?
- Is my attitude toward women such that I accept and treat them in equal partnership?
- Have I read or viewed pornographic materials?

- Have I made them available to others?
- Have I allowed my Christian sexual values to grow lax?
- Have I engaged in pre-marital sexual intercourse?
- Have I permitted myself to enter a sexually active relationship outside of marriage?
- Have I committed adultery? Exodus 20:14

*You shall not go about spreading slander among your kinsmen;
nor shall you stand idly by while your neighbor's life is at stake. Leviticus. 19:16*

- Have I started, passed on or listened to gossip?
- Have I spoken out in defense of the innocent?
- Am I supportive of my neighbors?
- Do I keep a watchful eye for the safety of their person and their property?

You shall not kill. Exodus20:13

- Have I mocked, laughed at or humiliated anyone?
- Have I attacked anyone's good name or reputation?
- Am I nurturing a grudge or filled with bitterness toward anyone?
- Have I attempted to set people against each other?
- Have I physically attacked anyone?

You shall not steal. Exodus 20:15

- Have I taken from another or from my place of employment what does not belong to me?
- Am I honest in my personal affairs and in my business dealings?
- Do I provide my employees a good and fair wage?
- Do I provide my employer a full and active day's work?

This people pays me lip service but their heart is far from me. Matthew 15:8

- Do I practice, in word and in deed, the values I profess?

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there is a place in your life where Actual Sin has taken hold?
What is it?
2. How is sin expressing itself (acting out) in this part of your life?
3. What do you need to do to stop committing this sin?
4. Do you believe that God can, and is willing to help you remove this sin from your life?
How would you bring it to God in prayer?

SIN: VIEWED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A CHRISTIAN'S COMMITMENT

One of the things that makes sin "sin" is that it identifies an objective wrong (i.e., something

that damages the integrity of some-one or something or the life-giving order of things). You don't have to be Christian, or even religious, for the reality of sin to be of critical personal, social and global concern.

There is, however, a dimension to sin that is specifically religious and Christian. For a believer and a Christian, sin is always more than an objective "wrong." Sin is "personal." It affects a personal relationship. Sin has a direct connection to a believer's personal commitment to God. Sin betrays the relationship of love and trust between himself and God.

The word for "sin" in the original language of the New Testament is *hamartia*. This Greek word corresponds to the Hebrew word *hatta't*, used in the Old Testament. Both *hamartia* and *hatta't* mean literally: "to miss the mark." One immediately thinks of archery or marksmanship. But what is the "mark"?

When God opened His mind to let humanity in on the design of human life and its relationship to the world, He lovingly entrusted to us the principles of right-relationship (The Commandments). He calls for a personal response from each human being – a personal commitment to heed these principles and follow them in our choices, attitudes, words and actions (see Exodus 24:3-8 and Deuteronomy 30:15-20). This is the Covenant. We enter the Covenant when we freely agree to heed the wisdom of God and follow the principles He reveals. God, in turn, agrees to draw close to us, so that from our relationship with Him we might draw the power to overcome our disordered nature and be able to carry out the good He has shown us.

*"Ever present in your midst,
I will be your God and you will be my people."
Leviticus 26:1-13*

The Covenant became complete when God, "in person," *became flesh and dwelt among us*. (John 1:1-14) In Jesus, God draws near to each human being with the offer of saving grace – the power to overcome our old nature and to become a new woman or man in Christ:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not die but have eternal life. John 3:16
I came that they may have life and have it to the full. John 10:10b
Live in me as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me. John 15:4

Returning to the Archery image, sin is "to miss the mark". The "mark" is to die to self (Mark 8:34), to live the Commandments (John 15:10) and to love as we have been loved by God in Christ (John 13:34). The "mark" is also to follow in Jesus' footsteps (Mark 8:34) and to become a new self in Christ (Colossians 3:9-11). When we become a Christian we, like an archer, "take aim" at this "mark" through a conscious commitment – a commitment we place at the center of our life and all our strivings in this world. This commitment rests at the core of the meaning of our Baptism:

Baptism is ...the pledge to God of an irreproachable conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 3:21

For Christians, sin is to “miss the mark.” More than just “doing something wrong,” sin is “falling short of the love that loves us.” Yes, this is a love that will always forgive when we repent, and that will always lift us up again and urge us forward to becoming the woman or man God made us to be. But this grace is not a license to make no effort to remove sin from our lives. Rather, the grace of forgiveness is an incentive to be perfected in love, and wholeness of life, as He is perfect. (see Matthew 5:48)

Examine yourself!
Test yourself to see whether you are living in faith!
2 Corinthians 13:5

I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me. Exodus 20:2-3

-Does God come first in my life?

