

“But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!” Those are some harsh words; certainly not the words of the teddy bear Jesus that many of us were taught to believe in over the years, but Jesus is not a teddy bear; he is a man, a man among men, and he is God, so he tells it like it is even when the message seems harsh. We might have expected Jesus to say something nice about the Galileans, maybe something about how they had been martyred while they were at worship, or some other comforting hogwash, but no, he cuts straight to the chase: if you die in your sins, you are going to perish for all eternity. You do not pass Go, you do not collect two hundred dollars, you go straight to Hell. And just so we won’t miss the point, he says explicitly *“if you do not repent, you will perish as they did.”* When Jesus says those people perished he is not referring to their physical death.

Sin is, before all else, a personal offense against God, a rupture of our communion with him and an attack on our own human dignity. Sin is always an offense against reason, truth and right conscience – something many people seem to have trouble forming these days, but, more than anything else, sin is a failure in love that is caused by our own perverse attachment to things of this world. Sin wounds us, it wounds our neighbor and it insults God, up front and personally. Sin wounds us by defacing our dignity as adopted children of God, making us less and less human with each sin that we commit; it degrades and destroys our capacity to be good or to do good. Sin defiles the image and likeness to God within us. Every sin – even venial sin – inflicts grievous injuries upon our soul, and left untreated - unrepented and un-confessed - these wounds fester and become infected so that our soul becomes weaker and weaker, uglier and uglier, less and less able to resist sin until eventually it completely kills God’s life within us. And if we die unrepentant, we will perish for all eternity.

But what does it mean to repent of our sins? Repentance begins with a heart wrenching sorrow for what we have done that is wrong. It means having a serious desire to change our lives and not to do those bad things again. It also means making amends to God and to our neighbor for what we have done. We cannot be genuinely repentant of our sins if we do not have the desire to make amends for what we have done and we must make amends to both God and neighbor. It is not sufficient to say “sorry God” while ignoring the person we have injured. Ultimately, repenting of our sins means conversion of our hearts. Jesus gave us the sacraments so that we could cultivate and fertilize the soil that is our soul.

Jesus got up on that cross and died, so that our sins might be forgiven. Do not insult his sacrifice by refusing to ask for the pardon that he died to win for you. Just as we truly receive his body and his blood in the Eucharist so too do we truly receive his forgiveness and mercy when we meet him in the confessional. St Paul reminds us that “our ancestors were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all of them were baptized into Moses ... all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink But that God was not pleased with most of them and they perished.” God was not pleased with them because of the hardness of their hearts and their lack of gratitude for his great mercy. Let us not be like them, let us soften our hearts through sincere repentance and humbly express our gratitude through heartfelt confession.

May Mary, the queen of heaven and earth, help us to listen to her son and cultivate the soil of our souls through repentance and the practice of the virtues so that we might stand with her at the foot of Christ’s cross for he gave his life for the forgiveness of our sins.