

## **XIV Sunday after Pentecost - Mortification<sup>1</sup>**

*In the name of the Father ...*

On account of Adam's sin, we all inherit a wounded nature which is deprived not only of habitual grace but also original justice, that original harmony of the well-ordered loves of self, neighbour and God. Baptism removes the stain or guilt of Original Sin and infuses habitual grace, but the disorder remains.

St Paul expressed this disorder within us: *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.*<sup>2</sup> Concerning this captivity to the law of sin, he wrote: *Put off the old man who is corrupted according to the desire of error ... and put on the new man who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth.*<sup>3</sup> This *putting off the old man* is a call to mortification. Paul writes: *The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary to one another... They who are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscences.*<sup>4</sup>

Original Sin inflicts a four-fold wound on our nature: reason is weakened in its order to the truth – a wound of ignorance – and is thus prone to error; the will is weakened in its order to the good – a wound of malice – and is thus prone to evil; the irascible appetite is weakened in its right order to arduous works – a wound of weakness – and is thus prone to effeminacy and anger; and the concupiscible appetite is weakened in its right order to sensible goods – a wound of concupiscence – and is thus prone to inordinate pleasure.

This four-fold wound engenders an inordinate love of self to the detriment of the love of God. Our Lord warns in today's gospel: *No man can serve two masters; for he will hate the one and love the other.*<sup>5</sup> If we are to truly love God – indeed first love God – this inordinate love of self must be mortified – put to death.

We are not required to repent of Original Sin - a sin of nature for which we bear no personal guilt - but we are required to recognise its legacy of disorder and to rid ourselves of it. Far from destroying nature – repressing all emotion which was the way of the Stoics – under the impulse of and accompanied by God's actual graces, the practice of mortification helps to repair human nature, to restore those well-ordered loves.

As well as combating the legacy of Original Sin, mortification is necessary because of the

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<sup>1</sup> [Reginald Garrigou-Lagrangé OP, The Three Ages of the Spiritual Life \(Tan Books\), Vol 1, Ch 20 - Mortification](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Rom 7:22-23](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Eph 4:22-24](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Gal 5:16-17, 24](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Mt 6:24](#)

consequences of our personal sins. Repeated actual sins engender in us habitual bad dispositions, vices, which dispose us to commit sin in accordance with Aristotle's observation that: *as the man is, so does the end seem to him*, i.e., a man will choose in accord with his disposition. For (post-baptismal) personal sin, the sacrament of Confession removes the guilt but the inclination to sin remains, which must be mortified – put to death, to guard against future falls into sin.

Mortification is associated particularly with the virtue of *penance*, which – inspired by *charity*, the love of God – commands other subordinate virtues to perform works to put to death the inordinate love of self. For the wound of ignorance, the virtue of *studiousness* commands study and contemplation,<sup>6</sup> and avoiding curiosity, e.g., overuse of internet bulletin boards and social media. For the wound of malice - the root of sins against neighbour - and in the spirit of today's gospel of not being able to serve God and money, the virtue of *liberality* commands alms giving.<sup>7</sup> For the wound of *weakness*, the virtue of *patience* commands bearing the discomforts of life.<sup>8</sup> For the wound of *concupiscence* the virtue of *temperance* commands forgoing sense pleasures, e.g., through fasting and indeed inflicting sensual “unpleasantries” upon ourselves, e.g., cold showers.

Beyond repairing the wounds of sin, we are required to expiate for them, to make good the imbalance of justice caused in God's creation. Beyond hating sin as an offence against God and stopping sinning, by mortification in a spirit of penance we must seek to make *satisfaction* while we are still on this earth and can merit for doing so. Any reparation which we fail to make while alive will be exacted after death in Purgatory, where we must simply suffer – undergo *satispassion* – but gain no merit doing so.

A further, higher motive for repairing fallen human nature's evil tendencies by mortification is our call to share in God's life. To this end, God has instituted the sacraments as instruments of grace, in-and-of-themselves infallibly efficacious as their efficacy is from God. Their efficacy in us, however, is tempered by the obstacles which we place in their way, those disordered tendencies resulting from Original Sin or actual sin. Our model should be the Blessed Virgin, who neither contracted Original Sin nor committed any actual sin, nor was moved by any aberrant passion, and so never placed any obstacle to - but rather always perfectly corresponded with - God's graces and so always was progressing in grace and increasingly rapidly so.

In this vein, Fr Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange teaches that mortification must go beyond what is forbidden to encompass even what is permitted. He writes: *From the fact that we are called to a*

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<sup>6</sup> [ST IIa IIae 166](#)

<sup>7</sup> [ST IIa IIae 117](#)

<sup>8</sup> [ST IIa IIae 136](#)

*supernatural end of infinite elevation... it is not sufficient for us to live according to right reason, subordinating our passions to it. We must always act not only as rational beings, but as children of God, in whom reason is subordinate to faith, and every action is inspired by charity. This obliges us to detachment in regard to all which belongs only to the earth, or is purely natural, in regard to all which cannot be a means of drawing nearer to God and of leading souls to Him. Garrigou-Lagrange continues: *In virtue of this principle, St. Paul says to us: "Therefore, if you be risen with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things which are above, not the things which are upon the earth. For you are dead; and your life is hidden with Christ in God... Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth..."**

Fr writes here of the necessity of following Our Lord's injunction: *Seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof.* Both as rational creatures and as children of God, we are ordered to God as our ultimate end, not by way of addition as some optional extra but first and foremost according to the first and greatest commandment. Thus, if they are a distraction from – an obstacle to – the one thing which is important, even the legitimate things of this world must be set aside. Fr Garrigou-Lagrange concludes: *Therefore, even if a person does not bind himself to the effective practice of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he must have the spirit of the counsels, that is, the spirit of detachment... From all which is purely of this earth the Christian ought to have a detachment, a special abnegation which is demanded by the infinite loftiness of the eternal goal toward which he ought to advance every day with greater rapidity.* As did the Blessed Virgin.

God has created us for himself, to share in his divine life. The well-ordered unconditional love of God will allow nothing – neither forbidden nor permitted – not even Purgatory, to become an obstacle to it.

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