You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. Exodus 20:7

- Do I speak of God in such a way that others know that I have a personal relationship with Him?
- Do I use the name of God or Jesus to express anger or to appear to fit in with the group?

Therefore never be ashamed of your testimony to Our Lord. 2 Timothy 1:8

- Have I been ashamed, or backed away from admitting that I am a Christian, in the presence of others?
- Have I used any reasonable opportunity to speak of and share my Christian Faith with my friends?
- Have I made the effort to reach out in a warm and welcoming way to people interested in my Faith?
- Am I a warm, accessible and supporting member of my parish community?
- Have I made fun of or ridiculed another’s religion, attacked their church or disturbed their Faith in God?

Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, your God. Exodus 20:8-10

- Is weekly Mass the top priority of my weekend, every week?
- Do I carefully prepare for the celebration of Mass as an act of worship of my whole mind and heart?
- Do I leave Sunday as a Day of Rest on which to rejoice in the gifts of life, family and friendship?
- Do I contribute a fair share to the support of my parish and the missionary and charitable work of my church?

At every opportunity pray in the Spirit, using prayers and petitions of every sort. Pray constantly and attentively for all in the holy company. Ephesians 6:18

All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching – for reproof, correction,

and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

-Is daily prayer and daily scripture reading a priority every day?

Be ambitious for the greater gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:31

-Is grow to the full stature of my new self in Jesus Christ
my real and honest ambition?

-Am I the disciple of Jesus and the Christian witness I could be?

-In what ways do I need to improve and grow?

Questions for Reflection

“Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus?”

1. Have you made a serious commitment to pattern your life after Jesus’ life (Mark 8:34)?
2. How would you express your commitment in words?
3. Do you feel that you can be good “on your own?” How often in the past has trying to do this only led you to you being good “on your own terms?”
4. How does your relationship with Christ contribute to how successful you are at:
following the Commandments,
dislodging anger and resentment from your heart,
being an agent for what is good,
and practicing the virtue you say you believe in?
5. When you sin, what do you experience within yourself
in terms of your relationship with Christ?
5. Does Christ make you feel guilty for sin, or does he motivate you to be successful in
virtue? How can you make your relationship with Christ more effective?

MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN

Sin is sin, and “the wages of sin is death.”(Romans 6:23) The Scriptures, however, seem to draw a distinction between “deadly” (mortal) sin and “non-deadly” (venial) sin:

There is such a thing as deadly sin...

True, all wrongdoing is sin, but not all sin is deadly. 1 John 5:16-17

“Deadly” here does not mean that only these sins deal death to the living elements of the world and the life-giving order of creation. All sin does that. “Deadly” here means sin whose doing *ruptures* a person’s relationship with God, and brings death to the soul’s faculties for giving life, and witnessing to the truth, presence and power of God.

Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21

Non-deadly sins means sin whose doing *impairs* a person's relationship with God, and wounds the soul's faculties for giving life and witnessing to the truth, presence and power of God.

Mortal and Venial Sin in the Teaching of the Church

The Church teaches that Mortal Sin destroys charity in the heart of a person by a grave violation of God's law; it turns a woman or man away from God. Mortal Sin is sin 1) whose object is grave matter and which is committed with 2) full knowledge and 3) deliberate consent. Sins of *grave matter* are identified in the Commandments and in other parts of the Bible. (such as Galatians 5:19-21 above.) *Full knowledge* means that you know what you are doing is gravely wrong. *Deliberate consent* means that you choose to do it. (See the Catechism of the Catholic Church 1857, 1858, 1859)

Such things as these, if done knowingly and deliberately, are Mortal Sins:

- 1) Renouncing your faith in or commitment to Jesus Christ,
- 2) Intending or actually committing murder,
- 3) Nurturing a vicious attitude toward someone (out of racism, for a past injury, or out of pure spite and meanness),
- 4) Consistently and intentionally attacking another person's good name or reputation,
- 5) Vindictively seeking to cause another bodily harm or to lose their means of support (job),
- 6) Intentionally defrauding the poor or betraying a public trust,
- 7) Fornication: being single (unmarried) and having a sexual relationship (sexual intercourse) with another person,
- 8) Adultery: being married and having a sexual relationship with someone other than your husband or wife or being single (unmarried) and having a sexual relationship with someone who is married.

