

FROM FATHER JOHN: *"Then they came to Capernaum, and on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. 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 1:21 – 28.

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?



St. Theresa of Calcutta said that, *"We must have a real living determination to reach holiness. I will be a saint means I will despoil myself of all that is not God; I will strip my heart of all created things; I will live in poverty and detachment; I will renounce my will, my inclinations, my whims and fancies, and make myself a willing slave to the will of God."*

One of the things that we should do in our spiritual life during this season of Lent is to reflect on the nature of sin, why we are susceptible to falling into sin and how we can learn to avoid near occasions of sin. To do that, let's begin with Mark 1:21 – 28 (above).

The unclean spirit calls out to Jesus, *“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!”* Our Lord and God knows us better than we know ourselves. Scripture tells us that he knows the number of hairs on our head. God created us, gave us life and sustains throughout our lives by sharing his love and grace with us daily.

So God knows us. Who else knows us? The devil knows us as well. Unfortunately, he knows what emotions and feelings can drive each of us to sin. He knows the buttons within us to push, when to push them and how hard to push them in order to get us to sin. My experience of hearing confessions has taught me that most of us, myself included, confess the same sins over and over again. This is because the devil knows us and how best to tempt us and, because of this, we fall into the same sinful mistakes again and again.

The solution to this pattern of life is not simply to have the willpower to resist temptations although that is part of the solution. We also need to grow in self-knowledge and to become more aware of the things, the situations, the times that are near occasions of sin. These near occasions are different for each one of us which is why it's so important that we come to understand ourselves and the temptations that lead us to sin. This knowledge will allow us to avoid and resist the near occasions of sin in our lives.

Prayer leads to self-knowledge because the more we pray, the deeper our relationship with our Lord Jesus becomes. The Lord reveals many things to us in prayer and the knowledge of ourselves, of who we are, of who we are to become and how we fail is all part of what the Lord shares to us in our prayer life. It's similar to a human friendship. The more time we spend together the more we learn about our friend and about ourselves.

Holy Communion leads to better self-knowledge. The Eucharist is the *Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ*. We receive Christ Jesus into our very own being when we receive his Body and Blood. It is that intimate communion that the Lord offers us that helps us grow to know ourselves as our Lord Jesus knows us.

Developing the habit of regularly participating in the Sacrament of Penance helps us to identify those sins and temptations that are particularly difficult for us to overcome. God offers us His grace and mercy in the sacrament. His grace and mercy not only brings us forgiveness and absolution but also allows us to identify those sins that seem to have a deep hold on us. We receive forgiveness in the confessional but we also receive the self-knowledge that leads to a holier way of life.

When I was in seminary, Bishop Kaffer told us a story about a man who was in a forest surrounded by three huge trees. He couldn't see around them and couldn't move past them. His only solution was to cut them down. When he did that he realized that there were seven smaller, yet still large, trees behind the original three. He couldn't see them before because the first three blocked his view. But, he couldn't see around the seven trees and couldn't move past them. So he cut them down too. Then he saw eleven trees behind those seven.

The moral of the story is that the more we eliminate sin from our lives the more we become aware of what lies beneath those sins; what causes us to fall into the trap of sin. And, as we remove those causes from our life we will find what hides behind them as well. This is how we grow in holiness; Sacred scripture. Prayer, Eucharist, and Penance!

My prayer for all of us this Lenten season is that we all come to know our Lord Jesus and, as we enter into friendship with our Lord, we will come to better know ourselves and will receive the grace that we each need to grow in holiness of life.

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

