

## I HAVE SINNED

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

With your permission, Lord Jesus Christ, truly present with us in the Blessed Sacrament, Lord Jesus, give us light, give us instruction on this key means to connect with you more profoundly, more lovingly. And that is your constant invitation to repentance and conversion. Conversion and repentance are almost the same concept, I guess. Step number one in conversion always harkens back to repentance. The father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son represents God, our loving Father, but also represents Jesus Christ who is the mirror image of God the Father. And we want to bring that parable to life in our prayer and in our life. We know- because we're all a captive audience, we are here because we want to follow Jesus more closely, and this eagerness to follow him is not determined by our weaknesses or lack of virtue. Lack of virtue and sinfulness are incompatible with holiness as long as we deal with it according to the mind and heart of Christ. I say that because we have the collective experience- I'm not saying it's easy. I'm not saying it's comparable to going to Great America. But, we have this collective experience that our best self emerges when I am transparent with myself, that I call a spade, a spade. I recognize my wrongdoing that I am honest with God and I enhanced that honesty with God through another person who represents Jesus Christ, and that is through the sacrament of reconciliation.

As a rookie priest - I'm not a rookie priest now - but when I was one, I erroneously believed that one of the reasons we have to confess our sins, especially the more grievous ones - kind and number, as the Church teaches - as a penance, or, if you will, a medicinal punishment to help us avoid sin in the future because part of the price you pay is you have to say it to somebody. Saying it to God isn't that bad, but saying it to somebody else takes courage - it's challenging, it's humiliating. I couldn't have been more wrong. Maybe there's a little bit of that- it is so salutary and, you know and I know, I don't mean to be anti-ecumenical that we're all Catholics here or- but mostly Catholics - and there are non-Catholics warmly welcomed - but there is a difference. Should we confess our sins directly to God? Of course, that's part of our prayer life. We should be doing that often. We can't be going to confession many times a day. There has to be certain periodic confession, but it can't be excessive because doing it at certain times arouses more repentance. If we need to go off, we go off.

But there is a mighty difference between identifying our wrongdoing with God and identifying our wrongdoing vis-à-vis another person. The repentance is much more acute. And not that emotional reaction

is essential to confession, but maybe we all have that same experience as well when we confess to God or even discuss our wrongdoing with a confidant. And when we kneel down and go to confession, there is maybe more of an emotional reaction and sometimes we surprise ourselves. Well, why this emotional reaction? Because this verbal expression of our wrongdoing enhances my contrition and enhances my experience of a God who gives me a big hug when I repent. And, you know, you're hearing this from a guy who's not all that sentimental, but that's what it is, that's what the gospel says.

I'm not here to share whether I'm sentimental or not, I'm here to preach the gospel. As we look at the gospels, in general, circumventing the infinitely- infancy narratives, because it doesn't work if we just focus on the infancy narratives - everybody's good, you know, one person's immaculately conceived, somebody else happens to be God, St. Joseph is, you know, he's not full of grace the way Our Lady is. But if anybody's full of grace, it's him, given his vocation, his singular vocation anyway. But we go to the public life and you have the whole cast of characters who have repented, have gone to confession, different personalities. And it's not just white lies in their past, it's pretty grievous sins, even among the apostles themselves. And we see that they're not just good at self-examination. It has nothing to do with just self-examination, that everyone to a man and to a woman, their first step in examining their conscience is to look at Jesus Christ, that exchange of words, that contemplation of the goodness of Jesus elicits that profound repentance. And that's how the Holy Spirit is illuminating our Holy Father. Our Lord Jesus Christ wants to get that great majority of people- great majority of at least baptized Christians back to Christ. And so, we need to always lead with the merciful heart of Christ.

Mary Magdalene didn't convert because she read *A Treatise on Purity*. Maybe she read it after she converted, but not before - she looked at him. Peter wept in repentance getting geared up for that triple "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you." Only when Our Lord looked at him and what did that look say? Peter, I predicted it; really, come back. And that look said, I want you back. I don't want you to get discouraged. I don't want you to wallow in self-pity. I want you back. And even to his very last friend who he met, when he hung on the Cross. When that new friend, traditionally called the Good Thief," says I deserve this, you don't.

Remember, I'm by far not an expert on art, but there's one painting that catches my attention. It's a Caravaggio. That painting- painter spent time in prison for killing a person and his painting of the Conversion of St. Paul. That's why he is a "hall of fame painter." First, in the expression of St. Paul's face, there's a humble repentance, recognition of his own wrongdoing. And his wrongdoing was very severe. He didn't know better, but the data said he hated Christ. How much, he knew better. He was a serious Pharisee. And so, basically, that was his sin - hatred of Christ and hating the followers of Christ and fanatically persecuting the Church.