The Church teaches that Venial Sin allows charity to subsist in the heart of a person, even though it offends and wounds it. One commits Venial Sin when, in a less serious matter, he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without knowledge of its gravity or without complete consent. (See the Catechism of the Catholic Church 1855, 1862)

How might the distinction between Mortal and Venial Sin be valuable?

Defining Mortal Sin tells a Christian that these attitudes, words, actions and failures to act *are toxic in an immediate and deadly way* to the human person, to a just social order, or to the right order of creation and its elements. Awareness of Mortal sin informs the sinner that something has ruptured in his relationship with Christ; that he has become a witness contrary to Christ (Anti-Christ); and that the need for repentance is immediate and allows no delay.

Defining Venial Sin tells a Christian that these attitudes, words, actions and failures to act *compromise* the integrity of a human person, a just social order, or the right order of creation and its elements. Awareness of Venial Sin alerts the sinner to the fact that he or she is becoming a *venial person*. Maybe these are little things and small shortcomings, but they make for a compromised moral character and a shrinking spiritual stature. When we become comfortable with them they make us complacent and sometimes even cynical about virtue in

ourselves and in others. We no longer spur each other on to excellence, rather, we hold hands with each other as we slide into the mire of human veniality. This is no small concern for someone pledged to be a witness to Christ. In the spiritual life there is no middle ground. We are either moving forward to becoming a new self in Christ or falling backward into our old self.

Questions for Reflection

1. Has Mortal Sin taken hold anywhere in my life? If so, where?
2. How comfortable have I grown with Mortal Sin in my own life or in the lives of those around me?
3. Have I put off an immediate repentance for this sin? Why? Have I sought confession and absolution? If not, why not?
3. Have I become a “venial” person – loose in my language, crude in my manner, inconsistent in doing good, cynical about virtue or spiritual ambition in myself or others? In what ways?
6. What is my attitude toward the Venial Sins that have lodged themselves in my character and behavior? Am I concerned enough to do something about them? Have I brought them to confession?
6. Am I a moral encouragement to those around me? How?

SOCIAL SIN

Some Commandments speak to the kind of attitude and behavior necessary for a person to preserve his integrity as a human person. The foremost among these are the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Other Commandments speak to the right ordering of human society needed to protect the dignity of each person. These are the Social Commandments. (e.g., Leviticus 19:9-18).

Jesus told a parable that explains the goal and function of the Social Commandments. It sums up everything a just human society and the individual members of that society should be and do. It also expresses what Jesus’ life and ministry were about, and what the life and ministry of a Christian in society should be about:

What is your thought on this: A man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away; will he not leave the ninety-nine out on the hills and go in search of the stray? If he succeeds in finding it, believe me he is happier about this one than about the ninety-nine that did not wander away. Just so, it is no part of your heavenly Father’s plan that a single one of these little ones should come to grief.” Matthew 18:12-14

This parable, called the Parable of the Lost Sheep, teaches that human society must have a redemptive focus and function:

Those who have fallen or been pushed to the margins of spiritual, religious, political, social or economic life must be reached out to. They must be extended

an invitation to come back into the vital center of human community. Provision must be made to heal them and equip them, and a way must be made to facilitate their re-integration into the spiritual, religious, political, social or economic life of the community.

Not only must society and its institutions be organized to do this, this principle must guide each individual's personal relationships with her fellow human beings, her personal economic choices, and her political activity. As citizens we must each work to see that this principle guides social policy, domestic and foreign, and permeates all of society's institutions and structures. When we, individually or collectively, fail to act on this principle or act contrary to it, we sin. This is Social Sin. It is serious sin. It damages the right order of human society; it divides people into conflicting groups (classes); and it destroys the foundation necessary for peace. Social Sin is not a new religious concept. It has always been a concern before God:

Woe to those who enact unjust statutes and who write oppressive decrees, depriving the needy of judgment and robbing my people's poor of their rights. (Isaiah 10:1-2a)
The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they afflict the poor and the needy; and oppress the resident alien without justice. (Ezekiel 22:29)
They trample the heads of the weak into the dust of the earth and force the lowly out of the way. (Amos 2:7a) *Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow...If you refuse and resist, the sword shall consume you.*
(Isaiah 1:16, 19-20)

You might well think to yourself, "I don't oppress any widows or orphans and I don't victimize the resident alien or defraud the poor." You may not personally! But does "the way things are arranged" defeat them? In a free society we all share a responsibility for "the way things are arranged." Closer to home, what of the children at school or in the neighborhood that are made fun of and excluded from activities? What of those confined to low income areas who, because of lack of affordable transportation, have no choice but to buy locally and pay higher prices for inferior products? What of those you see around you every day who are without equal opportunity to unfold and develop their talents? What of the animosities and prejudices we hold in our heart toward certain races or social groups?

