

## ***Enter Into Life***

To be faithful disciples, we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Obviously, that means that we should pay close attention to the Gospel. Constantly watching how Jesus acted. Listening to what he said. Pondering his way so that we walk like him, talk like him, treat others like him. In this gospel Jesus' words are like a sword that pierces our hearts. He allows no wiggle room for sin. He says, ***“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off... If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off... If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out...”*** (Mk. 9:38-48).

Jesus uses hyperbole to sting our hearts so that we might avoid sin like a cancer. He is like a doctor attacking cancerous tumors. He warns us to get rid of sin at all costs. Tear it out of your soul. Why does he urge us to attack sin with such force? This is his reasoning, ***“It is better to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire”*** (Mk. 9:43). He wants us to *“enter into Life.”*

Do you see his words as the Way to Life? At another time, he said, ***“I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly”*** (Jn. 10:10). He also said, ***“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy complete”*** (Jn. 15:11). Obedience to God's Word brings enduring joy, but the pleasure of sin is fleeting. We may feel good temporarily, but the pleasure quickly fades.

During the pandemic, people are suffering from more stress because of the change and uncertainty in our everyday lives. Many are turning to pornography to self-soothe their anxiety or depression, or just find some quick pleasure. But quick fixes have hidden risks. People soon become dependent or even addicted.

Studies have shown that porn use leads to many more problems. People develop a secret life which is manifested in lying and deceiving others. They become self-centered; they choose porn over people. They spend their time alone seeking pleasure in fantasy, rather than caring for others. They feel irritable, angry, and depressed. They become more anxious and powerless in relation to porn. If they are married, their spouse views porn as “cheating,” and the relationship deteriorates due to a lack of trust and respect. The list of bad effects keeps multiplying.

Biblically, one way to sin with the eye is to look at someone with lust. ***“If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the Gehenna”*** (Mk. 9:47). Looking at another person with lust or viewing porn brings immediate gratification, but it poisons the mind and heart. The poison of porn is only one example of how sin leads us away from life.

Gossiping about others also poisons our hearts. It leads to distrust among family members, peers, or teammates. Gossip creates unhealthy friendships rooted in jealousy, grudges, or superiority. It is a poison in our hearts, and it poisons everyone around us. ***“If your tongue causes you to sin, tear it out.”*** Just be quiet. Say nothing. Say only the good things that people need to hear.

Jesus urges us to attack sin like a cancer for two reasons. First, he wants us to be freed from the poison of sin and to be filled with Life and with his Joy. He said, ***“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy complete”*** (Jn. 15:11). Obedience to God's Word brings enduring joy.

Second, our sin poisons those around us. It scandalizes the little ones. He said, ***“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea”*** (Mk. 9:42). Our sins cause others to sin.

Literally, sin *“scandalizes the little ones.”* To be scandalized means that sin causes people to stumble on the Way of Christ. It leads them astray. They may even stop believing in God.

The ***“little ones who believe”*** are catechumens, recent converts, or lowly people. Little ones might be people who have no voice in society. They might be the poor or less educated. Sometimes poor laborers are scandalized because rich Christians do not pay them just wages, as we heard in the second reading (James 5:1-6). Or while the rich are in church, they send their workers to the fields and do not allow them time off for Sunday worship. So, the poor say to themselves, “If this is how Christians act, then I don’t want to have anything to do with their religion.” ***“If your greedy hand causes you to sin by clinging to money, cut it off.”***

How you and I act either leads others to God or away from God. So, Jesus used another hyperbole. ***“It would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.”*** Life is at stake. He didn’t say this because God likes to punish sinners severely, but because Life is at stake for the little ones. He wants all people to enter into the Life of the kingdom of God. That’s why he attacks sin like a cancer in society.

Every single person struggles with sin. Each one of us battles some type of cancerous evil. As we continue with our prayer at Mass, bring to mind the sin that poisons your heart. Then remember the Opening Prayer for Mass. We prayed, *“O God, who manifest your almighty power above all by pardoning and showing mercy...”* In prayer, we do not speak to a God who wants to punish. Rather, we stand before Almighty God who extends mercy and gives us Life in abundance, who fills us to the brim with Joy.

The words in this gospel are painful but healing. Jesus looks on sinners like a doctor looks on a cancer patient. He longs to heal us. He wants us to enter into his Life. We are helpless without him, so ask the Lord for the grace to be free of the sin that poisons your soul. Ask for the power to cut out the scourge of sin, to rid yourself of it. Grace works powerfully when we want to change with all our heart and when we trust in the Lord’s love. Remember that Jesus Christ wants you to enter into Life. Always pray keeping that in mind.