

Examination of Conscience

O God, come to our assistance

O Lord, make haste to help us

Earlier today at the Solemn Liturgy, we recalled Jesus' death for the forgiveness of our sin, so that we might come to share life with God, a participation that begins even now in this present life: in our prayer; in our sharing with others the things of God, especially His love; and in our reception of the sacraments, particularly in the Mass, including in spiritual communion, in which we are joined to Jesus' saving death and resurrection, these having their effect in us, and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which we lay our lives before the Lord, open in every respect, so as to welcome Him and receive His loving mercy; and we remember that what we are offered by God in Jesus is a new life, not a return to Eden, but a transformed life in which God will be all in all; and this should give us hope.

In his Gospel, St John records Jesus saying the following:

I am the true vine,
and my Father is the vinedresser.
Every branch in me that bears no fruit
he cuts away,
and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes,
to make it bear even more.
You are pruned already,
by means of the word that I have spoken to you.
Make your home in me, as I make mine in you.
As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself,
but must remain part of the vine,
neither can you unless you remain in me.
I am the vine,
you are the branches.

Whoever remains in me, with me in him,
bears fruit in plenty;
for cut off from me you can do nothing.

This is an invitation to deep and real communion with God through Jesus. We have been called to life with God, as members of the Body of Christ, and through baptism and faith that is what we are. But we also know, given the frailty of our human nature, that this calling is something that we find it difficult to live up to – that we sin, and that our sin damages our relationship with God and with other people. The wonderful thing about God’s forgiveness and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is that they offer us the opportunity to repair these relationships and give us the strength to grow in the love of God and of others.

One of the things that we should learn from our experience of sin – whether this is to do with how we fail to treat others with love and respect or with our lack of love for God – is that we cannot live the Christian life unaided. In fact, we should learn from our failures that in the end we need to place our hope and trust in God rather than to rely on ourselves; and this, in turn, should lead us to recognise, poor and feeble as we are, God’s overwhelming love for us as made manifest in Jesus. The acceptance of our sin and what we are like should lead us to grow in humility, becoming evermore aware of God’s love for us, and so in thankfulness learn to grow in that love.

This growth, of course, can be difficult and uncomfortable, Jesus in the passage we have just heard speaking about us needing to be ‘pruned’ if we are to bear fruit. But, the counterpart of this is that as branches of the vine we have our true home in Jesus, just as he has made our home in us, and the result is that slowly, over time, we become conformed more and more to Jesus, as those things that lead us away from God are stripped from our lives and the intention of our hearts purified.

In confessing our sins, we should simply lay our lives bare before the Lord, difficult though this is. Of course, Our Lord knows all of our weaknesses and sins - He knows precisely what each one of us is like and doesn't need us to tell Him this. But, we need to allow Him to do something about this, and this means giving ourselves up to Him in complete honesty, so that over time we can be changed. Our Lord loves us unconditionally; we have only to learn to accept this.

As the Father has loved me,
so I have loved you.
Remain in my love.

I have told you this
so that my own joy may be in you
and your joy be complete.

A man can have no greater love
than to lay down his life for his friends.
You are my friends.

You did not choose me,
no, I chose you;
and I commissioned you
to go out and bear fruit,
fruit that will last;
and then the Father will give you
anything you ask him in my name.
What I command you
is to love one another.

This evening, of course, we cannot offer as we would usually do, the opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. So, instead, let us now take a few moments of silence to think over our sins and our need for God. Then, after this pause, let us say together – either silently aloud – the ‘I confess’ from Mass.

I confess to Almighty God
and to you my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore, I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

And recognising God’s love and goodness to us, let us say, Glory be to the Father...