

MEDITATIONS ON REPENTANCE – Life in the Spirit Prayer Group 16th September 2020

Some Catholics who were brought up with pre-Vatican 2 teaching on repentance can remember a rather Old-Testament style emphasis on God's judgment, wrath and punishment for sin by damnation and hell: we were urged to avoid this fate by striving to avoid sin and by frequent confession. Sadly, the main motivation was fear and there was very little teaching on the New Testament principles of God's love and forgiveness; the remedy for sin offered by Jesus' death and resurrection; and the role of the Holy Spirit in transforming us from within.

More recently there has often been a distorted emphasis towards the other extreme, with very little mention of sin and punishment; and the impression that, because God is so loving and merciful, He will overlook all sin and not condemn anyone. Again, the role of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are diminished (if sin is unimportant, why do we need a Saviour?)

We are seeking a fuller understanding of the true teaching on Repentance and Tony gave us a talk on its meaning and history in the Old and New Testaments. The script of the talk is attached and some key points are as follows:

- Repentance is a complete change of mind and heart which turns us away from sin to serve the living God, not as servants but as adopted members of His family: and not out of fear but out of love for God in response to His love for us.
- Through surrender of our lives to Jesus as our Lord and King, and baptism in Jesus' name, we are born again as new creations and enter His Kingdom of goodness, truth and love to begin a new life in the Spirit.
- But we are living in a fallen world and engaged in spiritual warfare with the temptations and attacks around us: we face the daily challenge of the Lord's instruction to "Be Holy as your Heavenly Father is Holy". We remain vulnerable to temptation and sin.
- However, we know that in Jesus we have the victory and in the Holy Spirit we have an advocate and helper, so we need to repent and rededicate our lives to the Holy Spirit each day.

We then reflected further on this and reminded ourselves:

- We are not trying to earn God's love or a place in heaven by being good and avoiding sin: God loves us as we are, unconditionally. We enter the Kingdom of heaven not through our works, but through the salvation of Jesus Christ. We then "work out our salvation" by doing the will of God: loving Him with our whole being and loving our neighbour in practical ways, with care and compassion.
- Although we need to remember that we are sinners in constant need of God's mercy and forgiveness, we should not focus on the sin but on Jesus, who redeemed us from slavery to sin: through his cross and resurrection, and sustained by the Sacraments, we have the authority and power to repent, to resist temptation and to be transformed more and more into His likeness.
- We cannot overcome sin through our own efforts alone: our part is to make the choice to change our minds (repent), to trust in what Jesus has already done (made us sons and daughters of the living God), and to give the Holy Spirit permission to "transform us by the renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2)
- The Eucharist is an essential help because we offer ourselves along with the bread and wine at Mass; and when the Holy Spirit miraculously transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Our Lord, He also opens us to transformation. As we receive the Lord and change our minds towards believing and trusting in Him, He is the one who is actually changing us from within.
- We should live each day as if it is our last, as this will give us a heart open to repentance.

Links

Video with music and prayer: ["Jesus - make me holy"](#)

Repent

Text of a talk given by Tony Calway 16/9/20 at Life in the Spirit Prayer Group

Our topic this evening is Repentance, but I would like to extend it to look at the relationship between repentance and sorrow for our sins. I will not be telling you anything you do not already know just putting it in a different way maybe and opening up the topic for discussion.

To get into the topic I need to set the background. God is almighty, all powerful, infinite. God is perfect, by nature good, holy, loving and true. This is the benchmark against which we measure ourselves and which leads us to Repent.

God created the universe including mankind. We are reminded in Psalm 88:

*O Lord God of hosts, who is your equal?
You are mighty, O Lord, and truth is your garment.
The heavens are yours; the world is yours.
It is you who founded the earth and all it holds;*

The first of mankind, Adam and Eve, committed the original sin and nothing was the same anymore, their natures were changed, as was the rest of mankind. God, who is so loving, did not leave it there, but through various means spoke to mankind, including the prophets. God revealed himself to the descendants of Adam and Eve, and has been calling mankind to repent ever since.

The Old Testament prophets called for a conversion that would turn people away from idolatry and from a merely superficial practice to live in fidelity to God's law and their social responsibilities. For example, in Isaiah we read:

*Take your wrongdoing out of my sight
Cease to do evil. Learn to do good,
Search for justice, Help the oppressed,
Be just to the orphan, Plead for the widow.*
(Isaiah 1: 10-20; Ez. 18: 1-32).

