

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Epiphany, 2021

“May these offerings, we beseech Thee, O Lord, cleanse us from our sins.” The Secret

A young Polish priest once wrote the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and asked if he could stay at a rectory to experience the United States and practice his English. Only one priest accepted this, and the Polish priest enjoyed his stay in our country greatly, and became friends with the American priest. He came back many years later as a Cardinal in 1976, and a few years later as Pope John Paul II. At the Mass in Philly the pope saw his old friend in the crowds of priests vested to concelebrate the Mass, and invited him up to be by his side. The crowds parted to let him go up, wondering who the priest could be, like Bartimeus came up through the crowds at Jericho, beckoned by the Lord.

This is a pleasant anecdote, and the humanity of the incident warms us. But in his message to the faithful, the pope was not pleasant, but serious...gravely serious. “We are today before the greatest combat that mankind has ever seen. I do not believe that the Christian community has completely understood it. We are today before the final struggle between the Church and the anti-Church, between the Gospel and the anti-Gospel.”

The crowds listened to him politely, but likely let those words slip by and were more concerned to shake the pope’s hand or get their baby kissed by him. But was he right? Are we now in the final struggle, and if so, what does final mean?

I wish to focus on one meaning of that apocalyptic phrase of the pope, and that is sin. When we see clips of riots on Twitter, we are watching people commit mortal sin. When we watch people yelling blasphemies and obscenities on Facebook, we are watching and listening to people committing mortal sin. When we watch a politician lying to shirk their responsibility, we are watching a mortal sin being committed. But most do not notice this. Most seem unable to even detect that sin is being committed.

When a baby or an adult is being baptized in the traditional rite, the rite of Ephetha is required to be given. The priest wets his thumb just a little, and touches it to the nostrils of the one being baptized, and says, “Ephetha, be thou opened, for an odor of sweetness. Be thou, devil, begone; for the judgment of God shall draw near.” The purpose of that little rite is to give the one baptized the ability to detect what is good from what is evil. It enables the Christian to smell a rat.

But we have lost our sense of smell in modern times. Pope John XXIII said once that this was the greatest sin of modern times – the inability to detect sin. Perhaps one reason for this is that the new rite of baptism made the rite of Ephetha optional, and millions upon millions of Catholics never received it. This is part of the final struggle between the Church and the anti-Church; a loss of blessing; a loss of grace.

But what is the nature of this great combat that Pope John Paul II preached? Pope Benedict XVI said this: “The sufferings of the Church come precisely from within the Church, from the sin existing within the Church. This too is something that we have always known, but today we are seeing it in a really terrifying way; the greatest persecution of the Church comes not from her enemies without, but arises from sin within the Church, and that the Church thus has a deep need to relearn penance.”

How do we relearn this? How do we make a difference in the Church at this parish? How do we combat the spirits of wickedness in high places such as our government? The answer is, we begin with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. To relearn this, let us glean from the Council of Trent some basic teachings of the Mass.

Every Mass is Calvary continued. Every Mass is worth as much as the sacrifice of Our Lord's life, sufferings, and death. Holy Mass is the most powerful atonement for our sins. At the hour of death, the Masses we have heard will be our greatest consolation. Every Mass we pray will go with us to judgment and plead for pardon. At Mass we can diminish the temporal punishment due to our sins according to our fervor. Assisting devoutly at Holy Mass we render to the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord the greatest homage. In the Mass He will supply for our many negligence's and omissions. In the Mass He forgives the venial sins which we have not confessed. In the Mass the power of Satan over us is diminished. In the Mass we afford the souls in Purgatory the greatest possible relief.

One Mass which we pray during our lives will be of more benefit to us than many prayed for us after our deaths. We are preserved from dangers and misfortunes which otherwise might have befallen us if we assist at the Mass. By the Mass we shorten our stay in Purgatory. Every Mass wins for us a higher degree of glory in Heaven. At the end of the Mass we receive the priest's blessing which Our Lord ratifies in Heaven. At the Mass we kneel amidst a multitude of holy angels, who are present at the Adorable Sacrifice with reverential awe. We are blessed in our temporal goods and affairs by attending the Mass. In eternity we shall fully realize that it was certainly worthwhile to have assisted at Holy Mass daily with holy love and reverence.

Do we see our society in tatters with stupidity, ignorance, violence and utter rebellion against the order willed by God? The source of this mortal sin arises from sin within the Church, beginning with the lack of the celebration of the Mass with holy reverence and love. You and I can do something about this, even if the Mass you attend somewhere has an utter lack of reverence. Sure, you can write a letter of complaint about it; speaking to the celebrant or reporting the priest to the bishop, but these do little good usually.

Instead, I remember when shortly after my conversion while I was still at university a visiting priest came to celebrate Mass and it was unquestionably invalid and grossly irreverent. People started to walk out in droves. After the Mass upset parishioners were talking passionately about what to do, but one of my friends stayed through the whole thing. We asked him how that could be, and he shrugged his shoulders and said he was just trying to imitate Our Lady when she attended the Mass which was celebrated from the Cross on Calvary. She was surrounded by mockery, games, blasphemies, boredom...yet *stabat Mater*. She stood. She did not flinch or look away or hide or leave. She attended Mass not to be edified or to feel better when she left; she went to Mass in order to adore God and honor Him when others were not. We can do the same.

I remember too telling my Godfather about the incident and how terrible it was and how can this be? He listened quite patiently and said "Father doesn't believe in God." I said that can't be – he's a priest! Priests are required to believe and so on. He responded to this blather by saying, "Oh, I see the problem. You thought the Church was an ocean liner, and you could just go up to the top deck and have a nice chair and sail up to heaven. Turns out she's a leaky old barge, and as soon as you got on board, someone tossed you a bucket and said 'Start bailing, she's going down!'"

There is another difficulty but which cannot be overcome at this time, and it is the concelebration of the Mass. Most of you are aware that your priests do not concelebrate with the good priests of the Archdiocese and the Archbishop and his auxiliary. And perhaps you may think that it has to do with the different rites. I know, officially there is one Roman rite with two forms. But ask anyone who attends Mass here and then goes to a church where the band rocks out with electric bass and drum set and then ask them if it is the same rite. They will tell you "No." Yes, the fact of the *Novus Ordo Missae* is part of our decision, but there is something else which may not meet the eye at first glance.

That is, when the Mass is concelebrated, only one Mass is celebrated. So when I attend the Chrism Mass at the Basilica – and even see that it is done with real honest-to-goodness reverence with good music and a good sermon – I am still sad. I've heard it said often that the sight of so many priests celebrating together is a great sign of unity. Perhaps this is so, and perhaps there is something to be gained with this. But what I see instead of 200 priests celebrating together is the loss of 199 Masses not being said, and the floods of grace which would have occurred in this broken old world did not happen. Whatever is gained by a symbol of unity is I believe overwhelmingly, overwhelmingly outweighed by the losses of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Archimedes, the great Greek master of Geometry, once said “Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world.” The fulcrum is the Sacred Heart of Christ, and the lever is the wood of the Cross. These come together, and the world is moved, when the Mass is celebrated.