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# CONFESSION: THE SACRAMENT OF FREEDOM

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## WEEK 3~ *Getting Real: Taking Sin Seriously*

### I. Introduction – I’m not that bad, *right?*

- “The Christian answer — that we have used our free will to become very bad — is so well known that it hardly needs to be stated. but to bring this doctrine into real life in the minds of modern men, and even of modern Christians, is very hard.” ~ *C.S. Lewis*

### II. Social Drowsiness

- “When I recently happened to confess about fifty people in a typical Orthodox parish in Pennsylvania, not one admitted to having committed any sin whatsoever!” ~ *Fr. Schmemmann*
- Fr. Morelli: “Combating Secularism’s Most Serious Sin: Indifference.”
- The Church Fathers
  - "Insensitivity is deadened feeling in body and spirit and comes from long sickness and carelessness. Lack of awareness is negligence that has become habit. It is thought gone numb...." ~ *St. John of the Ladder*
  - "'I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.'" ~ *Revelation 3:15-17*
  - 'Sloth,' in this instance, is not of the kind we experience on a lazy summer vacation. Sloth means forgetfulness, to which the ascetics refer as 'greatest of all sins.' Forgetfulness means the inability to be amazed, to marvel or even see.... It is a frame of mind in which the only relevant criteria become utility, profitability and the correlation between price and quality...an over-crowded agenda...where every activity leads to another...violence, drugs...forget God and His creation...forget death and possible meaning beyond it...[it becomes] a spiritual neurosis...the means of forgetting...." ~ *Olivier Clement on the Prayer of St. Ephraim ("Take from me the spirit of sloth...")*

### III. C.S. Lewis on the Bad Influence of Psychoanalysis

- His book, *The Problem of Pain*, examines the reality of human wickedness and our modern insensitivity.
- *See quote above (Introduction)*
  - It was easy preaching this to the pre-Christian pagans. They were all deeply aware of their sin and how they deserved divine punishment and wrath. They knew they broken and when they found Jesus they found a solution

- But to modern me, we first need to be convinced that we are, after all, evil.
- We can't receive Jesus until we're really convinced we need him.
- Psycho-analysis has destroyed our natural sense of shame
  - "The second cause is the effect of Psycho-analysis on the public mind, and, in particular, the doctrine of repressions and inhibitions. Whatever these doctrines really mean, the impression they have actually left on most people is that the sense of Shame is a dangerous and mischievous thing."
- We are told that our feelings of shame are unjustified – 'it's only natural...'  
  - "We are told to "get things out into the open", not for the sake of self humiliation, but on the ground that these "things" are very natural and we need not be ashamed of them."
- God's wrath doesn't make sense until we really understand how serious sin is
  - "When we merely say that we are bad, the "wrath" of God seems a barbarous doctrine; as soon as we perceive our badness, it appears inevitable, a mere corollary from God's goodness."
- **We need a radical re-awakening**
  - "A recovery of the old sense of sin is essential to Christianity. Christ takes it for granted that men are bad."

#### IV. A Non-Guilt Culture

- **We live in a culture of non-guilt**
  - Fr. Schmemmann: "When I recently happened to confess about fifty people in a typical Orthodox parish in Pennsylvania, not one admitted to having committed any sin whatsoever!"
  - "We're capable of doing some *rotten* things, and not all of these things are the result of poor communication. Some are the result of rottenness. People do bad, horrible things. They lie and they cheat and they corrupt the government. They poison the world around us. And when they're caught they don't feel remorse—they just go into treatment. They had a nutritional problem or something. They *explain* what they did—they don't feel bad about it. There's no guilt. There's just psychology." - *the Minnesota storyteller Garrison Keillor*
- **We are taught that we should be guilty about feeling guilty**
  - "A sense of guilt—the painful awareness of having committed sins—can be life-renewing. Guilt provides a foothold for contrition, which in turn can motivate confession and repentance. Without guilt, there is no remorse; without remorse, there is no possibility of becoming free of habitual sins."  
 ~ *Lay theologian, Jim Forest*
- **Bad Guilt**
  - Dead-end streets
  - Guilt that you haven't been who you want people to know you as
  - We aren't called to be PERFECT – but WHOLE

