

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, C – October 23, 2016 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Sat., 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 815 words

The scene recounted in this Sunday’s gospel is as relevant today as it was two millennia ago. The fact remains that there are some men and women who lack a proper sense of sin and a proper awareness of their standing before God, and so consider themselves justified – when, in fact, they are not. And there are others who have a better grasp on reality and enough humility to see that the only thing they have a claim to is God’s mercy. Please God, may we all be found in that latter category.

The problem afflicting our time – if we can boil it down to a single problem – is the loss of the sense of sin. Pope St. John Paul II famously wrote about this, repeating something that Pope Pius XI had said several decades before: “The sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin”. Because of this loss, we now see some things as normal or not all that bad, that in former times would have provoked shame, outrage, or horror; there has been a distortion of our spiritual vision and our moral compass. There has been a deadening or downplaying of conscience in which we have grown comfortable to one degree or another. This phenomenon has affected us all at some point in our lives – perhaps even right now.

It behooves us actively to seek out a properly-tuned spiritual vision and moral compass, for the first reading tells us of the “God of justice, who knows no favorites” and who is “not unduly partial” toward anyone. God has set a standard and he will hold us and everyone else to it. Death is the great leveler: then, it will not matter what kind of résumé you built up, how much money you accumulated (or, for that matter, gave away), or how many accolades you received from men. All will be judged according to the same standard of truth and love that Christ has revealed for all. It may be possible for us to live in the delusion of the Pharisee in this life, but if we do so, we will be in for a surprise in the next.

“O God, be merciful to me, a sinner”. These words, and the sentiments of heart that accompany them, must take shape not only in our one-on-one relationship with God, but also in our relationship with him in and through his Church. The dramatic decline in the practice of the Sacrament of Confession in the last several decades is a prime indicator of a loss of the sense of sin. The special Jubilee Year of Mercy draws to a close in less than a month, and I beg you: if you have not been to confession in a long time – if you have not been to confession in over a year – if you are living with serious sin on your conscience that perhaps till now you have been downplaying or ignoring; please, for the love of the merciful God, go to confession as soon as possible! Do not wait any longer! Say the prayer of the humble tax collector of the gospel and make a firm resolution to take action: “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner”!

Jesus died for every sin that you and I have committed, even for those most shameful, embarrassing, or hidden ones; but not only that: he died for every sin that you and I will commit in the future. Never believe the devil’s lie that you can’t be forgiven, or that the priest might think badly of you, or whatever other sweet lies the evil one might whisper to you to get you to stay away from the sacrament! The only sin that cannot be forgiven is the one that we withhold from God’s infinite mercy. We will, of course, still have the Sacrament of Confession after the Jubilee Year is over – but we will not have access to the special and particular graces that the Jubilee Year offers. Now is the time to act.

At the end of this Mass we will sing to Our Lady, as is our custom during this Marian month of October. And so let us again entrust ourselves to her maternal care – she who is the “mother of mercy and of love” and who always knows the fastest and most secure way to Christ her Son. She held us in her heart when she stood by the Cross, consenting to her Son’s death for us and our salvation – a death caused by our sin. She holds us in her heart in a special way here

at St. Paul's, also, for we have consecrated ourselves to her. May she obtain for us liberation from whatever might stand in the way of our reconciliation with God; may she pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.