

Fr. Perozich comments —

Saint Vincent Ferrer, priest wrote, “When you treat virtuous and sinful acts in your sermons and exhortations, use simple language and sensible idioms. Give apt and precise examples whenever you can.”

I agree with him that people relate to the modern language and events of our own time and experience a little better than to the depth of theological reflection from the past.

So for this Passion week, I offer first psychologist Terry Paulson’s reflection, and then follow with John Henry Newman’s thoughts on the Crucifixion.

Ferrer continues, “Each sinner in your congregation should feel moved as though you were preaching to him alone. Your words should sound as though they were coming, not from a proud or angry soul, but from a charitable and loving heart. Your tone of voice should be that of a father who suffers with his sinful children, as though they were seriously ill or were lying in a huge pit; and he struggles to free them, raise them up, and cherish them like a mother, as one who is happy over their progress and the hope they have of heaven’s glory.”

Let He Who Has Not Sinned Cast the First Stone

Terry Paulson

There seems to be seething anger in the world today that seeks someone to attack. It is a world where there is little room for redemption or forgiveness. It's a one-and-done trial. You have a visible sin, and it's over. Like the

gladiators with swords to the neck of their defeated opponent, they look to the coliseum masses for a verdict. The thumbs-down condemnation seems unanimous. **There is no mercy to be had.**

Maybe two years of being cooped up in our homes for fear of COVID has left us easily enraged by those we deem evil and deserving of our wrath. **The media, eager to draw our attention to the mistakes and sins of others to improve ratings, use any "sinner" they can find to capture viewers and feed our appetite to have someone to hate.** Whether it is a politician we dislike, a law enforcement officer who goes too far, a fellow citizen who dares try to defend his community, or even an offended Oscar-winning actor who slaps a comedian in front of millions of viewers, we may not want blood, but we do want to destroy their reputations.

Our country seems to be majoring in condemnation. Whether it's former President Trump or President Biden, with a polarized electorate, the faithful followers do what they can to bring their opponent down. When an officer in a scary moment of confrontation makes the wrong decision and it is captured on video, we want his job-we want him convicted and locked up. When a citizen brings a gun to town to help protect his city from rioters and chaos reigns, there is no room for mercy. And when Will Smith slapped Chris Rock at the Oscars, millions piled on to the outrage.

Maybe we are not as unique as we think. Two thousand years ago, a man named Jesus was led through a throng of adoring fans on his way to Jerusalem. They laid cloaks and palm branches on the ground before him with shouts of "Messiah" echoing for all to hear. But in less than a week, another crowd gathered before Pontius Pilot as his fate laid in the balance and demanded in one voice-"Crucify him!" And they did. He was nailed to a cross until he died.

That same man, when a woman who was caught in adultery was brought to him and he was asked to condemn her to be stoned to death as the law prescribed, gave an unexpected but powerful response. As the crowd gripped their stones ready to deliver the verdict the woman's sin deserved, Jesus knelt down and seemingly drew images in the sand. With all eyes upon him, he said to an angry crowd, "Let him who has not sinned cast the first stone." Within moments, stones could be heard dropping to the ground. No stones were thrown.

As we enter Passion Week, we are reminded of the powerful message and life of Jesus Christ. He ate with sinners, those in need of forgiveness and healing. **He challenged the religious of his day to not focus on the speck of sin in the eyes of others but to deal with the planks in their own eyes.**

As the Apostle Paul would remind us in his letter to Christians in Rome, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Jesus came not to lead the perfect but to save the sinner. Our society likes to feed the illusion of perfection. Maybe that is why we get so upset when anyone

dares break that illusion. We know privately that we fall short of even our own ideals. But publicly we dare not confess to such sin. Maybe that is why hiding in our homes exiting only with the cover of face masks to hide who we really seem somehow safe.

