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The Mystery of Sin: Why We Must not Despair

"We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I work, I understand not. For I do not that good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do. If then I do that which I will not, I consent to the law, that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh, that which is good. For to will, is present with me; but to accomplish that which is good, I find not. For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do. ... For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

(Romans 7.14-24)

Read that again. *Carefully*. Every word of it. I know that it is a rather long citation, but it is necessary and profitable to you.

Have you read it? Good. Now, let's begin.

You've sinned ... *seriously*.

The very thing that you were determined never to do again ... you have just done. You even knew it as you were doing it. And you went ahead and did it anyway. Right? It's almost like a

second self, and you are watching it abstractly, aware of what is going on, but somehow strangely detached from it. The Siren Song of the moment seems to block out everything else, and you know that it is, after all, "just this one time more and that's it!".

In fact, it has already entered your heart – the sin – you have already committed it in thought, in desire, in intention – and the guilt will accrue to you even if you don't actually do it ... so ... why not? If you're going to pay the penalty you may as well at least enjoy the sin.

I wonder who could be whispering this so persuasively to you ...?

You've done it, and now you're miserable

Could you go back, you would undo it. You would flee the occasion, jump into the snow, hold your tongue, stay your hand ... *anything!* But the deed is done, and the lie comes crashing down upon your head. "Fool that I am!"

Yes. Fool that you are, that I am, that we are. As Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, whenever we sin we make fools of ourselves. How true.

And now we hide in shame, guilt – much like Adam and Eve in the Garden who hid from God when He came looking for them in the cool of the evening.

It goes back a long way, doesn't it? To the very beginning.

And now the devil has you in his grip – even more now than in your sin, for you flee from God, hide under something selfish and false called "regret", rather than coming forth with something genuine called "sorrow". You crawl into darkness, that terrible vortex of despair that would carry you off to death ... instead of contrition that will bring you back to life. What a victory! For that miserable serpent. What a loss ... for God, for the Church ... for you.

The mystery of sin. The utter ability of sin to blind! St. Paul understood this, even as he stumbled to understand the terrible power of sin. *"For I do not that good which I will; but the evil which I hate, that I do."*

Hello? Still with me?

That was Saint Paul. *Saint Paul!*

We must admire him tremendously! He did not put a veneer over the struggle, nor excuse himself in his failure to vanquish it. But what answer does St. Paul come up with to this terrible enigma? In the agony of his sin, he cries out, "*Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*"

But in the next breath he answers his own question – and ours: "*The grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord.*" **HE** will deliver me! His grace will deliver me. The Jesus Christ that he proclaimed from Corinth to Galatia, that Jesus Who came to call not the righteous but sinners, to gather the lost, to go after "the one who strayed", to go, not to those who are not sick, but to the sick!

Jesus Christ is his answer! **Mercy** is his answer! **Forgiveness** is his answer! ... In other words, **all the things you despair of!**

They are there for you --- in abundance. Were it never required of God, how could we call Him Merciful? Were it never required of God, how could we call Him Loving? Were it never required of God, how would we call Him forgiving?

Why is God Loving, Merciful, Forgiving?

Because we are sinful. Because it is needful to us ... a sinful people. To whom will He show His mercy, if not sinners? To whom will He give His loving forgiveness, if not to sinners? We would never be able to predicate of God, "mercy" and "forgiveness" were we *incapable* of sin – in other words, if we were perfect. But we are not. ... are we ...?

"And seeing the multitudes, he had compassion on them: because they were distressed, and lying like sheep that have no shepherd" (St. Matthew 9.36)

Sin remains a great mystery. Its ugliness, its hideousness, its malignant deformity, by and large remains hidden from us. But we do have clues. We can often see the **consequences** of our sins ... and they are devastating!

Even so, we see the mere superficialities, the more apparent effects that are, even in their terrible penalty, opaque to our understanding – we do not see the hidden effect of sin, how frightfully it affects the entire Church, the lives of others of whom we have no inkling – how sin, our sin, leeches into the suffering of others!

Just as our deeds that are holy affect the entire Body of Christ, are beneficial to the Church, and touch the lives of others in ways we never anticipate – most often through the medium of people we do not directly know – so it is with sin. As one Saint pleaded of God, "*Mercy, O God! Let me*

never see the full consequences of my sin, for I could not live in light of what I have done, and before the enormity and evil my sins have caused."

The Mystery of Sin is so Closely tied up with the Greater Mystery of Forgiveness

The mystery of sin is so closely tied up with the greater mystery of forgiveness. Ironically, we could sooner understand the mystery of sin – before we could arrive at an understanding of *the far greater mystery of forgiveness*.

Yes, you've sinned. Grievously. Recognize this. Ask God's mercy and forgiveness. Go to Confession. If your heart is sincere, He knows this, and His forgiveness is that of a Father's to a Prodigal son. Unstinting. Joyous. Overwhelming. Overflowing. Take! Receive! Embrace! What are you waiting for? ***He loves you!***

As to that fatal whisper of despair? Tell the devil to go to Hell, and get up and move on.

You've work to do --- and hitherto you have not so much as begun.



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