- “When Christ says, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), He’s not speaking of getting a perfect score on a test, but of being whole, being in a state of communion, participating fully in God’s love.” ~ *Jim Forest*
- **Godly guilt**
  - “A blessed guilt is the pain we feel when we realize we have cut ourselves off from that divine communion that irradiates all creation.” Jim Forest

## V. What is Sin?

- **The big three-letter word: SIN**
  - Hebrew – chata’ & Greek - amartia
  - “to sin” – straying off the path, getting lost, missing the mark
- **Sin separates us from God**
  - “Sin makes us to be out of communion or what might be called disunion with God and neighbor. St. John Chrysostom states: "Did you commit sin? Enter the Church and repent for your sin; for here is the physician, not the judge; here one is not investigated, one receives remission of sins" (St. John Chrysostom) If the church is a "physician", then this break with God and neighbor needs healing. It is missing the mark of being centered on God and His Will. Sin is considered, therefore to be an illness or infirmity. With healing we are restored to a former condition.” ~ *Fr. Morelli*

## VI. The Passions

- **How it all happened**
  - “After the Fall we are predisposed to self-centered choices directed by the passions (lusts) rather than choices based on agape.” ~ *Fr. Morelli*
  - “. . . pandering to the flesh, produce(s) in us shameful urges and unseemly fantasies” ~ *St. Isaac*
- **Passions come from within**
  - "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man" ~ *Mark 7: 21-23*
  - "While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death" ~ *Romans 5:7*
- **Passions separate us from God**
  - "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" ~ *Galatians 5:19-21*

## VII. How Passions and Sin Work in Our Lives

- **Demon of lust**
  - “The demon of lust, the Church Fathers tell us, may take over our lives. Modern society facilitates this malady. Sex is broadcast everywhere for almost every use: art, fashion, music, news, pornography (especially the Internet), and the sale of almost any product from automobiles to computers, The secular world flagrantly exposes body parts” ~ *Fr. Morelli*
- **Demon’s wage war through thoughts**
  - "Demons wage war against the soul primarily through thoughts . . . " ~ *Ilias the Presbyter, Philokalia, III.*

## VIII. The Cure

- **Remembrance of God**
  - St. Diadochos of Photiki taught that "To avoid this passion...we must confine our mind...devoting ourselves solely to the remembrance of God."(Philokalia I) St. Hesychios the Priest wrote in *Philokalia I*
  - The life of attentiveness, brought on by fruition in Christ Jesus, is the father of contemplation and spiritual knowledge. Linked to humility, it engenders divine exaltation and thoughts of the wisest kind. The prophet Isaiah said: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings and soar aloft through the power of the Lord." ~ *Isaiah 40:31*
- **Remembrance of Sins**
  - “Pride makes us forget our sins ... the remembrance of them leads to humility.” ~ *St. John of the Ladder*
- **Going to confession**
  - “Great Grace is imparted to those who take advantage of this Sacrament. Some remarkable and extraordinary "miracles" have been known to happen in Confession...miracles of release from burdens, ephiphanies, something said which pierces the heart and effects change, etc. It is not so much that God gives the "authority" to the Priest. Rather, He works in His Church through the Priests. His grace and power are available and accessible in and through the Church, Her prayers, Her teachings, Her whole life and atmosphere.” ~ *Fr. Michael Shanbour*
- **SHINING THE FLASHLIGHT**
  - Cast light on it – bring it to a priest – and the devils flees

## IX. Summing Up -- We have to take our spiritual drowsiness very seriously

- The more we confess, the more we begin to wake up and see how desperately we need to confess. Little by little, the cycle continues – God shows us our passions and pathologically flaws, and shines the light on them.
- Thus, in this beautiful adventure of freedom and liberation, we are made into new beings: “being transformed into His image with intensifying glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” ~ *2 Cor. 3:18*