Saul, the first persecutor of the Church, and Our Lord looked at him and said, "Saul, Saul. Why do you persecute me?" Caravaggio captures that expression of awe, that expression of contrition and vulnerability. He's vulnerable, on the ground. He's on his back. This strong man, this fanatical young man, riding a horse

or horses, big deal in those days, with his, you know, type A+ personality, cleaning up Jerusalem of all the followers of Christ and heading to Damascus to do the same thing. And he's completely transformed, he's powerless. And he's repentant. And because he's so repentant he becomes one of the greatest evangelizers in the history of the Church. And he didn't repent because of self-analysis, he repented because of looking at Our Lord.

We will get into the Prodigal Son, but we won't go over a half hour, so you know. You're probably saying well, you know, you said Prodigal Son but so far you're still introducing your meditation, this contemplation of Christ. I mean, that's step number one. No one just dryly says, you know, I got issues and I have to change those issues. No, it's always seeing Our Lord and changing.

I remember reading a biography of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Edith Stein, a genius philosopher. She studied under a very famous philosopher and at age thirteen became an atheist. At age thirteen I hardly knew how to read and write. But anyway, she became an atheist after all her philosophical study. And if you would figure, well, maybe after she read Aristotle or- or Thomas Aquinas, you would convert because she was such a brilliant intellectual. No, she didn't. She softened up when she became a volunteer nurse and observed both Catholic and non-catholic Christian nurses during World War I – their love, their affection. And then she got burned out because she was studying so hard and working so hard. A Jewish woman and a Catholic friend said that if you want to use my bungalow and chill out for a few days, the house is yours. And she took took her up on it and, like any bona fide intellectual, notice the book - probably the friends had strategically placed it - there a book on the coffee table, the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila. So, instead of chilling out, she pulls an all-nighter and reads the whole thing and basically says, I have discovered the truth. Well, you didn't read our stall, you didn't read any philosophy book. What do you mean you discovered the truth? Basically, she saw the goodness of Christ in this Carmelite nun, Teresa of Avila.

Now, my conversion is just as valid and these conversions we read about the lives of the saints and in the gospel, perhaps without the melodrama or ostensible glamour, but it's still the same kind of drill. And so, we open up because our life is the gospel. Our Lord talks to us through the gospel and he tells us what happens in confession. But we read, this is me. And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father: 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the youngest son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country and there he squandered his property in loose living." Jesus, through this parable, defines what a sin is - probably means my will; probably means myself. And every sin is a lie, it's a very basic lie. I can be happy without God and that's what it said. Very seldom do we sin by, well, I want to hurt God directly. No, I choose to become happy without God. I could be- I could be happy by violating his commandments. Or it's another lie. I can't become totally happy by living by his commands. And the devil, who is the father of lies, prompts that too. Isn't that how the first sin began? It began with a lie. You'll be like, God knowing good and evil.

Well, every lie has a strain of truth, as Aquinas says, because you can't have a pure lie - there has to be a little bit of truth in there for it to exist. Yeah, he- they would know good and evil, but it's like saying well, you know, I have more knowledge because now I know what it's like to have my- my finger cut off. So, it always begins with a lie - I could be happier without God. He believed more in the god of lust, and in this case, than the joy he had when he was with his father. And like all kinds of deception there is when we sin, there may be a cheap thrill that is subsequent to the sin, especially with a sense of anger, greed, lust, well, and then the bottom drops out and what leaves is joy. Sadness is one of the symptoms of sin and a low self-esteem and a loss of freedom freedom from our passions, freedom to have good relationships, freedom to love other people, freedom to pray. And so, what happens? Here- we see here of this very graphic. It's allegorical too. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country and he began to be in want. I mean, that's what a- it's lack of meaning this- this lack of hope that is a consequence of sin.

Periodically I mention being a priest. I got a little bit more of insiders information on consciences, not that I would reveal the consciences of others, but I think I can safely say I have not met anybody yet, and I've been at it for many years who's said, I'm so happy because I got back at someone I dislike severely, and I had this wonderful opportunity to insult him, and it's made my week. I've not met that person yet. Or I got away with stealing significant amount of money and want to make restitution, but the person died. So that's made my week too. Now I don't have to pay it back. I haven't met that person. Well, I know it's wrong, but I feel real good about myself because I'm looking at inappropriate images. I know it's- I know it's not right, but wow, I'm high on life because I'm doing that. I've not met that person.

