

*Repent, says the Lord, the Kingdom of God is at hand.*

What does “repent” mean to you? It is used extensively in Sacred Scripture: 20 times in the Old Testament, 53 in the New Testament including 24 in the Gospels. Repentance was the subject of Christ’s first sermon; same for Saints Peter and Paul, and it is also the subject of Our Lord’s final sermon before his Ascension.

The Latin word is *poenitentia*-penance, a punishment for wrongdoing. We know all about penance, right? In the original Greek the word is *metanoia*, literally “change of mind”, in the literal and spiritual sense toward the moral teachings of Christ. The disciple continuously reflects on their life and the world and examines their consciences for what they have done wrong, and failed to do good. One Gospel commentator wrote that repentance means “we turn with contrition from sin to God in order to be in the proper condition to receive the divine forgiveness”.

The Great Apostle Paul provides a beautiful summary of this today. Our ancestors *drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ*. Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt and destroyed Pharaoh’s army on the way. The Covenant was to given for freedom from the slavery of sin. When food ran out manna rained down from heaven.

Without water Moses tapped the rock from which came living water.

Sinfully, they weren’t satisfied, so they rebelled against God, and they were punished. Even Moses wasn’t spared, dying before reaching land for his lack of faith tapping the rock a second time.

Our Blessed Lord instructs us, the baptized, the believers, his brothers and sisters about being trapped in focusing on the obvious sins of others and foolishly believing they are so much worse than ours. No, the Israelites shouldn’t have worshipped the Golden Calf. They shouldn’t have rebelled, and instead been grateful for the Covenant, manna from heaven and the living water that flowed from the rock. Moses shouldn’t have tapped the rock twice. We know that now, and he told us they were punished because of it.

Pilate is an easy target. Before he sealed his place in history by sending the Lord and Savior of the world to death, he lured innocent people onto the sacred Mount Garizim, falsely promising to provide recently discovered sacred vessels buried by Moses for their sacrifice. Instead, he killed them all, except for the Priests he hauled off to prison. This is what our Lord is referring to in the mingling of blood.

Sin of course is evident today too. The unjust invasion of a sovereign nation? Merciless bombing of innocent people producing death, suffering, homeless and fleeing refugees? Catholic leaders openly promoting the *expansion* of abortion? Clergy ordained to protect and uphold the sacred teachings of Christ openly challenging them?

But how about us? The prince of the world seduces us into bemoaning and dwelling on the obvious sins of the others. This can only produce 1) the mortal sin of calumny and

distraction, 2) sinfully question the existence or motives of God, and or 3) conclude that since those sins are so obvious ours aren't so bad, not sins at all and not needing repentance!

This is all a lie. Just because our sins may not be as obvious or public as others doesn't mean they aren't sins. Sin is ecclesial, which means it affects everyone, whether we see it or not. We may not have openly killed, but have we wounded the soul of someone by talking about their behavior behind their back, wounding their soul and soul of the people who heard us say it too? Have we sinfully judged the eternal salvation of someone who has sinned so publicly? That's God's job, not ours.

Our job is to labor in building up, not tearing down the heavenly kingdom, which is at hand here and now, within and among us whether we can see it because of sin or not. We are called to repentance for our sins and the sins of the world and the bitter fruit they produce. Why, because that is what Christ did for us! Divine mercy poured out from His wounds.

Divine mercy is the fruit of repentance. Without repentance there is no mercy, no building up of the Kingdom and no freedom from the slavery of our sins and those of the world. This spiritual and moral freedom wrote St. Francis, produces the good fruit of faith, hope, charity and all the virtues that conform our lives and the world to Christ. And it has to begin with us. This is the lesson of the parable of the fig tree, which is us. Everything about us, our thoughts, desires, words, actions and inactions frequently require a change of attitude away from ourselves and the world toward Christ, which can be a painful process. There is a cost to this, and it is called repentance. Why wouldn't there be, considering Our Lord nailed himself to the Cross for us?

We are incredibly blessed to be born after the life, death and resurrection of Christ, writes St. Alphonsus, because we have Jesus Christ the Savior of the world to redeem us from our sins and open to us the gates of heaven. We have the way, the truth and the life. He is the spiritual rock that we, unlike Moses can tap time and time again, here at the Sacred Altar and in the Sacrament of Confession that is the spiritual food we need to produce the good fruit he desires from us.

And blessed are we, the faithful, to have this sacred season of Lent to escape from the world, go into the desert with Christ and battle evil, root out our sins, repent, and by God's grace receive divine forgiveness and bear the fruit that builds up the heavenly, not earthly kingdom.

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