



Pastor's Column

An Advent Examination of Conscience, from Pope Francis (part 2)

December 17, 2017 ~ Third Sunday of Advent

Last week, we began reflections on an Advent Examination of Conscience that Pope Francis offered for the Roman Curia in 2014, an Examination that is good for all of us, too, here at the parish. This week, we conclude these reflections.

Pope Francis warns of “the disease of existential schizophrenia.” By this, he means those who live a double life, which is a rotten fruit of hypocrisy. It seems that all of us do this – or at least that all of us are susceptible to this. The problem is when we do not admit it and do not strive to correct by cooperating with God’s grace to improve as humans and Christians. All of this is good fodder for spiritual direction, as well as confession.

Next: the disease of gossiping, grumbling, and back-biting. One of the most frequently-confessed sins these days seems to be sins of speech, and all three of these are sins of speech. Are we quicker to judge, gossip, and gripe than we are to pray, apologize, and offer mercy?

Next: the disease of idolizing superiors. The Church in the United States (and perhaps all throughout the world) is particularly sensitive these days about clericalism. Maybe there was a day when we “worshipped” our priests, like they could do no wrong. But those days are gone now, and thanks be to God! Priests have an important vocation, yes...but they are still just as much in need of God’s grace and mercy as everyone else. Even so, there are plenty of other superiors whom we are tempted to idolize: celebrities, such as our favorite athletes, actors, or singers (we need only to look at “American Idol” to realize this). In an increasingly politicized society, we are tempted into political cults, where being Republican or Democrat is *first* in our lives, and being good and faithful Catholic Christians is a distant second. Regardless of our idolized superiors, the objects of our hero-worship, the fact is that we tend to be tempted into this false idolization, but it is God alone Whom we are to worship and adore.

Next: the disease of indifference. Another word for this: apathy. If a joyful Christian is met by a staunch atheist, then at the very least, a very interesting discussion will ensue. But when a joyful Christian encounters a totally indifferent, apathetic person, then *nothing* happens. There is an interesting phrase of the apathetic: “m’eh.” This “m’eh” culture that has grown up around us is a wretched fruit of apathy, and our task as faithful, joyful disciples of Jesus Christ is somehow to get through that malaise, that “m’eh” attitude, that apathy; and we must guard ourselves always against falling into that trap of apathy.

Next: the disease of a lugubrious face. Saint Teresa of Avila once said, “God save us from these dour-faced saints!” What she means is that we cannot become sad, sorrowful, or dour with regard to our faith. A true, authentic faith in Jesus Christ cannot possibly be sad, for Jesus is God, and God is love, and love gives rise to joy, peace, and all good things – the exact opposite of sad, sorrowful, and dour!

Next: the disease of hoarding. Greed, in other words. And not just with material things, but also greedy with our personal time and talents. Are we a cheerful giver of *everything* that God has given to us?

And finally: the disease of worldly profit and forms of self-exhibition. We might think of frivolous postings on Facebook, where so many people seem to have the urge to share absolutely everything about themselves, when in truth, we do well to pause and ask ourselves if anyone really cares about what our cat did *this* minute, or what we are about to eat for dessert, or what our painful hangnail looks like! Let us be far *less* focused on ourselves and *less* preoccupied with self-exhibition and *more* concerned with authentically intimate relationships with others and the real concerns of real people, *other* people.

And with that, we conclude this proposed Examination of Conscience for Advent, as Pope Francis offers to us. May it be that this year, Advent is a season for us of profound prayer, stillness, quiet, and reflection as we prepare to receive the Christ-Child on Christmas.

~Fr. Lewis