

- No doubt many of you have been following the Holy Father's historic visit to our country this week. Certainly, it's always a blessing to have the Successor of St. Peter on American soil!
- As I have sifted through the transcripts of his talks and all the media commentary on what Pope Francis has said and not said, it's come to my mind that our Holy Father's great charism is that of exhorting all people to live lives of authenticity.
- While the media is lauding the Holy Father as the "huggable", "down-to-earth" "people's Pope", which is all very nice, I think his real effectiveness is in his willingness to challenge those who are comfortable in this world.
- While we can certainly debate the merits of the agenda he brings to our country this week, and the sins he emphasizes and those he doesn't, what is certain is that our Holy Father is a fearless champion of the poor and those victimized by abuses of power.
- It's his personal quest to reach out to and offer hope to those on the margins of society, while also calling those who are comfortable to relinquish some of their comfort to help those who are less fortunate.
- At the same time it seems like our Holy Father is striving to make the papacy a moral authority once again for those have turned a deaf ear to the Church and Her more difficult teachings.
- While I certainly don't offer myself as an apologist for the Holy Father, it seems to me that, at the heart of everything he said this week is a challenge to treat people, faith, and the created world with the proper respect and dignity they each deserve.
- At the heart of his message is a challenge not to be complacent in the face of sin, even when that sin comes in the form of deeply-entrenched social structures and social trends that seem very difficult if not impossible to change.
- What the Holy Father taught us this week is that political expediency, economic prosperity, social entitlement, and personal comfort must not be held in higher regard than the dignity of any person or groups of people.
- And anything that leads to the dehumanizing of man, impinges upon the practice of faith, or contributes to the wasteful destruction of the created world is sinful and must be rooted out of our society.
- Regardless of what we may think or feel about this pope, whether good or bad, I do hope we can all see the "Big Picture" of what our Holy Father has tried to do this week.
- In his own way and with his own style, Pope Francis has tried to help our country and the world recognize many of the sinful and destructive forces that are at work among us and the dangers they pose to humanity.
- For it is only when we recognize an illness for what it is that we can begin to treat it.
- Intrinsic to his message this week is a call to personal conversion.
- What's important about the pope's visit this week is not so much the political issues that he was highlighting, but rather the moral dimension of each issue and the fundamental need to address the sinfulness of our society.
- So for example, whether or not you believe that global warming is a problem, we should all be wary of the unnecessary and wasteful consumption of the earth's natural resources. Exercising prudent stewardship is a Christian value!

- Whether or not you believe our country needs to reform its immigration policies, to fail to care for the needs of others and to uphold their dignity can be terribly sinful. It is part of our Catholic faith to welcome the stranger and to care for those in need.
- Our readings today maintain for us a bit of the spirit that the Holy Father has brought to us this week, for in them we find a clear denunciation of sin as well as an exhortation to rid of our lives of sin.
- Our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading from the Letter of St. James reminds us of the dangers of wealth, materialism, and an abuse of power. This passage tells us so very clearly that our wealth cannot save us, and that what wealth can provide for us is only temporal.
- If we allow the pursuit of wealth to consume us in this life, shamelessly living in luxury and pleasure with no care for the needs of the poor, then the wages of our sinful greed will consume us in the next life.
- It also tells us that whatever injustice we commit against others will be noticed by our Lord, especially if we wrong someone who is poor or righteous. In our dealings with others, we must strive to be both just and charitable.
- And our Gospel today speaks of rashly judging others, the sin of scandal and of leading others into sin, and the need to repent and be detached from our sinfulness.
- This is why we are told in today's Gospel that we must be willing to cut off whatever part of us causes us to sin.
- Our Lord is not being literal in calling us to cut off the part of our bodies that cause us to sin. Rather, He's telling us that we need to repent of our sinfulness and be willing to put those sins out of our lives, which is often a painful thing to do.
- The problem with sin is that it often gets very deeply entrenched into our lives. I spoke about that a bit last Sunday in discussing the passions.
- Our passions can be like tyrants demanding obedience from us. So when our unruly passions get the better of us, we often develop sinful and vicious behaviors that, once recognized, are not easily dismissed.
- And when sin becomes entrenched in our lives, it can seem like our sin is a part of us, such that cutting it out of our lives can feel like losing a part of ourselves. It's painful!
- But regardless of how difficult or painful such a task may be, we must try nonetheless to root out our own personal sinfulness, trusting completely in God's grace and mercy to supply for all that we lack.
- And we must do this not only for ourselves, but for our world at large. For it's only when we each endeavor to improve ourselves and become holier that our world will become a holier and healthier place.
- May we all be fearless in recognizing the sin in our lives, and absolutely courageous in cutting it off. But most of all, may we be completely trusting in our Lord's grace and mercy to help us.