

- For those of you who were busy looking at our beautiful new church while I was preaching last Sunday, I gave a homily on how our passions and sinful inclinations can truly harm us by distorting our souls and making it more difficult to see the Truth and act upon it.
- I talked about some of the dangers of falling into sin through a weak will: how it takes away our peace and makes us vulnerable to committing more sin, and how it can ultimately lead our souls to hell.
- I also mentioned how the virtues of humility and charity, along with the spiritual practices of fasting and penance, can help us learn to master our wills and overcome the temptations to sin that our passions can provoke within us.
- In our Gospel today our Lord gives us a little primer on sin and the importance of trying to avoid it at all cost. Therefore, I'd like to talk a little more about sin, its effects, and what we can do to avoid it.
- Benjamin Franklin once said that: "Sin is not hurtful because it is forbidden, but it is forbidden because it is hurtful." And he's absolutely right! Not only is sin hurtful to the one who commits the sin, but it is also hurtful to those around us.
- As I've mentioned before, sin enslaves us. It makes us less than who we are called to be. Sin robs us of our personal dignity and it distorts our true character. As the French author Andre Gide put it: "sin obscures the soul."
- But our sins also affect on those around us, and our Lord addresses this in the Gospel today. And being a cause of temptation for others or inducing others to sin is a sin.
- Jesus says: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea." These are pretty harsh words from the Prince of Peace! But we must take them seriously.
- When we lead others into sin through our sinful actions, we jeopardize their souls. Or if our sins are known to others or made public, they may cause scandal – which can cause people to fall away from the Faith, thus jeopardizing their souls!
- Sadly, the Catholic Church in this country knows firsthand the devastation that scandal can cause. For example, in the wake of the sex abuse scandal that rocked the Church in 2002, hundreds of Catholics left the Church, especially in parishes where abuses took place.
- But even on a small scale, giving rise to scandal and inducing others to sin is something we must be wary of. One issue that comes readily to mind is dressing modestly. When we dress immodestly, we may lead others to sin, and this is especially sad when it happens at Mass!
- Parents, too, must be very careful about what they say and do around their children. Children pick up on everything, and sometimes they can be very quick to call you out for your sins and moral failures.
- But what's worse than that is that children often end up committing the same sins as their parents. If you're living in a way that is morally compromising or if you have habitual sins that are apparent to your kids, it's very likely that they will think nothing of doing the same things as they grow older.
- Thus, it's very important that we try to make reparation for the damage we cause to others by our sinful actions. It begins by making apologies when necessary.
- As weak humans, all of us sin from time to time. No one outside of Jesus and our Lady have ever lived perfect lives. And because we sin, we must ask for forgiveness, first from God, but also from those who may have been affected by our sin.

- But in addition to asking for forgiveness, we also need to show we're sorry for our sins and make restitution, and that's why the priest gives us a penance whenever we go to confession.
- Penance helps us to restore the balance of justice we disrupted by our sin. It's a way that we can make up for what we've done wrong. And that's why it's important for Catholics to perform acts of penance on a regular basis.
- Penance brings healing to our soul, and it helps us right our relationship with God. Penance also helps to deepen our sense of contrition, making us less likely to commit the same sin again in the future.
- In addition to talking about leading others into sin in today's Gospel, our Lord also speaks about the necessity of avoiding whatever leads us to sin.
- We are told: if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. . . . And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. . . . And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out, for it is better to go through life without these things rather than be thrown into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire.
- Hopefully it's obvious that our Lord is speaking figuratively here. He doesn't really expect us to maim ourselves.
- Our Lord's point is that we should do everything in our power to avoid those things that lead us into sin, what we call in Catholic parlance: "the near occasion of sin." Jesus makes the point that we should do this because if we don't, there may be – very literally – hell to pay.
- I say this not to scare you, but simply to underscore our Lord's own words. Please understand, my friends, that when it comes to sin, the stakes are high. So many people today waltz through life, sinning with reckless abandon, with nary a thought to the consequences.
- And yet there are always consequences to our sins, whether we recognize them or not. Sin not only offends God, but it alienates us from God and makes it harder for us to love and live a holy life. So we must try with all our might to avoid sin at all cost.
- Personally, I love the stories of the virgin martyrs, like St. Agnes, and even more recently, St. Maria Goretti, who preferred to die rather than allow themselves to be defiled by sin.
- They give us hope and show us a great example of courage in the face of sin. The virgin martyrs remind us of how we are called to love God above all things – even our own lives.
- Now if we wish to avoid sin, then we must also avoid the near occasion of sin. For a lot of us in today's world, that means being very careful about the type of media we expose ourselves to, especially on television and the internet.
- It also often means learning to avoid or limit contact with those people in our lives who easily lead us into one of the 7 deadly sins like anger, lust or envy.
- Ultimately, we must learn to constantly throw ourselves on God's mercy, and trust that He will give us the grace we need to overcome temptation when we face it, and that He will forgive our sins when we fall prey to our temptations if we make a good confession.
- My dear friends, let us listen well to the words of our dear Lord today. Let us flee from every temptation to sin as if our lives depended upon it, for in truth, they do.