The Social Commandments seek for each human being:

The dignity of being spoken to and treated with respect and human kindness.

The ability to acquire what is necessary to survive and develop physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

The freedom to choose his direction, vocation, cooperation, and charity, and to be able to choose between good and evil.

The opportunity to lay hold of the things of the earth, developing them and enhancing their ability to benefit herself and those for whom she is responsible.

The opportunity to collaborate freely with others on a multitude of levels – from the family, through other associations of many different kinds, to the national enterprise.

The ability to realize the produce of his labors, to see and enjoy its goodness, and to possess it as his own.

The dignity of freely choosing to surrender possession of what she has and what she is and to give it as a gift for the enrichment of others and humanity as a whole.

Examine yourself!
Test yourself to see whether you are living in faith!
2 Corinthians 13:5

You shall not act dishonestly in rendering judgement. Show neither partiality to the weak nor deference to the mighty, but judge your fellow men justly. Leviticus 19:15

- Have I excluded anyone from the opportunity to be involved and included in circles of friendly association and activity?
- Have I passively or actively supported policies and procedures that are designed to leave some people out?
- Do I treat people with equal courtesy, respect and kindness no matter who I am with at the moment?
- Do I take the initiative to invite anyone standing outside to become involved and included?

If one of your kinsmen in any community is in need in the land... you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand to him in his need. Instead, you shall open your hand to him and freely lend him enough to meet his need. Deuteronomy 15:7-11

- Do the poor have my attention and assistance?
- Do I recognize the Face of Christ in the poor?
- Am I alert to laws, policies, procedures that restrict access to educational and economic opportunity or social and political participation?

All men have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. All men are now undeservedly justified by the gift of God, through the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:2-24

- Do I see my own wounds in the sins of others?
- Am I an invitation and encouragement to them to change, heal, and grow?
- Have I grown cynical about people's ability to change and become something more than they are?
- Am I patient and encouraging when I see them struggling to change and improve?

When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you. Leviticus 19:33-34

- Am I racist or bigoted toward another nationality or religious group?
- Do I encourage my friends and colleagues to change their harsh or prejudicial attitudes towards individuals and groups?

I give you a new commandment: love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. John 13:34

- Do I hold a superabundance of wealth or material goods beyond my ability to use or enjoy while others live in destitution?
- Do I make an effort to lower the barriers of hostility where they

- exist, between members of my family, my friends, neighbors or fellow workers?
- Do I break the “bread of myself” in time, concern, energy or assistance with others, in the name of Jesus?
 - Do I go the “extra mile” with people?

Questions for Reflection

1. What social circles, and political and economic structures of society are you involved in?
2. In what areas might you be blind to social sin?
4. No one can be vigilant in every direction, but do you have a desire to erase and heal social sin? Are you “available” to God to bring about a just social order for all?

PART TWO: REPENTANCE

What Is Repentance?

*Jesus began to preach and say,
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew 4:17*

Repentance is an act by which you take on a whole new attitude toward the sinful habits and addictions that cling to your life.

Repentance means you **ACKNOWLEDGE CLEARLY** that God is right about you and sin in your life: your sinful habits and addictions control you; they easily can, and often do, pull your life apart.

Repentance means you **DECLARE EMPHATICALLY** without any reservation or exception: “The sin in my life has to go -- all of it!”

Repentance means you **HUMBLY ADMIT** that you are powerless to free yourself from your sinful addictions, that you need God’s help and that you are ready and willing to reach out and take firm hold of it. The Bible says:

You must lay aside your former way of life and the Old Self which deteriorates through illusion and desire, and acquire a fresh, spiritual way of thinking. You must put on that New Man created in God’s image, whose justice and holiness are born of the truth. Ephesians 4:22-24

Repentance is the ‘attitude of heart’ in which God’s grace ‘works’ to defeat the Old Self within you. When your heart is set in the attitude of repentance, God’s grace can take hold of your sinful habits and work powerful changes within you. Now we need to take a look at exactly how that works.

How the Grace of Repentance Works

*Jesus said: "If you wish to come after me,
You must deny your very self, take up your cross each day
and follow in my steps." Luke 9:23*

"...deny your very self..."