And we don't- we don't need a theology book to know that, but our God is infinite love and Jesus is the incarnation of infinite love. And that's the only explanation why a God we affect is euphoric over our repentance and seems to almost ignore our offenses against him. In fact, he doesn't. He ignores our offenses against him, but he doesn't ignore his- what the sin does to us. That's what he- he's offended because he loves us so much. He knows those that sin is damaging and we see what happens here, that God doesn't need this. So, as they- as you say in modern parlance, the prodigal son reached rock bottom. He began to suffer want. He went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into the- his scent- into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine had, and no one gave him anything.

Now, when these- when the people heard this for the first time it was very jarring because the pig was the most disgusting animal among the Jewish people. It represented sin and filth and so much that you couldn't open up a hot dog stand, that's for sure, unless they are made of beef. I mean, pork was spiritually poisonous, morally poisonous, for the Jewish people. And so, he becomes a pig for his dignity has reached rock bottom. And nothing God creates is evil, but the impact- he felt despicable. He's not eating as well as this despicable animal called a pig. And God, in his mercy, is prompting him to repent. And- and step number one is what? It's- it's contemplating how good his father is; that's the first step, how happy he was with his father, the goodness of his father, I mean. That's how Augustine converted. I mean he was- he was a party animal with a lot of emphasis on the animal, that he was reading like he was going out of style. He knew he was

conversant with Scripture, but he had seen St. Ambrose, he had to see the goodness of Our Lord to get the repentant machinery moving.

And the prodigal son says this, "But when he came to himself," alright now because- because repentance is all about truth. It's, first of all, it's seeing the truth of Christ that he is the source of my happiness. And that is seeing this- the truth of myself, what- where I stand next to Christ and to own up to my wrongdoing, not to wallow in self-pity, but to release it. And what I need to struggle against, I don't know. If you read the book - I didn't read the book - I heard the book *The Story of Steve Jobs*, and this phrase keeps appearing in the biography, that he had an explosive temper and he was unreasonable and could be abusive. And the author says that he had what he would call it, an unrealistic or distorted reality field, that he saw a reality through the prism of his own selfishness, so-called distorted reality field.

Well, Lord, I know I say I'm guilty of a distorted reality field. When it comes to me I tend to give myself a lot of passes and I may not- may tend not to give anybody else passes. I'm the only person I give a pass to. Lord, I don't want to give myself a pass. I want to come to myself. And yes, I have a vested interest. I want to release this stuff, I want to get rid of that barrier between you and me. I want to convert, but I got to go through repentance just like these saints that Mark, the gospel, and the rest of the New Testament. He came to himself and he says, "But how many of my father's hired servants have bread enough to spare, but I perish here with hunger? What a difference between being with my father and squandering my property. I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.' And he rose and came to his father."

That's what confession is all about. But basically, that's what it's about- when I confess my sins. I say, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son." And what is Our Lord do? He exalts him, he gets the older brother pretty upset. Here's this hedonist, irresponsible, selfish kid. And he just said all he has as he throws his arms around his father. His Father's watching for him to come back every day and throws him a huge party. Well, God who is an infinitely loving God, rejoices. He's glorified in my repentance, so I want to be a good repentor. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you I'm no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe." The robe represents Christ - isn't that what Paul says, put on Christ? - "And put it on him and put a ring on his hand," - which represents loving fidelity, another allusion to Christ - "and shoes on his feet so he can walk with Christ. And bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and make merry." It's a veiled allusion to the Eucharist.

We finish our prayer - I want to read a couple of quotes from St. Josemaria. Recalling, it wasn't false humility- I, many years ago, hearing from someone who had a connection with St. Josemaria, that fact he was a physician and kept looking at St. Josemaria through the prism of a physician which would cause St. Josemaria to growl a little bit. You know, you always get self-conscious if someone's always looking at you through the prism of a physician. And he said, well, you look pretty happy. He wasn't, you know, evaluating

his spiritual life as much as his physical life, and you look pretty good. You look good today. And he said, well, hey, you want to know why you look so good today? He was a doctor. And St. Josemaria said, because I have made many acts of contrition today, more than usual. I played the role in the Prodigal Son. Another fall, despair. No, humble yourself and through Mary, your mother, have recourse to the merciful love of Jesus. Have mercy on me and lift up your heart and now begin again.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you've communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into affect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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