

- Just when you wonder if our social mores can sink any lower, I recently saw a billboard in our area that read: “Life’s short. Get a divorce.”
- Outside of the shocking bad taste of this billboard, outside of the fact that it encourages something as painful and traumatic as divorce, and trivializes the sanctity of marriage, this message is really quite dangerous, spiritually speaking.
- I say this not so much because divorce, generally-speaking, is a grievous sin, but because the underlying message of this billboard is that we should do all we can to avoid suffering and discomfort in this life.
- Rooted in the very worldly mentality that we should do all we can to secure our own personal happiness and comfort in this earthly life, this billboard’s message is a repudiation of our baptismal call and the message we hear in today’s Gospel.
- To the degree that we actually believe that this billboard’s message is valid or even amusing, we show how far we are from understanding and living the Gospel message.
- Let’s consider for a moment the message today’s readings impart to us.
- In St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, we are taught that baptism, which is the Sacrament that makes us a Christian, is a death to sin so that we might have the hope of eternal life.
- We die to sin with Christ Jesus in baptism so that, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”
- The point that St. Paul is making here is that, as Christians, we must have an eternal outlook. This world and all it holds must not be our primary focus.
- Our focus must be on Heaven and the life we will enjoy there. As St. Paul puts it: “If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.”
- So, St. Paul says that we who have been baptized “must think of [ourselves] as dead to sin.” And we should want to be dead to sin not simply so that we can avoid hell and go to Heaven, but also so that we can live a life here on earth that is actually pleasing to God.
- You see, through the incredible graces of baptism, we are given the capacity to live a life pleasing to God. Thus, God expects those who have been baptized to grow in virtue and to make Him the highest priority in life. Baptism is a call to holiness.
- We get a sense of the seriousness of our baptismal call in the Gospel today.
- Jesus says, “Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.”
- Jesus is telling us to get our priorities straight! He is very clearly calling us to love Him above all else – even our family members! And He goes on to say, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”
- In other words, if we try to live our earthly lives in such a way as to please only ourselves, we run the risk of going to hell. But if we are willing to set aside our own desires in order to please Him, we shall be saved.
- In this we see the insidiousness of that billboard’s message. By encouraging those who are struggling in marriage to get a divorce, that billboard is telling us to place our earthly desire for comfort above God’s will. It’s telling us to please ourselves, not God.
- And frankly that’s really a dangerous way to live, for by doing so we risk making ourselves into an idol.

- Moreover, seeking to live in a way pleasing to God rather than to ourselves does not mean we have to forego every pleasure and joy that life has to offer.
- To the contrary, the well-formed Catholic knows that God's good gifts are to be embraced with gratitude and joy, not shunned out of a puritanical sense of righteousness.
- The good things of this world, such as food, drink, love, friendship, leisure, sport, and so on are to be enjoyed with a proper sense of balance, but never sought after as ends unto themselves or made into idols or objects of addiction.
- Yet seeking to live life in a manner that is pleasing to God also means that we don't run away from suffering. And this is the rub with so many of us. Conditioned and attuned to pleasure and comfort as we are, we don't like to suffer – and we avoid it at all cost, don't we?
- When we have the means to do so, so many of us live lives that are based on maximizing our personal pleasures and joys, while mitigating as much as possible any sufferings or discomfort. And when we do that, when we refuse the cross, we're in trouble.
- "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of me."
- As we get accustomed to thinking of ourselves and of our own personal comfort and pleasure before ever considering what is pleasing to God, we become selfish and self-centered.
- We begin to think in terms of self-entitlement, deluding ourselves with notions of what we think we deserve, while losing our capacity to suffer courageously and well.
- Generally speaking, not only does this lead us headlong into sins of pride, avarice, and sloth – creating within ourselves attachments to earthly things – it also changes the way we look at God, blinding us to the reality of His omnipotence, majesty, and glory.
- Rather than humbly realizing that we are mere creatures made in His image and likeness, we begin to shape God into our own image and likeness, proudly determining what we will believe to be true, and shunning those teachings of His that impinge upon our comfort.
- This damnable pride, rooted in a selfish idolizing of oneself, has led so many people to reject the teachings of the Church, most especially re: marriage and the marital act. When we turn away from God to focus on ourselves, we're blinded to the truth and we embrace delusions.
- Thus, so many selfishly believe that we can willfully strip the marital act of its procreative quality so that we might enjoy the pleasure of that act without its inherent responsibilities.
- So many have been deluded into believing that the necessarily sterile union of two men or of two women can be a true marriage in God's eyes, though Scripture very clearly condemns it.
- Sadly, so many believe that we can break our marriage vows and remarry another without a proper annulment, and act as if nothing happened by still receiving Holy Communion.
- My brothers and sisters, whom do you love more: yourself and your own sense of comfort and pleasure, or God, Who is all good and deserving of all your love? Do you make of yourself an idol, or do you strive to love and honor God as you should?
- Our blessed Lord so dearly wants to show us His mercy. As He has proven time and time again throughout salvation history, God is willing to wash away our sins if only we repent. But even beyond repenting, He invites us to make Him our highest priority.
- If you wish to give God the proper place in your life, then pray and obey. Get on your knees, adore Him, get to know Him, and obey His commandments – especially the difficult ones. Accept whatever sufferings He allows, and do penance.
- Strive for virtue, trusting that growing in virtue is its own reward.
- That's the path to pleasing God. That's the path to Heaven.