

Fr. Perozich comments —

Lent is upon us, the lengthening of daylight in the season of spring, the 40 days to live the pillars of piety: prayer fasting and almsgiving, recalling our Lord's 40 day fast and prayer in the desert before beginning His mission of charity for the salvation of mankind.

With serious effort, prayer will storm heaven for a Christian's transformation into the image of Jesus.

Fasting will empty the Christian of sin and of inane desire in order to receive the graces from God.

Almsgiving will form the Christian into the image of Jesus with a true vision of self as like the others toward whom charity is directed.

Anthony Esolin shows how the darkness has overcome souls and the world so that the light does not penetrate where man has chosen sin.

The saving grace is Jesus where, in the gospel of John, he teaches that "the light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome the light", except perhaps only in men who choose to close their eyes to the brightness of the Savior's truth and live in their own created worlds.

Fr. Paul Scalia guides the Christian to classic Catholic teaching for this season with the pillars of piety: prayer, fasting, almsgiving.

The traditional pre Lenten Sundays of Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima (70, 60, and 50) before Quadragesima, the 40 days of time before Easter began the faithful, for the rigors of self reflection during Lent.

*I stopped by a parish hall to visit the faithful after Mass last Sunday, and politely refused the offer of coffee and doughnuts explaining that I had begun my pre Lenten preparation. A woman there said she was not going to fast. Being in her 70's she was not required to fast, nor being in my 70's am I **required** to fast.*

Toward the end of my life, I do not see this as a privilege of age, rather an opportunity to rid myself of superficiality, self concern, and to empty the stomach to prepare the soul for a cleansing from sin and a new infusion of grace.

Pray for those church leaders who seem to be confused as Esolin notes regarding a particularly influential cardinal, that any darkness and hard heartedness be overcome by the light of Christ in imitation of Jesus' own piety.

Pray for more priests like Fr. Scalia who call us Christians into the light of Christ out of darkness and self centeredness toward the cleansing and transformation that the 40 days offer and the graces that the Easter liturgies confer upon us as we work our our salvation in fear and trembling.

Where the Light Doesn't Shine

Anthony Esolen FEBRUARY 26, 2022

One of the effects of **evil**, as all the great Christian teachers and poets have told us for two thousand years, is that it **makes you stupid**. You miss things right in your line of sight. You determine that you are going to kill your brother (or, far more likely in our time, your child), and you do it. And before long you cannot even see that he was your brother and that you owed him a brother's love. "Am I my brother's keeper?" says Cain, the first murderer, in the first flippant and stupid comment in Scripture.

We should not be surprised that, **in Scripture, stupidity comes arm in arm with hardness of heart, a moral dullness that we wish would be merely idle, but is often restlessly active and willfully destructive**. Our Lord brings to our attention these two qualities, bound together, when he says that Satan was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, indeed the father of lies. (Jn. 8:44)

Now, I know of no more destructive lie in our time than the lie that is at the dead heart of the sexual revolution. Revolution? Rather **the utter collapse of the Christian and Jewish moral vision that used to guide relations between boys and girls, and men and women, and the formation of families and the raising of children**.

No moral vision has taken its place. We are a city built upon a crater. Every year the earth beneath us groans and falls in again, so that, compared with what we are now supposed to believe in 2022, 2012 seems sane and healthy. In 2012, we were not yet mutilating little boys and girls, giving frissons of delight to their parents as they show off the amputees. Who knows what 2032 will bring?

Every sin is a lie, suppressing, distorting, denying, or mocking the truth. Sexual sins are no exception. The unmarried man and woman in bed together *must say* with their bodies, "I am

yours forever, and this act is proof, because it is the act that brings new life into being.”

But they cannot intend that meaning without sensing that they should be married – they should have uttered the sacred vow explicitly *before* they uttered it implicitly with the child-making act. And in our time, fornication is not usually an overflow of youthful spirits and infatuation. *That* romantic lie no longer fools even the liars. It is instead a sluggish backwash, a poor stay against loneliness and boredom.

And the lie, accepted and submitted to, has rendered the landscape of young love an inhospitable desert. Do I need to cite the statistics here, that show how marriage itself has fallen into the crater – especially harming the working classes and the poor? Do I need to show how many children are born out of wedlock, or how many, if they are not born into chaos, are pitched into it by divorce?



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I will hear that people who are attracted to members of their own sex must live as they truly are. That too is a lie. We do not know who we truly are; it is one of the effects of sin. What I am, in any case, does not lie in my determination, and is not, in its most basic sense, private to me. I am a man, a male human being; I am not an angel with some specific individual essence.

All human beings are bound by the same moral laws. All male human beings are to treat the maleness of their bodies as a gift whose meaning is already inherent in itself, a meaning they must not violate or traduce. All female human beings, likewise. If a Christian denies this, he denies creation itself and its God-given order. He no longer says with Saint Paul that the invisible things of God can be perceived through the visible things he has made. (Rom. 1:20)

He thus tries to shoulder God from his throne, and the stupidity of the attempt causes him to fall farther into stupidity. So, Paul says, men ended up worshipping four-footed beasts, and God gave them up to shameful and unnatural passions – passions that violate the created order (1:26-27).

And thus, Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg, the Relator General of the Synod on Synodality, is waving a bituminous banner.

Cardinal Hollerich has, by his own inadvertent admission, been living a lie. He has said that the **Church's teaching regarding the immorality of homosexual actions is wrong and must be abandoned.** Of course, **the entirety of Christian sexual morality is included in that abandonment.** There is no way to tell John and Mary that they must keep themselves chaste or at least continent before marriage, no way to show them the holiness and the wonder of the marital and child-making act, no way to warn against fornication, let alone against the bitter coarseness of most popular entertainment now, while you are on your way to the gay bar.

