

Lent, IV

Once we have identified our predominant fault, we need to identify the virtue opposed to it. For this, we need clear doctrine. An unclear or false understanding of the virtues and vices can make quite a bit of trouble for the soul trying to do the spring cleaning of the soul we call Lent.

Sacred, orthodox doctrine is most necessary, since Christian, contemplative prayer goes through the Cross. There is no other pathway for union with God. The death of Christ opened this up. His wounds radiate the presence of God. But you cannot have those wounds unless in Christ. No one else has them.

Sacred teaching or doctrine unlocks deep prayer. This is one great reason we should not separate the content of our prayer from the prayers of the Mass. The Roman Missal is a glorious safeguard of truth for our prayer. No matter what your predominant fault is, you will find in the Mass of the day some idea which can be directly applicable to the overcoming of the fault. And catechism is far more than just prep for 1st communion. Christ has two natures, but He is one person. And He is one with God. We need this bedrock of belief to form our pursuit of virtue.

Now some think that the Holy Trinity is a mystery, and since it is a mystery, this means we can't figure it out so we throw up our hands and walk away from it. But it isn't a giant puzzle to be figured out. It is not that kind of mystery. It is a mystery like something which is intensely beautiful is a mystery; something that no matter how long you look at it, you will always see something more, something new. It is inexhaustible in this sense.

St. John of the Cross wrote a poem once called the *Spiritual Canticle*, which he wrote while he was in prison. After he got out of prison, he wrote a commentary on every strophe. It is about the progress of the interior life. Strophe 12 describes a woman looking into a pool. As she looks into the pool, the water reflects her face back at her. As she looks deeper and deeper into the pool, past her reflection, she notices standing behind her is an image of the one whom she loves. She recognizes the eyes of her lover in the pool. That pool he says, are the truths of our faith; the propositions we believe. We believe them not just because they are true; not just because the Church proclaims them as true, but we believe them because they actually carry God with them. So, like the deeper reflection, you can see the eyes of God looking at you with love as you grasp the doctrines or propositions of the Faith.

So, as you allow the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to become calm and smooth in your soul, you will see a reflection even of yourself, because you have been created in the image and

likeness of God. And you will also see His eyes, looking at you, who loved you from all eternity. And He is waiting for you, deep in your soul.

Therefore, when we share good doctrine, and the truths of the Faith with each other, the sharing is a moment of actual grace. This is why in a class, or a sermon, or reading a book, we are moved sometimes profoundly in our souls. It's a moment that can lead us into deep prayer and conversion.

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity knew this better than most. When she was 17, she attended a parish mission – plenty of fire and brimstone – and was confused by it all. So she went to a Dominican priest (Fr. Valee) who knew that good doctrine helps you see God, but bad doctrine blinds you to Him. The bad doctrine she was getting at the mission was what we now call Jansenism. In this doctrine you approach God only through fear. But there is a difference between the fear of the Lord and being afraid of God. Being afraid of Him is thinking that because you made a mistake, He is going to do something to you; something bad. And so your spiritual life, your life of prayer, is one of anxiety and worry. He is not waiting in joy to receive you; He is waiting to pounce on you and punish terribly. This robs the soul of the peace and rest that should normally come from prayer. We are supposed to rest in the heart of God. "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest." our Lord says. You should not be on pins and needles with someone who loves you, and cares for you.

In the meantime, God grant we all work hard on the virtues opposed to our predominant faults, and not lose heart!

The person who only sees his weaknesses and faults will lose courage. The person who, fully aware of his weaknesses, recalls at the same time Your omnipotence and Your infinite mercy, that person will have the courage and strength to accomplish everything.

Many know this truth and nevertheless think and live as if your grace counted for little, as if they were by themselves and all alone the artisans of the great work to be achieved.

O Jesus, lift the veil that covers my eyes, the shackles that blind my heart, so that I may say with St. Paul, "Lord, without your grace I am nothing." I rejoice to know my weakness so well: in fact this knowledge keeps me humble, and humility guarantees the presence of Your divine omnipotence in my soul. (Bl. Edward Poppe)