



THE ENEMY'S TACTIC

THE SAFEST ROAD TO HELL IS THE GRADUAL ONE

By Philip Kosloski

Often when we think of what actions merit a "ticket" to Hell, we immediately think of murder or adultery. Yet Satan is much craftier than that and can lure a person to Hell over a lifetime of "smaller" sins to ensure that the person is obstinately and permanently separated from God.

No matter the sin, all that matters to Satan is separating the soul from God.

C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* puts it much more devilishly,

"But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy [God]. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts." (61)



Satan does not want us to know that we are on the road to Hell. If we did notice, that would alert us and we might turn back. Much safer is the road that is paved with little unrepentant sin after little unrepentant sin.

We might call these "venial" sins and on the surface they do not immediately take us away from God. However venial sins that become habitual, naturally lead to "mortal" sins (those sins that take us out of right relationship with God).

Let's use the analogy of the string.

Our relationship with God can be likened to a string. We are both tied together by a string and remain firmly attached to each other. Venial sin is like taking a dull kitchen knife and sawing away at the string. We are still attached, but slowly our relationship is strained and starts to break down. Without repenting for these sins and going to Confession, the knife continues to saw away until the string breaks and we break our relationship with God by committing a mortal sin.

The Catholic Encyclopedia puts it this way,

Frequent and deliberate venial sin lessens the fervor of charity, disposes to mortal sin, and hinders the reception of graces God would otherwise give.

If we persist in these little venial sins, it is much more likely that we will falter under the weight of them all and commit a mortal sin that takes us completely away from God. Satan will use any means necessary to lure us to Hell and that includes the road of venial sins that creates in us a heart closed off to God.

A lifetime of unrepentant venial sins will do much damage. That is why we must never let our guard down. Sure, we will sin on a daily basis (we still live in a Fallen World), but we must not let sin rule our life and become our identity.

Confession: The Antidote

Many spiritual directors recommend confessing our sins at least once a month. For some, we might have to confess our sins twice a month. St. John Paul II went to confession every week. Pope Francis says he confesses his sins every two weeks. Suffice to say, those two pontiffs recognized how venial sin can

STRATEGIES FOR A BETTER AND HOLIER LENT – ALMSGIVING

By John Clark

Lent calls us to focus on three areas to develop our spirituality: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Almsgiving is the one that often gets the least attention.

Lent offers us an opportunity to focus on the poor among us, yet many of us forget to take advantage of that opportunity. We need to make this the Lent that we remember. This Lent, let's help our brothers and sisters who are living in poverty. Below are five strategies for participating in almsgiving.

1. Help pay a medical bill.

There is no shortage of people who are overwhelmed by medical debt. Get in touch with local charities and let them know that you would like to help with medical expenses. Even if it is just a few dollars, it helps alleviate the financial burden of others.

2. Pay another's utility bill.

Many utility companies have programs that allow people to help pay the utility bills of the poor. What a wonderful idea.

3. Work in a soup kitchen.

Pope Francis has implored the faithful not only to help the poor materially, but to work among them. What better way than a soup kitchen, where we have the opportunity to serve the poor, whom Christ loves so much.

4. Give away clothes and shoes.

Many of us have clothes that we have been meaning to give away for months or even years. Let's stop putting it off. In the first week of Lent, get your old clothes together and donate them. Poor people need them right now.

5. Be the one who needs alms.

There are probably many lists of ways to help the poor, but the role that the poor can play in almsgiving is often unaddressed.

There is a saying: "I've been rich and I've been poor. Rich is better." Cited as a pithy truism, I'm not sure this is true. At least not for everyone.

Scripture argues that—for some people—rich was worse. For instance, the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 knew that Lazarus was at his gate, sick and starving; yet the rich man was unmoved to pity.

The rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-23 asked Jesus what he must do for eternal life; to which Jesus responded that he should sell his belongings, give the money to the poor, and follow Him. Because he was very rich, the young ruler walked away sad. He felt that Jesus was asking just too much. (However, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem he most likely lost all anyway) In both cases, their wealth could have been an aid to eternal life, yet they used their wealth as a detriment. "Rich" could have been better. But for them, "rich" was worse.

In my life, I have known neither extreme of great wealth or of dire poverty. But at different times of my life, I have been both the almsgiver and the alms-receiver. What I have realized is that whether I receive with the virtue of humility, or give with the virtue of charity, I

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THE ENEMY'S TACTIC (continued from left)

weigh a person down and they did what they needed to be relieved of the weight.

Takeaway Point Don't let venial sin weigh you down. Get thee to the Confessional! Embrace the loving arms of God the Father, who is always there to welcome us home.

STRATEGIES FOR A BETTER AND HOLIER LENT – ALMSGIVING (Continued from front)

have grown closer to Jesus.

Almsgivers and alms-receivers need each other. When the poor allow the wealthier to help them, they are granting the wealthy a much greater gift than material goods can provide.

God puts people in our lives who can assist us in our salvation. Lazarus stood at the rich man's gate, and because the rich man would not go out to that gate to see Lazarus, he did not enter the gate of Heaven. The question we need to ask ourselves is: Where are the gates in my life? Because they are there.

