

- During this time of year, as we approach the holy and penitential season of Lent, Holy Mother Church begins focusing our attention on sin and its devastating consequences through the readings at Mass.
- So for example, at our daily Masses this past week we heard about the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Next week we'll hear about the consequences of sin through the stories of Cain and Abel and Noah and the great flood.
- The purpose of these readings is to help us understand sin and its terrible consequences with the hope that we'll seek ongoing conversion during Lent, and thereby be prepared properly for Easter. With this in mind I'd like to talk today about the nature of sin.
- In meditating on sin and its consequences, our readings today make a couple of very important points for us to consider. The first point is that **sin separates us**. The second point is that when we do separate ourselves through sin, **God desires to reconcile with us**.
- In the first reading from Leviticus, we read about the directives our Lord gave to Moses and Aaron concerning lepers. Now keep in mind that to the Israelites, leprosy wasn't simply a terrible and disfiguring disease. It had a moral connotation as well.
- Physical ailments and illnesses, especially leprosy, were seen as manifestations of evil or sin. They were often thought to be the result of divine punishment for sin and symbolized a lack of integrity or wholeness in the afflicted person.
- The point that our Lord makes today to Moses and Aaron is that those who contract leprosy must live apart from the community. The spiritual symbolism of this statement is obvious, because sin does the same thing: it separates us from God and from the Body of Christ.
- Leprosy is also a good analogy for sin because not only did it cause the leper to be separated from the community, but leprosy also deformed and disfigured its victims. Sin does the same thing! Sin disfigures our souls so that we become less of who we are called by God to be!
- Sin makes us ugly.
- As Catholics we distinguish between two basic categories of sin: venial sin and mortal sin.
- Venial sins are our lesser sins. While they do not completely separate us from God or the Body of Christ, they do injure our friendship with God. They involve a disobedience to God in matters of less importance.
- A mortal sin, however, is much more serious. Mortal sins completely break off our relationship with God and they separate us from the Body of Christ. It's like spiritual leprosy. When we commit a mortal sin, we are no longer in a state of grace.
- When we are in a state of grace, we are oriented and moving toward God. In committing a venial sin, we're still oriented toward God, but we're knocked a little off course. Mortal sin, however, is a complete about-face, such that we are oriented and moving away from God.
- For a sin to be mortal, three conditions have to be met: First, the sin must be grave matter – it must be very serious. Secondly, you must know that the sin is grave, and lastly, you have to willingly choose to do it anyway.
- And sadly, if we die in a state of un-repentant mortal sin, we lose the eternal reward Christ won for us on the cross. In other words, if we die without being sorry for our mortal sins, we merit the eternal pains of hell.
- You see, my friends, God condemns no one to hell. We condemn ourselves by knowingly and willingly turning away from God in a grave way. And that's the horror of sin.

- Because we separate ourselves from God and from the Body of Christ through our mortal sins, we are not allowed to receive Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin. To do so is a sacrilege and one of the worst sins we can ever commit.
- When we receive Holy Communion, we demonstrate our communion with God and with His Church. Reception of Holy Communion is both the sign that we believe what the Church teaches and that we are living accordingly.
- But if we turn away from God through mortal sin, we are not in communion with Him. Thus, knowingly receiving Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin is an affront to God because you are lying with your actions. It's a disingenuous act.
- The good news is that when we do separate ourselves from God and from the Body of Christ through our sins, God wants to bring us back. Like a good shepherd, He always goes after the lost sheep. And this is the second point we can glean from the readings today.
- In the Gospel today a leper approaches Jesus and begs Him for healing: "If you wish, you can make me clean." And Jesus, moved with pity, touches the man and says: "I do will it. Be made clean." Immediately the man is healed.
- And the same is true for us and our sins. If we humbly approach our Lord, repent of our sins, and ask for forgiveness, God will give it to us. His deepest desire is that all of us be made clean from the stain of sin so that we can enjoy eternal life with Him in heaven!
- Thus God makes forgiveness readily available. If our sins are venial, we are forgiven every time we receive Holy Communion worthily. For those who are ill, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick also forgives venial sins.
- For mortal sin, however, we must go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And when it comes to confessing our mortal sins, we must not only be explicit in confessing the sin, but to the best of our ability, we must try to recount how many times we've committed it.
- With all that being said, as your pastor I am less concerned about what your sin is, and much more concerned that you recognize your sin *as sin* and have a desire to be reconciled.
- While some sins are certainly worse than others, there is no sin that God will not forgive. But in order for us to be forgiven, we must recognize that what we've done is wrong, be sorry about it, confess it completely, and try not to commit that sin again.
- Moreover, there is no end to God's mercy. So many times people come to me in the confessional upset that they keep confessing the same sins over and over again. But as I mentioned last week, we can never allow ourselves to despair over our sins.
- No matter how bad our sins are, and no matter how many times we commit them, God will always forgive us if we're truly sorry and try to amend our lives. And it's in this process of trying to root out sin from our lives that we find holiness.
- Holiness does not come about just through simple avoidance of sin. Holiness, my friends, comes about through perseverance in prayer and in trying to live virtuously. We become holy, my friends, by humbly recognizing our sins and confessing them honestly.
- We become holy by turning away from our sins, and joining in communion with the Body of Christ.
- My dear friends, soon Lent will be upon us. As we prepare for this holy season, let us be conscious of our sins and seek God's mercy. Like the leper in the Gospel today, let us ask God to make us clean, and let us trust that He will do it.