

FROM FATHER JOHN: *“The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!’ Jesus rebuked him and said, ‘Quiet! Come out of him!’ The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.’ His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee.” (Mark 1:22 – 28)*

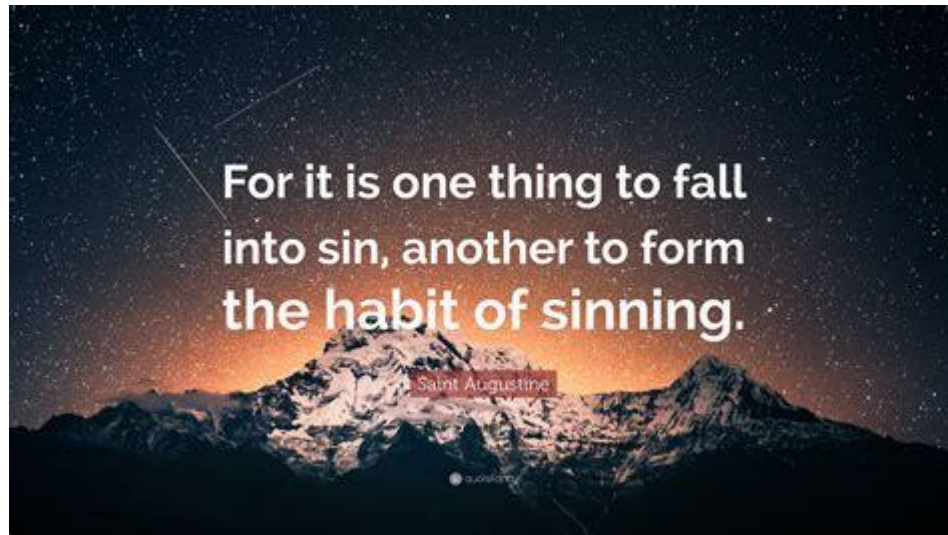


“I know who you are” the unclean spirit cried out to Jesus. It begs the question, “Who knows us?” Our Lord Jesus knows who we are; he knows us better than we know ourselves; he knows the number of hairs on our head (which is much easier to count on my head than on most other people). After all, our Lord Jesus created us, gave us life and sustains our lives through his grace and love?

Unfortunately, the devil knows us as well. The devil knows what tempts us; what desires, feelings and emotions to use to drive a wedge between us and God. He knows what causes us to fall into sin. Most people, when they come to the sacrament of confession, confess the same sins each time they come to

confession. It's because we make the same mistakes over and over again. The devil knows this, and he knows how to tempt us, repeatedly, into these same sins.

We need to know ourselves, and our temptations, to avoid sin. We need to grow in self-knowledge. We need to become aware of those times and situations that are “*near occasions of sin.*” These “*near occasions of sin*” can be different for each of us. We need to come to know and understand what they are for us so that we can avoid them and root sin out of our lives. How do we grow in this self-knowledge?



First, we need to pray every day. The more we develop our life of prayer the more we grow in relationship with the Lord. Think of it as having a friend. The more we talk to a friend, the closer we become because we continually get to know each other better.

Second, we must receive Holy Communion on a regular basis, at least weekly if not more often. The Eucharist is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus. When we receive Holy Communion, we are receiving our Lord Jesus into our very being. We enter an intimate moment of communion with our Lord and in doing so our Lord helps us to know ourselves as He knows us.

Third, we need to encounter our Lord Jesus in the sacred scriptures. The sacred scriptures are God's revelation of Himself to us.

Fourth, we need to develop the habit of going to the Sacrament of Penance (confession). We receive the grace of God every time we go to the sacrament and receive penance and absolution. This grace truly helps us drive sin out of our lives. We begin to see, over time, what the underlying causes of the sins that we keep falling into are. We become aware of what temptations we face in our lives that may lead us into sin. St. Pope John Paul II said that “***Confession is an act of honesty and courage – an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God.***”

Bishop Roger Kaffer, God rest his soul, was the Auxiliary Bishop of Joliet when I was in the seminary. During one of his homilies when he was celebrating mass with the seminarians from the diocese, he told us the story of a man who was in a forest surrounded by three huge trees. He couldn't see around the trees and he couldn't move past them. He was trapped. The only solution the man had was to cut down the trees. When he cut down the three large trees, he found that he was still surrounded by seven smaller, yet still large, trees beyond the original three. He hadn't seen them because the first three trees blocked his view. So, he cut them down the seven trees. After cutting them down, he saw eleven trees behind the seven trees. He was still trapped.

You can see where Bishop Kaffer's story is going. Each time we eliminate sin from our lives (i.e., cutting down those trees), we become aware of what lies beneath those sins. Every time we eliminate sins from our lives, we find what is lurking behind them tempting us to sin. We grow in holiness each time we eliminate sins from our lives and expose what lies behind them to the light of Christ.

When we come to know our Lord Jesus in prayer, in the sacraments, in the scriptures, we come to know ourselves as our Lord Jesus knows us. And this exposes those things lurking in the shadows tempting us to sin. Growth in our relationship with the Lord, growth in our knowledge of Him and His love for us, leads us to grow in self-knowledge and in holiness.

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.