The COVID restrictions are coming down. The mask mandate is being made optional. We will soon be re-entering a new normal. Unfortunately, **the anger and calls for condemnation are still there.** Everyone has a cell phone ready to capture the "sins" of others. The private is now dangerously public. **Videos of sin feed the social media and those captured moments never go away.** Will Smith's slap will be with us every Oscar season. He may not be in the Oscar audience for the next ten years, but the slap will be used to make sure we don't forget.

Those willing to forgive may be ready to give Will Smith a second chance. After all, like me, we love many of his movies, and everyone deserves a second chance. But is a second chance enough? Like us, Will Smith will certainly sin again. He most certainly will not slap anyone else at an Oscars, but the media will be watching him for more proof of how far he has fallen.

To Will Smith and all of us, **God sent His Son that rather than being limited to a second chance, God gave us grace. Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sin. On Easter, Jesus rose again that we might by faith share with Him in eternal life and a loving relationship with God. The price for that gift of grace is to put down the stones we**

throw at others, to repent of our own sins of the past and those of the future, and to believe that Jesus died for our sins and rose again through faith we might be forgiven and saved.

In His ministry, Jesus shared the story of the "Prodigal Son" who demanded his inheritance from his father and left only to squander his wealth and be left to a life of sin and want. When he decided to return to his father, repent of his sins, and offer to live as his servant, his father saw him coming and ran to him with open arms. I [recently preached on](#) the fact that, like the sinners we all are, we all have our own prodigal moments. This is **the Easter God is inviting you to come back home to His loving arms. Is it time to come home?**



Terry Paulson is PhD psychologist, author, and professional speaker on Earned Optimism, Making Change Work, Claiming Your American Dream, and Becoming a Conservative Values Voter. Contact him at terry@terrypaulson.com.

The Omen and Presage of the True Victory

By St. John Henry Newman

SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 2022

A great number of men live and die without reflecting at all upon the state of things in which they find themselves. They take things as they come, and follow their inclinations as far as they have the opportunity. They are guided mainly by pleasure and pain, not by reason, principle, or conscience; and they do not attempt to *interpret* this world, to determine what it means, or to reduce what they see and feel to system.

But when persons, either from thoughtfulness of mind, or from intellectual activity, begin to contemplate the visible state of things into which they are born, then forthwith they find it a maze and a perplexity. It is a riddle which they cannot solve. It seems full of contradictions and without a drift. Why it is, and what it is to issue in, and how it is what it is, and how we come to be introduced into it, and **what is our destiny, are all mysteries.**

In this difficulty, some have formed one philosophy of life, and others another. Men have thought they had found the key, by means of which they might read what is so obscure. Ten thousand things come before us one after another in the course of life, and what are we to think of them? what color are we to give them? Are we to look at all things in a gay and mirthful way? or in a melancholy way? in a desponding or a hopeful way? . . . **Now, let me ask, what is the real key, what is the Christian interpretation of this world? What is given us by revelation to estimate and measure this world by? The event of this season,—the Crucifixion of the Son of God. . . .**

Look around, and see what the world presents of high and low. Go to the court of princes. See the treasure and skill of all nations

brought together to honor a child of man. . . .Go to the political world: see nation jealous of nation, trade rivaling trade, armies and fleets matched against each other. . . .Go, again, to the world of intellect and science: consider the wonderful discoveries which the human mind is making, the variety of arts to which its discoveries give rise, the all but miracles by which it shows its power; and next, the pride and confidence of reason, and the absorbing devotion of thought to transitory objects, which is the consequence.

Again: look at misery, look at poverty and destitution, look at oppression and captivity; go where food is scanty, and lodging unhealthy. Consider pain and suffering, diseases long or violent, all that is frightful and revolting.

Would you know how to rate all these? gaze upon the Cross. . . .

But it will be said, that the view which the Cross of Christ imparts to us of human life and of the world, is not that which we should take, if left to ourselves; that it is not an obvious view; that if we look at things on their surface, they are far more bright and sunny than they appear when viewed in the light which this season casts upon them. . . .How does this solve a problem? does it not rather itself create one?

