

The Fifth Sunday of Lent March 14, 2021

The English Catholic writer, G.K. Chesterton, once wrote about original sin that “it is the only Christian doctrine that can be proven.” He meant that, original sin is the Christian teaching that, because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, we all inherited a tendency to sin.

It is hard for us to do the good we know we should do and easy for us to fall into the sin we know we should avoid. We only have to take an honest look at ourselves and the world around us to know how true that is. So, although people might disagree about whether Jesus was the Son of God, whether the Bible is the word of God, or whether the Catholic Church is the one true Church, no one can argue that human beings commit evil acts. Unfortunately, it is proven out time and time again.

Five weeks into our Lenten pilgrimage, our own sinfulness might be very clear to us. We may have started out on Ash Wednesday with high hopes of dedicating time to prayer, fasting, and service to others only to see our human weakness get in the way. We wanted to do good but found ourselves slacking off. We wanted to avoid evil but found ourselves falling back into sin. Over and over again, we may have found ourselves slipping back into the tendency to disregard and even disobey God.

The people of Israel also knew how difficult it could be to trust God and to follow His ways. Yet, time and time again, God showed His faithfulness to them by sending them prophets to call them back to Him. He showed mercy in forgiving them and calling them to live differently than the nations around them.

In today’s first reading, God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah. He talks about the disobedience of His people and how they broke the covenant He made with them. Then He says, “I had to show myself their master”.

At its root, sin is a failure to acknowledge that God is God and that we are creatures. When we sin, we make ourselves the master. By breaking God’s law, we proclaim that we know better than God does about what’s right and what’s wrong. Sin is the absurd assertion that we are the masters and that we are in control.

There is only one way to break out of that sinful cycle. It is to acknowledge God as our master and to submit to His will. But, we don’t do that slavishly and blindly. We don’t do it out of an irrational fear. Rather, we submit to God out of love. Yes, He is our Master, but He is also our Father. He loves us unconditionally and faithfully. Everything

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He wills is for our good. Sin damages us but God's grace restores us. The key is to surrender our own will and commit ourselves to doing God's will.

Because we are weak, committing ourselves to doing God's will is not easy for us. But, this is where the second part of today's first reading comes in. God makes a promise to His people that He will establish a new covenant. This new covenant won't be written on tablets of stone but written on our hearts. God tells us He will place His law within us and that all of us will know Him. This new covenant will not only tell us about the good we should do but give us the power to live it out.

If the words "new covenant" sound familiar it is because we hear them every Sunday at Mass when the priest repeats the words of Jesus over the wine saying: "Take this all of you and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant."

God's promise of a new covenant is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And, today's second reading spells it out for us. We read that "[Jesus] learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him." These words might sound odd to us. Wasn't Jesus already perfect? But, the key to understanding this is in the first line - "In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh." Jesus took on our human nature in every way except sin. He was totally obedient to the Father. Because He accepted the Father's will unconditionally, even when it meant His death, He changed everything for us. The same spiritual principle by which Adam and Eve's original disobedience damaged us makes it possible that Jesus' obedience can restore us. Jesus' "yes" to the Father undoes Adam and Eve's "no". We can now say "yes" to God through Jesus Christ who made that possible for us.

So, we don't have to be stuck in a pattern of guilt and shame. We can turn to God who is rich in mercy and generous in forgiving us. We also don't have to be stuck in old habits of sinfulness. We can turn to Jesus who strengthens us against temptation and empowers us to not only follow God's law but to truly love others from the heart. God has made a new covenant with us written on our hearts in the blood of Jesus. His Holy Spirit is at work within us cleansing us, restoring us, and invigorating us.

At every Mass, we celebrate this new covenant. We offer the Body of Christ given for our salvation and His Blood, the blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for us. At the Eucharist, the power of Jesus' death is made new again so that we

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can unite our sacrifices and sufferings to His and be renewed. When we receive Holy Communion, it is Jesus Himself who enters our soul and gives us His love which makes it possible for us to live His command of love. As sons and daughters of this new covenant, let us go out, then, and fill the world with the knowledge of God's love.