

God loves to spend his mercy

Chatham Mission Talk #3

December 4, 2023

A. Diagnosis of humanity: the bad news

- five events: (1) Babel (2) Titanic (3) Challenger (4) Fukushima (5) submersible : common: *hubris*
- a broken world: environment:sick/culture of death/loneliness/broken families/suicides/me-world
- hello: sin i. Miss the mark (*hamartia*)
 - ii. Turning away from what is good
 - iii. Division and indifference (boredom)
- essence: self-love/selfishness/kills life of soul/“When looking for #1, you step on #2.” (Dangerfield)
- original sin (spiritual cancer/my proclivities/ slippery slope/heredity) /actual sin
- our self: fundamentally good (God’s image/reason + free will/body + soul/loved by God/adopted/ “married” by God/eternal righteousness/truth/joy [Paschal and Kreeft, p. 149])
- “We cannot think too little of ourselves, nor too much of our souls.” (Chesterton)
- need to be *soulish* not selfish/“When a wrong man uses the right means, the right means becomes the wrong way.” (Chinese proverb)
- “I sin because I am a sinner, just as I sing because I am singer.” “I want what I want when I want it.”
- our world: compromise/cope with it/not really that wrong/ vs. our faith: can be destroyed: our faith: cuts to the heart = heart surgery/but need to know we need heart surgery!
- sin isolates/Jesus restores relationships: story of widow of Nain’s son: Jesus gave him back to mother

B. Prescription for our healing: the Good News

- *uniqueness of Christianity*: [Peter Kreeft, Christianity for Modern Pagans – Pascal’s *Pensées* Ignatius Press, 1993, p. 277]
 - 1. Christianity understands both halves of humanity. (human/divine; body/soul;material/spiritual)
 - 2. Christianity teaches, not self-fulfillment, but self-abnegation (denial) and the Cross.
 - 3. All other religious “enlightenments” (monotheism, morality) are Christianity’s “kindergarten”.
 - 4. Christianity puts into Martyrs’ lips hymns of triumph and into believers’ lives “joy unspeakable and full of glory”.
 - 5. Christianity does not teach human clichés and platitudes but divine mysteries, wonders and paradoxes. (And the unique key to all this is **Jesus Christ**, fully human and divine.)
- *constant teachings about God’s mercy*:
1. God is full of mercy/swimming in “sea of mercy”; *hesed:loving kindness/segullah*
 2. Christ purpose in coming to Earth: to reconcile us to God + one another;
 3. God loves *to spend* his mercy and to forgive us: death and resurrection of Jesus/ “way, truth, life” (= our GPS and more: Jesus actually *brings* us home!)
 4. our reward: eternal life and glory with God and all creation forever. Hurray! Alleluia!

C. Wonderful images of Mercy

1. **Ikon of descent to the dead**: Adam & Eve/bound up person/Sheol/God reaches out to us;
 - Creed: descended in Hell + the Hell of our existence

2. **Rembrandt: prodigal son:** hands of father: male and female/son's head: fetus
 - Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal* (1992): father/son relations;
 - 2 things son must hear from Father: (i) “I love you” / (ii) “you got what it takes...”
3. **Murillo: prodigal son:** son: mess/fatted calf/ring/sandals/
 - dog: Jack Daniel spaniel/always excited tail/= joy of God on our repentance
4. **Cameroun prodigal son:** whole village/father + mother/total joy
 - elder bother? Look on child on mother's back: at us: *we* are the elder brother!

D. Sacrament of Reconciliation

- word: Latin: *re*+con [*cum*]+*cilius* (hair): constant cleansing and protecting (eyes/soul)
- Sacraments: God touches us through material things: Incarnational principle
 - matter and form (Baptism: water + words); Penance: sin + absolution words
- Christ reaches out to us:
 - **priest and penitent engraving:** no screen (1974)/hands on penitent's shoulder/
Jesus right hand *off* the cross = forgiveness: *from* Jesus *through* priest *to* penitent
- God wants us to be totally open:
 - **St. Giles painting:** withheld a sin/revealed on scroll by angel/he confessed it/peace
 - **St. John Nepomucene window:** refused to tell king sins of queen/drowned in river
 - seal of confession: absolute: no exceptions/if one exception, what else?
- new closeness: **Gaspari drawing:** confession = “kiss of Christ” (Catherine Doherty)
 - after confession: huge “weight” lifted/peace/tears/joy
- Jesus and BVM help us to “untie our knots”: **Mary, Untier of Knots painting + ikon**
 - discovered in Bavaria by Pope Francis/Argentina/Brazil (also Poland)
 - powerful prayer for: national and family tensions/addictions/

E. Practical tips for a better confession

1. Mentioning a few blessings before confessing our sins
2. Sins often are “symptoms”: get to the root: often one of 7 capital sins: pride/lust/avarice/jealousy/envy/anger/sloth; “there are no new sins!”
3. Frequency: monthly/quarterly/need a pulse/check-up/objective affirmation
4. seniors: sins of past life coming up: new conversion (St. Francis of Sales: dust →light)
5. be open to broader perspectives: environment/racial attitudes/boredom/indifference

F. Our wonderful God who loves to spend his mercy! Wow?

1. Forgiveness: most powerful, and difficult, teaching in New Testament.
 - Nelson Mandela: 26 yrs. solitary confinement/but peace: “I forgave them.”
2. Quick apology/quick forgiveness: “oil of the Gospel”
3. Pope Francis: only modern Pope to say publicly and often he is sorry and to ask forgiveness.
4. “Confession is the God-given remedy for self-deception and self-justification.” (Bonhoeffer.)
5. God does not need confession, but *we do*!
6. Confession brings deep peace and joy because God is so good and so merciful.