God told two of the prophets (Malachi and Isaiah) to say:

*Look, I am going to send my messenger in front of you,
To prepare your way before you.
A voice of one that cries in the desert
Prepare the way for the lord.*

This came to pass, and we read in the gospel of Matthew :

*In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judea and this was his message: "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.**"*

This message is worthy of investigation. The Greek word used was Metanoia. In English "change of mind." What change of mind was John asking his listeners to make? Well, the clue is in the reason he gave; *for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.* John wanted them to recognise God, who God was, what God was. He was the "king" in heaven and His kingdom was coming. A kingdom of goodness, truth and love.

John was asking his listeners to consider their lives and to contrast them with God's perfection, this perfect kingdom. If they were to do this, they would realise how far removed they were from God and His kingdom. They would become aware how much they were missing the mark or target, in other words how much they were sinning.

Thus, John was asking for a change of heart which would turn his listeners away from sin to serve the living God. John was asking them to change their ways, the way they were living, but he did not just leave it there, but he went on to tell them how they should live, which we can read in Matthew, and if they did they could work towards being citizens of the kingdom.

We also read in Matthew about John:

then Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan, they confessed their sins.

John went on to say:

I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

We then read that Jesus was baptised by John, after which Jesus went out into the desert where He was tempted by the devil. On His return Jesus learnt that John was arrested, so Jesus returned to Galilee and we read in Matthew:

From that moment Jesus began His preaching with the message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand".

So, to recap:

- Metanoia, change of mind. The biblical term for that repentance or complete change of heart which turns one away from sin to serve the living God.
- OT prophets called for a conversion that would turn people away from idolatry and from a merely superficial practice to live in fidelity to God's law and their social responsibilities. (Isaiah 1: 10-20; Ez. 18: 1-32).
- John the Baptist and then Jesus preached a radical change of heart as demanded by the coming of God's kingdom (Matthew 3: 1-12; Mark 1: 15)
- John's baptism was for repentance (Mark 1:4; Acts 13:24; 19:4).
- In the name of Jesus, the apostles invited people to be converted and baptised and so begin a new life in the Spirit (Acts2:38)
- The gift of metanoia is so special that whoever jeopardizes it by subsequent sin may lose it forever (Hebrews 6: 4-6).

You might ask what has that got to do with me? I am a Christian I have been baptised; I am saved. Yes, you are right, but you are also a sinner, and however good you are or think you are, you still need to repent and change your life for the better.

For those of us who are attempting to walk in His ways, it is a call to reflect on how we are living the challenge of "Be Holy as your Heavenly Father is Holy" and to ask the Father to show us the ways in which we are falling short. We must not let go of the fact that we are good and holy, but must not forget that when compared with the holiness of God we are in a very poor state.

We read in the first letter of St. John: 1 John 1: 10

*To say that we have never sinned is to call God a liar
And to show that His word is not in us.*

Jesus was even harsher:

It is not those who say to me, "Lord, Lord", who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes, many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?" Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, you evil ones!" (Matthew 7: 21:23)

This is why we need to be constantly listening to our consciences, whilst at the same time realising that our consciences are being corrupted by the world, we live in. We are in an age of Apostasy - I do not know whether this is the great Apostasy referred to in the Book of Revelation, but God is giving us signs that we need to heed. In any case there is a spiritual warfare going on, both inside and outside the Church and it may seem like the devil is winning, but God will win out in the end.

Let us repent and rededicate our lives to the Holy Spirit each day. We will have difficulty in repenting if we do not have sorrow for our sins. To say something about sorrow for our sins; one definition of Contrition: A heartfelt sorrow for past sin accompanied by the intention not to sin again. It is our sins that crucified Jesus, each time we sin we are causing Jesus more suffering. Contrition is necessary for the sacrament of penance to be valid. The following may help us to have true sorrow for our sins:

Psalm 51; Luke 15: 11-32, The prodigal Son; 18: 9-14, the two men in the Temple.

Also, along with the saints, the more we know Jesus, the closer we come to God, the more we become aware of our sinfulness.

God bless you, from a sinner.