

30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, C – October 27, 2019 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 800 words

The Catechism describes the first movement of the prayer of petition as that of asking pardon;<sup>1</sup> it specifically quotes the humble tax collector in the gospel who prayed, “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” This first movement of prayer is so essential, because we are all, without exception, sinners. Whether rich or poor, educated or ignorant, devout or impious, all of us, to a fault, are sinners; we are incapable of pleasing God in ourselves. We cannot save ourselves!

Because of this, regardless of our state in life, our first movement toward God must be that of asking his pardon. And the first reading tells us that he gladly hears us: he is impartial – he “knows no favorites”, and always stands at the ready to hear our prayer. The prayer of contrition is very pleasing to him, because it asks him for the very thing that he so greatly wishes to give us: his mercy.

The Church’s official worship models this concept for us. For as we begin Mass, we ask forgiveness in a collective manner and the priest-celebrant pleads with God for mercy on us all. In that moment, if we have said those prayers sincerely, the Lord does wash away our sins. Not our mortal sins – no, those must be handled through confession; but he does wipe away all our lesser failings – our venial sins – of which we always have so many.

Then, we pray again in contrition before Holy Communion: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed”; we humbly ask his pardon. Yes, during the Mass we may well have incurred additional lesser faults: perhaps we entertained some distractions; maybe we had a negative thought about the preaching; and so forth. We again ask the Lord for his pardon.

This prayer is most pleasing to God, and he gladly forgives. And it is so important that we form this habit of making contrition for sin our first approach to him. It is good to ask his forgiveness daily for all our sins, great and small. And of course, to make healthy and regular use of the sacrament of confession. Indeed, in view of our second reading, I want to share a particular mercy God offers for those who form this habit of contrition.

The particular mercy is what is known as the Apostolic Pardon, the plenary indulgence “in artículo mortis” – at the point of death. If a priest is able to come to dying person’s side, the prayer he says is quite moving: “By the authority which the Apostolic See has given me I grant you a full pardon and the remission of all your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

But what happens if a priest is unable to get there in time to administer the last rites, which include this prayer? The Church teaches us that we may still receive the indulgence. Yes, if we are properly disposed – which means that we must be in the state of grace – and if we have been in the habit of praying throughout our life, then the Church supplies for what is lacking and gives the gift of the Apostolic Pardon all the same.<sup>2</sup>

Let us all, in this very moment, tell the Lord in our hearts: “Please give me that grace!” “Yes Lord, I want to be ready for my death; I want to be in your friendship and in your grace. I hope that a priest will make it in time, but if not, I still wish to receive the plenary indulgence at the point of death, the Apostolic Pardon.” Do you think he will grant that prayer? You can be certain of it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2631.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Manual of Indulgences* published by the Apostolic Penitentiary, published in English by USCCB Publishing (Washington, DC: 2006), page 54, art. 12.

But we have to do our part. Don't forget the conditions of being properly disposed and having had the habit of prayer. This is why our good and frequent use of the sacraments, and our daily prayer of forgiveness, is so important. St. Paul "competed well"; he "finished the race". We are in a race, but that means we not only have to train well for it, but we also must pace ourselves so that we make it to the end.

The daily act of contrition helps us keep the pace steady. Reflecting on our failings and then reaching out to God keeps us humble and helps us depend ever more on him, who alone can save us. He so greatly desires to do so! *Lord Jesus, help us to have confidence in your mercy and love and seek them often. Grant that we may compete well and finish the race. Show us, O Lord, your mercy! And grant us your salvation. Amen.*