To deny your very self has a specific meaning. It means to renounce a life centered on you – a life driven by what you want, when you want it and how you want it. This might seem like giving up a lot, but think it through. Some other things come along with a life center on self: a life perpetually envious of others and resentful of what they have, a life that demeans and humiliates those who have less than you to make yourself feel better about what you have, a life of that cannot see the beauty around you or take joy in the good that comes to another, a life that slowly drowns in bitterness and cynicism. When you give up a life centered on self, all the rest of this goes with it.

None-the-less, this is a radical decision to make. If you think that this self-centered way of living can still bring you happiness and fulfillment as a human being, you will not be able to successfully leave it behind. Like Lot's wife in the Old Testament (Genesis 19:26), you will keep turning your head backwards and wondering if, with a little tweak to the way you go about doing things and a favorable roll of the dice, you could still come out on top of this mountain of envy, greed and misery. If you have a divided heart on this you will make no progress in gaining freedom from your sinful addictions. Joy and peace will elude you. This is because freedom, joy and peace lie *in the opposite direction*. At the beginning of every Mass, at the Penitential Rite, and at the beginning of each day pray:

**Lord, I repent my pride, my absorption in self,
the ways in which I act as a god-unto-myself.
Teach me the meaning of love and how to engage life.
I am willing to be taught and led.
Wash my heart clean of anger, bitterness and resentment.
They leave me blind to the goodness and beauty in the people
and world around me.**

"...take up your cross each day..."

Your crosses are your attitudes, words and actions that the Word of God and your conscience clearly tell you are wrong, and from which you struggle to break free. If you want to be free of them, you cannot be hiding from them or denying that they don't still grip you and want to draw you back into sin. Jesus said, "*You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.*" (John 8:32) You have to be able to name the crosses you bear – to yourself, to God and to others. You do this in several ways, each of which provides its own grace.

First, you need to name the sinful habits you struggle with to God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession).

Second, you need to name them to those in your life that want the best for you and are equipped to support and encourage you. Not everyone is equipped to do this, but it is important that you find one or two people that are.

Third, you need to begin each day by looking in the mirror and naming the ones you have been struggling with the most to Jesus, your Savior. Ask him to walk with you and to give you the strength to resist them.

**Lord Jesus, I want to get through this day without _____.
Walk with me and let's do it together.**

By doing this you focus yourself on your goal (getting through the day without sinning) and focus your awareness of your source of strength (Jesus, your Savior, who is walking beside you).

You also need to be able to name them in the hour of temptation:

**Jesus, this old part of myself rises and wants to take hold of me.
I claim the power you won for me by your death and resurrection
to resist this. Your death "was death to sin, once for all".
I claim the power of your redeeming Love to defeat this temptation.
I nail it to the wood of your Cross. Let it die in the blood you shed
out of love for me.**

About Confession and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

*He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin,
we might live for righteousness.
By his wounds you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24*

Taking your sins to the cross of Jesus is exactly what confession and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is all about. In the Sacrament the Holy Spirit brings you before Jesus crucified. Here the Church stands with you and joins you in claiming the grace to put your sinful habits and addictions to death. Saint John writes:

*The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin...
If we acknowledge our sins, he who is just can be trusted
to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong. 1 John 1:7,9*

The death of Jesus on the Cross was the death of every sin that you bring to his Cross:

*This we know: our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful (sin addicted)
body might be destroyed and we might be slaves to sin no longer. Romans 6:6*

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was resurrection and new life for all who die to the Old Self with Him and walk with Him:

You can depend on this: if we have died with him, we shall live with him." 2 Timothy 2:11

The victory is yours if you persevere:

*Let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in
running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who inspires*

and perfects our faith... Do not grow despondent or abandon the struggle. Hebrews 12:1-3

“...follow in my steps...”

If you are going to be free from the sins that have a hold on your life then, at the same time you are trying to resist them, you must be deliberately moving in another direction. If you are trying to fight temptation with your will power alone, you will notice that you fall into a cycle that looks like this: 1) when you sin, you turn to Jesus for forgiveness with a sincere heart and he forgives you (the Sacrament of Reconciliation assures you of this), 2) in Confession you make a resolution not to sin again in the same way, 3) but after a while you fall into the same sin again, 4) you feel terrible and full of shame, and you begin the cycle again. This is because forgiveness and a new resolution not to sin is not enough *to stop you from sinning*. As the cycle continues you grow discouraged, then become depressed and want to give up on yourself. At this point you will be in mortal danger of turning away from God in despair. This is because your repentance is incomplete.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation gives you grace to resist sin, but grace is not magic. You have to co-operate with grace for it to become effective in you. There is only one way to do this. Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). Freedom from sinning requires that you be moving along the same path Jesus walked through life, taking the same steps he took in every moment. If you read the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, you see him moving in *a pattern of three steps*. In each moment and every situation:

- 1) Jesus pauses to raise his mind to God, his Father.
- 2) He asks to know his Father’s will (the good to be done in the moment) and the strength to do it.
- 3) Then he does the good he is shown to do.

