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I don’t have a tale from my own life to share this week to help you better understand the content of our faith, but that doesn’t mean that I don’t have something to say! I’d like to take the time to talk about the difference between mortal and venial sin and what having those sins on your soul can do to you.

There is a difference in the types of sin we commit. Let’s discuss mortal sins first. As the word mortal implies, these types of sins cause our death. Just as a fatal stabbing or terminal disease are referred to as mortal because they cause death of the body, so do mortal sins cause death of the soul. In order for a sin to be classified as mortal, three qualities must be true. One, the sin must be **of grave nature**. That is, it must be specified by the Ten Commandments or covered in the Precepts of the Church. Two, the sin must be committed **with knowledge**, with a full understanding that it is a sin. The sinner must know that what they are doing is wrong and that it violates God’s law. Third, the sin must be committed **with complete consent**. The sin must be done of a deliberate and personal choice. When these three attributes are present, one has committed mortal sin. This type of sin destroys the sanctifying grace within us. God’s very life, given to us through the sacraments to reside in our souls, is abolished. The only way we can be redeemed is by going to Reconciliation, atoning for our sin, and starting anew. Luckily, God knows we are weak and prone to sin. He is always ready to give us His mercy and welcome us back. We have to take the first step though. We have to acknowledge and confess our sin. We have to return to Him. He never left. We did.

Many of us may think that since we’ve never committed murder or adultery that we’re good, that we don’t have mortal sin on our soul. But if you do a true, good, and thorough examination of conscience, you may discover otherwise. (Disclaimer: You may want to stop reading here. What follows are a list of questions that are honest, blunt, and raw. Additionally, once you have the knowledge of these being sins, your committing them can move the offense from venial to mortal. This is your last chance to stop. Don’t complain about what is included if you continue to read. Seriously.) Do you love something more than God such as money, power, drugs/alcohol, or ambition? Have you refused to accept what God has given as truth/the teachings of the Catholic Church because you “just don’t believe that part” such as doctrine regarding homosexuality, premarital sex, co-habitation, women’s health/abortion, capital punishment, mercy killings, etc.? Have you engaged in superstitious practices such as reading horoscopes, visiting fortune tellers, playing with a Ouija board, participating in a séance, etc.? Do you use the name of God in vain? Do you curse, blaspheme, use vulgar, suggestive, or obscene speech? Do you Watch tv or movies, or listen to music that treats God, the Church, the saints, or sacred things irreverently? Have you belittled others, gossiped, or otherwise caused harm to someone’s name or reputation? Do you blame God for your failings? Do you presume that God will forgive you without confessing your sins or seeking Reconciliation? Do you fail to pray every day? Have you missed Mass on Sunday for a reason within your control? Do skip Mass on Holy Days of Obligation? Do you habitually come late, leave early, or fail to participate while at Mass? (Are you reading this now instead of listening to the homily?) Have you received Communion even though you did not fast for a full hour before Mass? Have you ever knowingly eaten meat on a day when you were to abstain? Do you disregard the need to truly fast (1 full meal, plus 2 snacks that together do not equal a full meal) on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday? Do you disobey/thwart the dominion of your parents, teachers, police officers, and other authority figures? Have you neglected the needs of your aging parents? Do you break laws? Have you failed to create a domestic church or to be a good example to your children on how to live the Catholic faith? Have you neglected to provide for the religious education and formation of your children for as long as they are under your care? Have you supported or voted for a politician whose position is opposed to the teachings of the Catholic Church? Have you been involved in, considered, attempted, supported, advised, or encouraged abortion, suicide, murder, or euthanasia? Have you ever physically, verbally, emotionally, or sexually abused or threatened someone? Do you abuse alcohol or other drugs? Have you over-eaten? Have you refused to control your temper or willfully engage in arguing? Have you ever refused to forgive, sought revenge, or taken delight in someone’s failing or suffering? Have you ever given in to lust or willfully entertained impure thoughts? Have you used artificial means of birth control or had a sterilization procedure for contraceptive purposes? Have you ever claimed or deprived your spouse of their marital right without concern for him/her or without just cause? Have you ever viewed tv or movies with sex/nudity? Have you engaged in unnatural (non-procreative/unrequited/outside of marriage) sexual acts including masturbation, oral sex, fornication, incest, rape, adultery, or prostitution? Have you ever stolen, defaced, or destroyed someone else’s things? Have you envied others because of their possessions? Have you cheated on a test, taxes, sports, or in business? Have you failed to make good on a contract or to pay a debt? Have you ever lied or willfully deceived another (“by what I have done and what I have failed to do”)? Are you guilty of making a rash judgment? Have you betrayed another’s confidence? Have you failed to confess your sins at least once per year? Have you failed to receive Eucharist at least once during Lent through the Easter season? Have you failed to do some other penance if not abstaining from meat every Friday of the year? Have you failed to support the church financially or through other stewardship? Do you think that any sin you have committed is so bad that God could never forgive you? Have you committed any one of these sins and then received a sacrament (like receive the Eucharist) with the mortal sin on your soul?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you have potentially committed mortal sin. If you knew it was wrong but did it anyway, and have not yet received Reconciliation, you have mortal sin on your soul. It is quite likely that most of us have committed at least one if not multiple mortal sins. The good thing is that God is so merciful! He wants the very best for us: a good life here on earth and eternal life with Him in heaven. All we have to do is acknowledge our failings, make a good confession, complete our penance, and try better from then on.

Venial sins are those in which one or more of the conditions for mortal sin are not met. They are less grave, done without an understanding of their being a sin, or done without intent. Venial sin is less serious than mortal sin, but it is still sin. It should not be brushed off. It still hurts our relationship with God, but it does not sever it. Venial sin is like a minor infection. It can make us sick, but it doesn’t kill us. However, if the infection is not treated, it can turn into a more serious health condition. This type of sin gets in the way of our doing good and forming moral habits. It deadens our minds and hearts to the horror of sin. Committing venial sin, sin that is deliberate and for which one does not seek repentance, makes it easier to commit mortal sin.

Venial sin can be forgiven without going to confession. While we are not obliged to confess them, if through your examination of conscience you recognize a pattern, it is suggested you go since you could be developing a habit toward an easier commission of mortal sin. Venial sin can also be pardoned through prayer such as an Act of Contrition, use of sacramentals such as Holy Water, recitation of the Rosary, and the reception of Communion. Venial sin can be forgiven through certain works and at moments during the Mass, most specifically during the Penitential Rite. We can obtain forgiveness of venial sins in many ways. Mortal sins must be confessed in both kind and number.

So, for everyone out there reading this who has not gone to confession for a while, for whatever reason…examine your conscience and GO TO CONFESSION! What happens when you make a sincere confession? What happens even if you sincerely can’t remember everything? Through the mercy of God, all you sins will be forgiven, taken away, gone! They aren’t simply overlooked or covered over. They are eradicated. You are washed clean in the Blood of the Lamb, never to be held against you when you come to your judgment.  Though your sins be red as scarlet, they will become as white as snow.

Please, look at your life with honesty, and go to confession. That’s it. Then you will be able to go to Communion again just as if it were your First Holy Communion. If you are nervous, or don’t know quite what to do, just let the priest know it’s been a while. Tell him you’re not quite sure how to start. He, acting *in persona Christi,* will help you. God’s mercy is magnificent and it is ours for the asking.

Blessings,

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