And we are not at the beginning of the collapse, when dull-witted or semi-honest prelates might plead that they could never have foreseen what would happen. We have been watching the collapse for at least sixty years. It has

accompanied – no surprise – a collapse in Church life. It has – no surprise – produced a world in which people are expected to tell disastrous lies with their bodies, and then they end up believing that that is all there is to tell.

Cardinal Hollerich is without excuse. I do not accuse him merely of failing to believe what the Church teaches. I accuse him of a shocking **hardness of heart.** Who can take an honest look at the Western world and conclude that we did *the right thing* in our wholesale denial of Scripture and of Catholic moral teaching? Has he not turned on a television lately? Does he own stock in makers of antidepressants? Or demolition companies?

Lux in burgo non lucet, quia tenebrae eam comprehenderunt.

***Image:** *Satan viewing the ascent to heaven* (Paradise Lost, book 3, line 501) by John Martin, 1825 [The Clark Museum, Williamstown, MA]

Inward and Outward

Fr. Paul D. Scalia FEBRUARY 27, 2022

A bitter irony of Original Sin is that it has made us simultaneously more self-focused and less self-aware. Despite our thinking so much about ourselves, we have little self-knowledge to show for it.

Fallen man is, in the Psalmist's words, *incurvatus nimis* – exceedingly bowed down, turned inward on himself. Our thoughts are self-referential. The self becomes the center of gravity for our thoughts, words, and actions. This is pride, plain and simple. From it come all boasting and haughtiness as well as fear and insecurity. Whatever manifestation our pride takes, it always results in a lack of concern for others. Or, very likely, a concern for the other not *as other* but, bending the arc back to oneself, as someone who affects *me*.

Despite this extraordinary self-focus, we still suffer a shockingly superficial understanding of ourselves. Our self-referential thinking is only to the superficial self. We remain on the surface of things and fail to delve beneath the surface to our authentic longings and desires. The impact on others is obvious: the one with a surfeit of self-interest and little self-knowledge can show little charity to others.

Our Lord touches on this tragic reality in today's Gospel. The hypocrite is one who lacks the awareness – or perhaps the willingness to be aware – of the wooden beam in his own eye, even as he notices the splinter in his brother's. He cannot assist his brother because of his lack of self-knowledge. Thus, Jesus directs us to the interior life, to “the fullness of the heart” that produces either good or bad fruit. Unless we take that self-knowledge seriously, we cannot bear fruit in good works for our neighbor.

So the Christian life, in its constant fight against our wounded human nature, should be a constant inward and outward progression. First inward, to know ourselves as we really are and not as we superficially think ourselves to be. Then outward, to genuine regard

and love for the other *as other* and not as an extension of our own self-love. This is the paradox of the Christian life: the more inward we go in self-knowledge, the more capable we become of going outward in love of neighbor.

With Ash Wednesday coming, we can approach the disciplines of Lent with this inward/outward progression in mind. **We can engage our Lenten prayer, fasting, and almsgiving with a view to lessening self-focus and growing in the self-**



knowledge that enables self-giving.

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Perhaps a **deeper praying of the Psalms** is in order. Saint Josemaría observes, “There are few things more at odds with

Christianity than superficiality.” Such superficiality keeps us from knowing our real longings and desires. We limit them to the here-and-now, to the worldly, and even the carnal. The Psalmist shows us the true path: *O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is.* (Ps 63:1) When we allow these words to shape our minds (as Saint Benedict counsels), then we break through the surface, into a deeper awareness of the real longing that we typically anesthetize. Then, as legitimate as our temporal needs may be, we realize the deeper need within us.

The privileged subject of Lenten prayer is our Lord’s Passion and Death. The extremity of his suffering displays the depth of divine love for us sinners. It should also shock us out of a superficial treatment of our sin and rebellion. But that requires that we *pray* and not just say prayers. Saint Alphonsus Liguori’s words in his Stations of the Cross might seem foreign to us, but they convey the reality, and we should make them (like the Psalms) our own: *I love you, Jesus, my Love, above all things. I repent of ever having offended you. Never allow me to offend you again. Grant that I may love you always; and then do with me as you will.*

Fasting is surface warfare. It targets those carnal desires that sit on the surface of our souls, not so that we can be without desire but so that we can go deeper and know our real desires. As a parishioner said to me years ago about the Eucharistic fast, “Father, how can you hunger for the Word of God on a full stomach?” That truth about the Eucharistic fast applies to all fasting. If we spend our time seeking to satisfy our hunger and thirst for food and drink – or whatever – then we will not experience our deeper hunger and thirst, for God.

Finally, **almsgiving has a twofold effect. First, it rids us of the possessions and money we use to make ourselves feel sufficient.** Only in so doing can we come to know God as our true wealth and everlasting possession. Second, **it puts our “needs” in the proper perspective. What we think we need is clarified when we take seriously the destitution and suffering of others.**

Inward and outward. This is the pattern of the saints. It is the Apostle Paul disappearing for years in prayer and then spending his

life as a missionary. It is Saint Catherine of Siena retreating to her “cell of self-knowledge” and then bursting forth in apostolic action. It is Mother Teresa first adoring Christ in the Eucharist and then serving him in the poorest of the poor. May it be our pattern as well.

Image: *Vanity* by Jan Sanders van Hemessen, c. 1535-40 [Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille, France]