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17 February 2008

The Second Sunday of Lent (A)

The Lord Jesus Christ has "saved us and called us to a holy life," yet so very often we do not walk upon the path that he has set before us (II Timothy 1:9).

It takes only a brief few moments of honest reflection to know that we have sinned and have strayed from the fold of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep (cf. John 10:11).

Having given in to temptation we are in need of reconciliation, which is achieved through the great Sacrament of mercy, the Sacrament of Penance.

Looking at the Gospel today we see, as it were, a sort of image of what happens in this Sacrament.

Examining our conscience - what we have done and what we have failed to do - we climb the interior mountain to that spot from which we look down on our lives. Ascending this mountain in prayer (cf. Matthew 17:1) we encounter the Lord, saying to him, "My heart has prompted me to seek your face; I seek it, Lord: do not hide from me" (Psalm 26:8-9).

We seek his face because there is within each of us a great longing, a yearning, for God. Saint Augustine put it this way:

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and hearts are restless until they rest in you."<sup>1</sup>

Standing, then, before the Lord we look upon him and gaze upon the beauty of his radiant light and we become aware that we are not worthy to stand before him.

Moses and Elijah stand beside the Lord, conversing with him about "his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). The Law and the Prophets help us to see our sin, our transgressions of God's commands. Moses and Elijah help us to see the necessity of the Lord's Passion and Death, together with the great depths of his love.

Seeing his holiness, we see our sin. Seeing his loveliness, we see that we are not all too lovely and we fall prostrate, very much afraid before him (cf. Matthew 17:6). With our sin before us and all worldly things left behind, we know that "What a man is before God, that he is, and nothing more."<sup>2</sup>

Conscious of our sin, we, like that tax collector, can only stand off at a distance and we dare not lift our eyes, but beat our breast in sorrow (cf. Luke 18:13).

Like Saint Peter, we stand off at a distance - where it is comfortable - until the Lord looks upon us and we "remember the

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, I.1.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Francis of Assisi. In St. Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 6.1.

word of the Lord;" then we, too, begin "to weep bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62).

The only words on our lips are these: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

Gazing upon the transfigured Lord we see his holiness and we are aware of our sinfulness. Seeing his glory we remember the source of this glory: the Cross of our salvation of which he spoke with Moses and Elijah. We remember, too, that his Cross is the result of our sin.

Conscious of all of this the fear of the Lord begins to take root in our hearts.

Perhaps this is a phrase with which we are not very familiar or do not like very much. But 'fear of God' is not anguish; it is something quite different. As children, we are not anxious about the Father but we have fear of God, the concern not to destroy the love on which our life is based.<sup>3</sup>

Seeing his love and seeing our sin, we know that we have separated ourselves from his love; this is the cause of our fear, it is the fear of the loss of the love of God.

We fall prostrate before the Lord of heaven and earth because we know that our sin has distanced us from him but it has not distanced the Lord from us!

He does not abandon us, but hears our humble cry and comes to us. Remember the words of the Psalmist:

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 15 August 2006.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,  
 upon those who hope for his kindness,  
 to deliver them from death  
 and preserve them in spite of famine (Psalm 33:18-19).

We know that the Lord "loves justice and right" and because of his justice man is condemned on account of his sin, but we also know that "of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full" (Psalm 33:5).

The Lord's "judgments are true and just" (Revelation 16:7) but for those who seek his mercy, "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). We encounter this mercy in the Sacrament of Penance through which our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled with God.

We come then to the Church confessing our sins to the priest, who acts in the person of Christ and, in the name of Christ absolves our sin.

When the words of absolution are spoken, Jesus comes and touches us, saying, "I have 'destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light'" (II Timothy 1:10). "Rise, and do not be afraid" (Matthew 17:7).

Having been raised up by the Lord we are able to raise our eyes and look into his (cf. Matthew 17:8). The reconciliation - a word which itself means to "see eye to eye" is accomplished. We have no more reason to avert our gaze from the Lord; no

longer does anything stand between the Lord and those who approach him in the Sacrament of Penance.

Is your heart at rest this day? Are you at peace? If not, know that it is because your heart is not resting in the Lord because your sin stands between you and Christ Jesus.

Why not approach the Lord's mercy this Lenten season? There is nothing to fear in the Lord. He turns no one away who seeks his mercy, who asks his forgiveness, who longs for his love.

Christ waits for you. Indeed, he has gone in search of you even as you continue to wander away from him. As he looks for us he calls out with the same words that we first called out: "My heart has prompted me to seek your face. Do not hide from me."

Do not stray any further. Turn and go to the Lord and you will know life, you will know love, and you will know peace. Amen.