

- One of the lessons my father constantly tried to teach my siblings and me while we were growing up is that our actions have consequences. One of my father's favorite phrases that we heard over and over again was "think before you act."
- While Dad wanted to orient us toward making right decisions, toward choosing the right things in life, he also simply wanted to protect us from harm.
- Unfortunately, like most boys my brother and I had to learn this lesson the hard way. But somewhere around age 12 or 13, after I had broken a couple of bones and had had dozens of stitches from various accident, the message began to sink in!
- Both my brother and I have a couple of scars on our bodies that remain as reminders of some of the bad decisions we made in our childhood.
- But as a priest, I can tell you that the scars we bear on our bodies from physical wounds are never as devastating as the scars that we bear on our souls from the bad moral choices we've made in life.
- One of the most poignant lessons that I've learned from sitting in the confessional every Saturday afternoon for five years is that our moral choices have a definitive meaning and finality. Our sins affect us. They wound us and scar us. And ultimately they can kill us.
- Both our first and second readings today talk about sin and encourage us to turn away and repent. But our Gospel story today follows on the heels of the famous story of the disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus.
- What's most interesting about today's Gospel is that when Jesus appears to the disciples, He identifies Himself by His wounds. Our Lord directs His disciples to look at His hands and feet as a way to prove His identity.
- As we consider our Lord's wounds, let us be clear about something: we put those wounds there. Our Lord was perfectly innocent during His life on earth, and yet as Isaiah prophesied, Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our sins.
- And in the process of wounding Jesus through our sinfulness, we also wounded ourselves.
- In philosophical terms sin is a privation; specifically, it deprives us of sanctifying grace. It never improves or adds to us in any way. In fact, sin makes us less than who we truly are.
- Sin distorts our true self by taking away part of our true self. It always wounds. It wounds our relationship with God, with one another, with the Church, and ultimately it wounds our souls. But there is a bright side to all of this!
- We are now in the Easter season: the season in which we celebrate the fact Jesus has conquered sin and death. Jesus has definitively won the battle between life and death!
- While Jesus still has His wounds, these wounds reveal Christ for who He Is – the incarnation of sacrificial love – and they also glorify the Father. And those wounds, my friends, are the means of our salvation.
- In the same passage that Isaiah tells us the Jesus was pierced for our offenses, he also tells us that by His stripes we will be healed. Because our Lord was willing to take on our spiritual infirmities and to be crushed for our sins, because He is the expiation for our sins, we have been redeemed.
- And yet while Christ has won the war over sin and death, and while we know what the final outcome will be, the battle for eternal life is still played out in each and every human soul.

- While we know that Christ died to save us, we still have to exercise our free wills so that we choose to cooperate with the grace that saves us. We still have to choose to repent from our sins. In this process it is important that we understand just how devastating sin can be.
- It's important to realize that our sins, no matter how small or insignificant we think they might be, can easily ensnare and entrap us.
- For truly, my friends, there is no such thing as a "little" sin or a hidden sin. Even those venial sins that we don't think much about and rarely confess have the power to deform us.
- And left unchecked, our venial sins can quickly lead us to mortal sins and to an enslavement from which it is not easy to recover.
- To make matters worse, we are now living in an age and in a society in which many sins are glorified and even defended as fundamental human rights.
- And those people who do have the courage to speak out against the popular sins of today are labeled as judgmental, intolerant, and even lately, as terrorists.
- As a pastor, I am constantly confronted with the responsibility of helping you form your consciences according to the teachings of the Church. Quite honestly, this obligation I bear toward you is not an easy one, especially when we consider the world we live in.
- I am often tempted to say less than I should for fear of offending some of you, especially when it comes to difficult issues like abortion, same sex unions, cohabitation and contraception. But, my dear friends, I cannot be silent. These things are intrinsically evil.
- If we do not repent of these sins or any other sins that the Church qualifies as mortally sinful, they can lead us into hell.
- I tell you this not to shame you or scare you, but because I love you and care for your soul, and as your father in faith, I want to protect you from harming yourself, just as my own father tried to protect me.
- Moreover, I want to remind you that priests are not the only ones who bear this responsibility of witnessing to the truths of our faith. It's your responsibility too. As baptized Catholics you too have the responsibility of being a soldier for Christ. You too share in the apostolic mission of the Church.
- In the second reading today St. John tells us clearly that we can know if we are truly in relationship with God by whether or not we keep His commandments. When we don't keep His commandments, we sin and thereby wound the Body of Christ and ourselves.
- And so, my friends, if you are living in a way that goes against the teachings of Christ, which are proclaimed by the Church, then please heed the words of the first reading today: "repent and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away."
- Last week was Divine Mercy Sunday, and what Divine Mercy Sunday teaches us is that God's mercy is for the taking, but we have to first acknowledge our sins for what they are, and then we have to do our best to turn away from them.
- As your pastor, I am less concerned with what your sins are, and more concerned that you at least recognize your sins *as* sins and do your best to repent.
- We can never presume upon God's forgiveness; we must ask for it. So please do not be hard of heart, and please do not let pride get in the way of receiving forgiveness for your sins.
- Place your trust in the Church's teachings, for they come from Christ Himself, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and they have been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit.
- And in repenting from our sins, let us together faithfully witness to the beautiful truths of our faith so that all men might be saved.