Rich or poor, every person in our lives can assist us in our salvation. And we can assist every person in our lives with their salvation.

Rich or poor, we are not mere footnotes to the story of each other's souls. We help write each other's stories, and each chapter is very much our own choice. We can choose whether we are main characters in their stories of salvation, or mere extras that linger in the background. Whatever side of almsgiving we are on, it is our chance to help others on the road to Heaven.

I wrote a short prayer for the poor that I wish to share with you:

Dear Jesus,

I know that You have a special love and affection for the poor. Please grant me the grace to develop a special love and affection for the poor in my own heart.

Grant me the vision to see my brothers and sisters who are in need today, and grant me the wisdom to know how I can help them.

Let me hear the cries of the poor, and help me rush to their aid.

Let everything I do for others be motivated by a pure love of You.

Please comfort the poor with a deeper knowledge of the wealth of Your love.

And please hold us all close to your Sacred Heart.

Dear Jesus, I am the least of your brothers.

Have mercy on me.

Read more at <http://www.setonmagazine.com/dad/john-clark/the-fathers-role/15-strategies-better-holier-lent-part-1-almsgiving>

The Gift of Sorrow for Sin – A Meditation on the “Mass for the Gift of Tears” in the Missal

By: Msgr. Charles Pope

Most pastors and confessors are aware that in any parish there are going to be a few who are scrupulous, even in times like these. Some have a kind of scrupulosity that is mild and almost admirable. A sensitive conscience is a beautiful thing and bespeaks a kind of innocence that is rare today.

Some others have a more unhealthy form of scrupulosity, rooted too much in cringing fear of a God who is seen more as a punishing adversary than a delivering Father who wants to help us overcome our sin.

But saddest of all are the large majority who have very little compunction (sorrow) for sin. Most Catholics have lived so long in a culture that dismisses, excuses, or makes light of sin that they have very little notion of just how serious sin can be. That God had to send His only Son to die in order rescue us from our sins shows just how serious they are; weeping for our sins is not some “extreme” reaction.

Indeed, a worthy Lenten practice is going to the foot of the Cross and allowing the Lord to anoint us, so that we see both how serious our sins are and at the same time how deep His love for us is. When it finally begins to dawn on us that the Son of God died for us, our heart breaks open, light pours in, and we can begin to weep for our sins and in gratitude for His love.

Consider that Jesus looked at a paralyzed man and, “not noticing” his paralysis, said to him, “*Courage son, Your sins are forgiven*” (Mat 9:2). In a sense, He saw the man's sins as more serious than his paralysis. Jesus says elsewhere,

I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell (Matt 5:28-30).

Now the Lord does not mean literally to gouge out eyes and cut off appendages. But what He is saying is that it is more serious to sin (in this case through lust) than to lose our eye, hand, or foot.

Now we don't usually think like this, but we should. Sin is much more serious than most of us imagine. It is our most serious problem. It is more serious than lack of money or poor physical health. Sin is our most serious problem; whatever is in second place isn't even close.

In times like these, when self-esteem is overemphasized, personal responsibility is minimized, and excuses abound, we do well to ask for the gift of tears. We do well to ask for a profound and healthy grief for our sins.



More than ever, this is a gift to be sought. Note that these tears are not meant to be tears of depression, discouragement, or self-loathing. The tears to be sought here are tears of what St. Paul calls “godly sorrow.” Godly sorrow causes us to have sorrow for our sins but in a such a way that it draws us to God and to great love, gratitude, and appreciation for His mercy. St. Paul writes,

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance.

For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation [at sin], what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done (2 Cor 7:8-11).

With all this in mind, consider that in the current (2011) Roman Missal there is a beautiful “Mass for the Forgiveness of Sins (B).” In the old Missal (1962), it is called the *Missa ad Petendam Compunctionem Cordis* (Mass Requesting Compunction (sorrow) of Heart). It is known more colloquially as the “Mass for the Gift of Tears.”

Consider these beautiful prayers from the Roman Missal (both the 1962 and current (2011) versions). I post here the English translation from the current (2011) Missal:

Collect: Almighty and most gentle God, who brought forth from the rock a fountain of living water for your thirsty people, bring forth we pray, from the hardness of our heart, tears of sorrow, that we may lament our sins and merit forgiveness from your mercy. Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Prayer over the gifts: Look mercifully, O Lord, upon this oblation, which we offer to your majesty, for our sins, and grant, we pray, that the sacrifice from which forgiveness springs forth for the human race, may bestow on us the grace of the Holy Spirit, to shed tears for our offenses. Through Christ our Lord.

After Communion: May the reverent reception of your Sacrament O Lord, Lead us to wash away the stains of our sins with sighs and tears, and in your generosity grant that the pardon we seek may have its effect on us. Through Christ our Lord.

So beautiful, scriptural, and spiritual. Pray these prayers. Ask your priest to celebrate this votive Mass often. We need the gift of tears today.