I answer, first, that whatever force this objection may have, surely it is merely a repetition of that which Eve felt and Satan urged in Eden; for did not the woman see that the forbidden tree was “good for food,” and “a tree to be *desired*”? Well, then, **is it wonderful that we too, the descendants of the first pair, should still be in a world where there is a forbidden fruit, and that our trials should lie in being within reach of it, and our happiness in abstaining from it?**



*

The world, at first sight, appears *made* for pleasure, and the vision of Christ's Cross is a solemn and sorrowful sight interfering with this appearance. Be it so; but why may it not be our duty to abstain from enjoyment notwithstanding, if it was a duty even in Eden?

But again; it is but a superficial view of things to say that this life is made for pleasure and happiness. To those who look under the surface, it tells a very different tale. . . .It may be granted, then, that the doctrine of the Cross is not on the surface of the world. The surface of things is bright only, and the Cross is sorrowful; it is a hidden doctrine; it lies under a veil; it at first sight startles us, and we are tempted to revolt from it. . . .

This being the case, the great and awful **doctrine of the Cross of Christ, which we now commemorate, may fitly be called, in the language of figure, the *heart* of religion.** The heart may be considered as **the seat of life**; it is the principle of motion, heat, and activity; from it the **blood goes to and fro to the extreme parts of the body.** It sustains the man in his powers and

faculties; it enables the brain to think; and when it is touched, man dies.

And in like manner **the sacred doctrine of Christ's Atoning Sacrifice is the vital principle on which the Christian lives, and without which Christianity is not.** Without it no other doctrine is held profitably; to believe in Christ's divinity, or in His manhood, or in the Holy Trinity, or in a judgment to come, or in the resurrection of the dead, is an untrue belief, not Christian faith, unless **we receive also the doctrine of Christ's sacrifice.**

On the other hand, to receive it presupposes the reception of other high truths of the Gospel besides; it involves the belief in Christ's true divinity, in His true incarnation, and in man's sinful state by nature; and it prepares the way to belief in the sacred Eucharistic feast, in which He who was once crucified is ever given to our souls and bodies, verily and indeed, in His Body and in His Blood.

But again, the heart is hidden from view; it is carefully and securely guarded; it is not like the eye set in the forehead, commanding all, and seen of all: and so in like manner **the sacred doctrine of the Atoning Sacrifice is not one to be talked of, but to be lived upon; not to be put forth irreverently, but to be adored secretly; not to be used as a necessary instrument in the conversion of the ungodly, or for the satisfaction of reasoners of this world, but to be unfolded to the docile and obedient; to young children, whom the world has not corrupted; to the sorrowful, who need comfort; to the sincere and earnest, who need a rule of life; to the innocent, who need warning; and to the established, who have earned the knowledge of it. . . .**

And thus, too, all that is bright and beautiful, even on the surface of this world, though it has no substance, and may not suitably be enjoyed for its own sake, yet is a figure and promise of that true joy which issues out of the Atonement. It is a promise beforehand of what is to be: it is a shadow, raising hope because the substance is to follow, but not to be rashly taken instead of the substance. And it is God's usual mode of dealing with us, in mercy to send the shadow before the substance, that we may take comfort in what is to be, before it comes.

Thus our Lord before His Passion rode into Jerusalem in triumph, with the multitudes crying Hosanna, and strewing His road with palm branches and their garments. This was but a vain and hollow pageant, nor did our Lord take pleasure in it. It was a shadow which stayed not, but flitted away. It could not be more than a shadow, for the Passion had not been undergone by which His true triumph was wrought out. He could not enter into His glory before He had first suffered. He could not take pleasure in this semblance of it, knowing that it was unreal.

Yet that first shadowy triumph was the omen and presage of the true victory to come, when He had overcome the sharpness of death. And we commemorate this figurative triumph on the last Sunday in Lent, to cheer us in the sorrow of the week that follows, and to remind us of the true joy which comes with Easter-Day.

***Image:** *The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem* by Anthony van Dyck, c. 1617 [Indianapolis Museum of Art]