

*What is sin?* Before I answer this fundamental question, let me pose another question: if a doctor *refused* to talk about the very real dangers to their patients' health, would that be a good doctor? If a doctor failed to educate and inform their patients on how to maintain a healthy life and avoid getting sick, would that be a good doctor? We as patients reasonably expect our doctors and medical experts to be proactive, honest, and forthcoming with us on how we can avoid anything that might endanger our health. We *want* our doctors and healthcare providers to educate us on how we can live healthy lives and avoid sickness and disease.

Similarly, we should want our spiritual doctors in the Church to educate and inform us on what can endanger our soul, and even our body as well. I feel like if you talk about the reality of sin nowadays, you're judged and condemned as some "harsh, mean, rigid, and old-school" person. Brothers and sisters, trust me, I'm not talking about sin because I'm some "mean, nasty, harsh, and rigid priest." Anyone who knows me well, knows that's not who I am at all.

Rather, I'm talking to you about sin because as a spiritual doctor who cares for your spiritual well-being, I want to be honest with you about what can endanger your spiritual health. And as a spiritual father who loves you, I want the *best for you* in every possible way, and that means helping you to identify and avoid the destructive evil of sin, which can kill us spiritually and lead to an eternity of pain and death.

So the bottom line is: I'm talking about sin right now because I love you. Even more so, *God* talks to us about sin today in the Liturgy of the Word *precisely* because He loves us and cares for us and knows that sin can destroy us. In 1946, Pope Pius XII famously said, and I'm paraphrasing, the "greatest sin is the loss of the sense of sin." And obviously, all of us are sinners who are in need of God's grace and mercy.

So let me return now to that first question I posed in the beginning: *what is sin?* The Church defines "sin" in paragraph 1849 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*: "Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It

wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.""

And I would clarify that the eternal law is love! So sin is a *free rejection* of God, Who is Infinite Love and Goodness. While I don't have time in this homily to go into great detail on the different types of sin, especially mortal and venial sin, I do encourage you to read the Catechism's section on sin. It really is enlightening and helpful in terms of our understanding of sin and how it endangers our lives, not to mention how we can fight sin in our life with the help of God's grace.

In the Liturgy of the Word today, our Lord speaks to us of the horrible realities of temptation and sin within human existence. In the First Reading from the Book of Genesis, the sacred authors use figurative and poetic language to describe what the Church calls a "Primeval event"—in other words an extremely ancient event at the dawn of the human race when the first human beings, Adam and Eve, committed the first sin, also known as the Original Sin, which was a sin of pride, selfishness, and disobedience.

Moreover, in today's Gospel we hear of that mysterious period in Jesus' life when He spent 40 days of fasting in the desert before He began His public ministry. During this 40 day period, which I'm sure Jesus shared with His apostles at some point in the future which is why we have a record of it in the Gospels, we hear that our Lord is tempted by the devil. Now unlike Adam in the first reading, our Lord Jesus, *overcomes* the temptations of the devil and reverses the disobedience of Adam, thereby *making Himself the New Adam* through which the human race will be reborn and recreated!

In both the First Reading and the Gospel, notice the nature of the devil's temptations. In these temptations, we see the devil's strategy for pulling human beings away from the Triune God. In the First Reading, notice how the devil explicitly tries to sow doubt and confusion among Adam and Eve over God's command not to eat the fruit of the forbidden Tree. The devil goes on to blatantly *lie* to Adam and Eve, contradicting what God told them what would happen if they were to eat the fruit from the forbidden Tree. Then the devil makes the disobedience of God all the more seductive when he entices Adam and Eve with divine power

and says that they will “become like gods.” This is who the devil is: he is a liar, the father of all lies, who uses things like power and pleasure to tempt human beings to reject God and all that our loving Father in Heaven wants to give us.

In the Gospel, we see more of the devil’s strategy in how he seeks to tempt and destroy through sin. Notice that the devil’s first two temptations to Jesus are aimed at attacking Jesus’ identity as the Son of God. The devil hates us so much and so he loves to attack our fundamental identity as beloved children of our Heavenly Father and seek to separate us from God at all costs. The last temptation of Jesus in the desert is one centered on power. The devil loves to offer us power for the sake of selfishness and pride. Ultimately through His own experience, Christ demonstrates for us that *it is possible* to overcome the temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh in order to avoid sin.

Now I’d be a terrible spiritual doctor if I didn’t speak about the remedies for sin and the practical ways we can avoid sin with the necessary help of God’s grace. If sin can be likened to a virus and a disease, then our *Lord Jesus Christ is the cure for sin! He is our*

*salvation and eternal Hope!* He is the one who destroys sin by the power of His love and mercy! This saving truth is proclaimed so boldly in the Second Reading today from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans!

And so in order for us to avoid and conquer sin, we must firmly root ourselves in Christ our Savior, most especially through prayer and the sacraments! Through His Church, our victorious and all-powerful Lord gives us so many weapons and tools to overcome sin and evil in our lives. Ultimately, the greatest weapon against sin is holiness, that intimacy with Christ that is manifested by a life of love and virtue. The Lord makes us holy through prayer, the sacraments (especially the Most Holy Eucharist and confession), Sacred Scripture, great spiritual reading, ongoing catechesis and education in the Catholic faith, fasting, almsgiving, awesome retreats and pilgrimages, etc.

An extremely important way to avoid sin and overcome temptation is to regularly and honestly examine and form our consciences according to the teachings of Christ and His Catholic Church. We have to humbly allow the Holy Spirit to form our consciences on what is good and evil, right and wrong. On our parish website, if you click on the tab with my

name on the left-hand side, I provide a link for what I consider be the best examination of conscience for adults that's out there. Feel free to use it and share it with family or friends.

The Archbishop of Baltimore, Archbishop William Lori, recently put it best, saying, "Lent is not merely a season for self-improvement. It is a time of laying aside illusions of self-reliance and, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, sharing in the victory of Jesus over sin and death." So as we prepare to receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, our Lord Who has already defeated the devil and conquered sin and death, may we abandon ourselves entirely to Him Who is the Cure for all of the evil in our lives and in the world.