This is *the pattern* of Jesus’ life. It is his WAY of being human. He repeats this pattern, moment by moment, throughout the day. In every moment you find him putting something decent where there was something indecent, something encouraging where there was something discouraging, something life giving where there was something death dealing, something good where there was plenty of no good, something of Heaven where there was a lot of Hell. Jesus was God as well as human, and much of the good he did was miraculously spectacular. Don’t let that distract you from seeing *the pattern* – his Way of living a human life. When Jesus said, “Come follow me,” he was calling you *to walk in this Way* with him. Doing this makes your repentance complete – and powerful! People who do this stop sinning, because their energy is being drawn in another direction.

The Resurrection of Jesus and Freedom from Sinning

He is risen! He is not here... He is going ahead of you...
Mark 16:6

Jesus faced rejection, humiliation, pain and great suffering. Through none of this did he abandon his Way of being human. After Jesus completed his earthy journey, passing through suffering and death, he rose from the dead. His resurrection from the dead has a lot to do with you and with repentance. It has everything to do with your desire to break free from sinning. Jesus

rose from the dead to take his place at your side! Your journey through life is not through. You have not engaged all the trials or faced all the suffering ahead of you. You have not passed through death. Jesus rose from the dead to walk with you through all of these.

You are not alone!

This is the ultimate meaning and saving grace of the resurrection of Jesus. “I am with you always,” the risen Jesus says, “until the end of all things (Matthew 28:20).” “Call on me, lean on me, walk with me. We have your sins to leave behind. We have your true self to discover. We have good to do, a world to redeem, joy to give and hope to kindle.

If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.

1 John 2:1-2

When you fall into sin, Jesus does not abandon you in disgust. He is at your side. He is standing next to you as your heart come to repentance. He looks at you and forgives you freely. But he is not there to sit around with you and wait for you to fall into sin again. He extends his hand to raise you to your feet. Take it and rise! He looks you in the eye and says: “Let’s get moving. You have a life to live. You have this day to embrace, and we have some good to do. Walk with me. We will draw down a bit of Heaven to earth in a half dozen places or more before the end of the day.” Move with him, following in his steps: look around you and ask to see the good you can do; and when God gives you sight of it, ask for strength and do it. Move on to the next moment and do the same. Don’t stop, keep on doing it. Walk with him.

Jesus knows that you are not going to be free from indecency until you are up and active being decent. You are not going to be free from sin until you are up and active doing good. You are not going to stop adding to the world’s pain and suffering until you are up and busy bringing healing, encouragement and hope. You are not going to stop creating Hell until you are busy making Heaven. Walking in the right direction with him pulls you away from drifting in the wrong direction. Walk with him in the right direction. Do it consistently and the fascination of the sin will lose its hold on you.

Don’t Let yourself get off the path!

Even if, in a moment of weakness, you slip and fall into sin again, come to your senses quickly. Don’t spend even a moment sitting in shame. Realize who is standing next to you. Tell the Lord that you are not going to head back in that direction. Ask his forgiveness and accept the strength he is holding out to you. Stand up and walk with him in the Way. Go to Confession when next you can, not in shame but to claim the grace won for you by your Savior. Sin cannot defeat you. Only you can defeat yourself. Know the truth and let it set you free.

Jesus’ Way of being human is The Way to be human. Asking to see the good that can be done and doing it is what God created you “in his image” to do. It is what will bring meaning to your life and give purpose to your existence. If you follow this path you will grow more and more confident in yourself. You will find joy in living. You will encounter and enter fellowship with men and women doing the same – finding friends among them and perhaps a spouse to share your journey through life. And when you glance behind you from time to time,

you will see a trail of good and decent things that came into the world because, as you passed through those moments, you were inspired by God and placed them there. These are the pieces of Heaven you brought down to earth to relieve the pain, suffering and misery in the world. At the end of this path, when you have breathed your last breath, you will hear a voice say to you: “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have completed your apprenticeship in Heaven building. Now join those who have mastered the art before you.” As God brings you together with them, guess what you will see them creating? Heaven!