

# THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY: SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT SIN

“I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner.”

Those words of Pope Francis from a 2013 interview get right to the heart of the mystery of sin in our life. The simple fact is that sin is a reality. We can't rationalize it away, and we can't find excuses; we sin. As much as we try to blame others and try to find all sorts of reasons to say it's not our fault, the unvarnished truth is we sin.

Ironically, though, it's only by admitting the truth of our sinfulness that we can truly discover and experience the inconceivable depth and richness of God's mercy. As Pope Francis, then Cardinal Bergoglio, remarked in 2010, “Only we big sinners have this grace of knowing what salvation really means.” That's because to understand what sin is, we first have to start with God's love.

We are profoundly loved by God with a love that is unconditional and life-giving. God has given us the gift of life. Through baptism, God has given us the gift of union with Christ and with each other in the Church. In the face of God's free gift, the only proper response on our part is a response of love that is given back to God, a love that makes our life a gift to Him and that leads to living in the way He asks us to.

Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from that love. Like the sin of Adam and Eve, it is disobedience, a revolt against whereby we desire to have a mastery over our life

that in truth belongs to God. Sin is an inordinate love of self, even to the point of putting oneself before God. It is a proud exaltation of self, in contrast to the obedience of Jesus, whose observance of the Father's will brought about our salvation.

Sin can be likened to a disorder or sickness. Take the example of our physical health: sometimes we are seriously ill, and sometimes we just have a cold. So, too, with spiritual health: sin can be serious (mortal) or less serious (venial).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that “sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity.” (1849)

Sin is a personal act, but our sins can sometimes lead others to commit sin. Our participation in collective wrong-doing can lead to “social sin,” sin that gives rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the very nature of God.

The awareness of sin in our life should lead us to immediately trust in God's mercy. We have the great gift of being able to seek God's forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance. The Sacrament of Penance brings us the experience of God's love and mercy, proving to us His desire to keep us always close to Him as His beloved sons and daughters. ✠

