



## *Pastor's Column*

*An Advent Examination of Conscience, from Pope Francis*

*December 10, 2017 ~ Second Sunday of Advent*

Now our Parochial Year For Evangelization has begun, and we reflect that evangelization of others must begin with discipleship of ourselves, our next couple of Pastor's Columns will feature a suggested Examination of Conscience, taken directly from Pope Francis in his Christmas address to the Roman Curia in 2014. These reflections and questions that he proposed to the cardinals and priests working in the Vatican are reflections and questions that are good for *all* Catholic Christians to consider as we examine our own consciences, reflect upon our own discipleship, and prepare for the coming of the Christ-Child on Christmas.

The Pope comments that there "are diseases and temptations which weaken our service to the Lord," and he presents a "listing of these diseases," which "will help us to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a good step for all of us to take in preparing for Christmas."

The first "disease" is thinking that we are immortal, immune, downright indispensable, when what is often necessary is periodic self-reflection, even *critical* self-reflection, really to plumb the very depths of who we are in our constant pursuit of holiness and perfection. The Pope says that "the antidote to this first disease is the grace of realizing that we are sinners and able to say heartily: 'We are unworthy servants. We have only done what was our duty.'"

Next: the "Martha Complex." Excessive busy-ness. Leaving no time for resting in and with the Lord, having no place for personal prayer. Pope Francis: "A time of rest...is necessary, obligatory, and should be taken seriously: by spending time with one's family and respecting holidays as moments of spiritual and physical recharging."

Next: mental and spiritual "petrification." That is, far beyond merely that we *cannot* be open to new ideas but that we *will not* be open; we refuse; our way or the highway! But "being a Christian means 'having the same sentiments that were in Christ Jesus,' sentiments of humility and unselfishness, of detachment and generosity.

Next: the disease of excessive planning and of functionalism. As musician, I myself learned very early on that the right note played in the wrong place is still a wrong note. In business school, I learned well this good maxim, that a good plan *today* is better than a perfect plan *tomorrow*. We can be so excessive in planning that we allow ourselves to be reduced merely to the level of well-functioning computer, rather than a *do-er* of God's will and a *be-er* of the Christian disciple. "In truth," the Pope says, "the Church shows her fidelity to the Holy Spirit to the extent that she does not try to control or tame Him – to tame the Holy Spirit! He is freshness, imagination, and newness."

Next: poor coordination. Poor communication goes along with this. We are not each of us an isolated pillar of creation; no, *we* are *Church*, and *we* are the Mystical Body of Christ. The whole body works in the perfect coordination of each of the body's members; the Mystical Body of Christ that is the Church must do the same. But do we allow ourselves to communicate well with others so as to coordinate well with others?

Next: "spiritual Alzheimer's." This disease consists in losing the memory of our personal salvation history, our own past history with the Lord, our "first love." We do well often to go back to that place where we perceived and experienced a personal conversion, a profound moment of sublime peace and joy in that privileged realization that we are the Lord's and the Lord loves us. It is all too tempting, sadly, willfully to lose sight of what is bottom-line for us: the greater glory of God and the salvation of all souls – *our* soul included. Cherishing our personal salvation story is a way of remembering always that the salvation of *our* soul (and *all* souls) is our disciple's mission.

And last (for *this* week anyway): the disease of rivalry and vainglory. Again, we are all in this together. We may playfully set ourselves as rivals against our brothers and sisters in Christ, but at the heart of the matter is that we must all, again, communicate and coordinate with one another in service to Christ and His Church – not abandon ourselves to petty rivalry and vainglory.

Next week, we will continue these reflections from Pope Francis.

~Fr. Lewis