

Fr. Perozich comments —

Some Christians claim “once saved always saved”. While there is truth that God does not take away His grace to save man from sin for goodness, from eternal death for eternal life, and from loneliness and isolation for communion and integration, man, on the other hand, frequently rejects the grace and can end up in damnation.

Still the grace of God is powerful, and continues to draw man back to God.

Whether or not man listens and obeys is the man’s responsibility.

For non Christians, the conscience is the guide.

For Jews, the Law is the guide to help conscience.

For Christians, grace is the power and guide to integrate the law and conscience into the life of the believer, chosen by Christ.

Fr. Paul Scalia presents two attitudes.

A sinner is one who falls short of the glory which God gives but repents and turns back toward God and toward righteousness.

A hypocrite is one who wishes to be seen as righteous but ignores God’s truth, substituting the hypocrite’s own preferences for sin as his guiding path.

It takes frequent effort and prayer to consider how God forgives and leads man on the path toward eternal life, an integration more and more here on earth toward unity with Jesus, so that when the journey on this side of the kingdom ends, and the door opens toward the kingdom of eternity, men will be ready to grasp the hand of Jesus and enter into heaven.

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Be a Sinner, not a Hypocrite

Fr. Paul D. Scalia

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Are you a hypocrite? Well, it might feel like that at times. At least, it should. Anyone striving for something great should be aware of his failures and how short he falls of the ideal. Even more so when the ideal is Christ Himself. You go to Mass, pray the

Rosary, and say grace before meals. But then you snap at your children, covet your neighbor's goods (and wife), eat too much, and so on. Yes, **we feel the division between what we believe and how we behave.** We can feel like hypocrites at times.

Now, some of that division comes from being children of Adam. Our human nature is wounded. **We've inherited the disintegration that's part and parcel of original sin. Our thoughts, words, and actions are not integrated, not whole and entire.** But some of this is also our own doing, our own failure to live a life of integrity. And every time we sin, we exacerbate that division.

Of course, *Hypocrites!* is the classic accusation thrown at serious Catholics or at anyone simply striving for more than the world's paltry offerings. People see that Catholics fall short of what we profess. They see us live in contradiction to what we claim to believe and strive to be. It's hypocrisy, pure and simple. Or so it would seem.

So, the striver and the hypocrite look a lot alike, both saying one thing and doing another. The word *hypocrite* comes from the Greek for *actor*. Both parties seem to be just that, actors playing out something that they are not. But we know that there's a profound difference between the two. The sinner is *not yet* the Christian he desires to be. The hypocrite doesn't even desire it.

The sinner who strives is discontented by the division within him. He wants to be made whole – to think, speak, and act according to what he knows to be true. He wants to live according to the truth of who he is and what he is called to be. His failure to do so is a cause of frustration and, more importantly, repentance.

The hypocrite, on the other hand, has made peace with his interior division. He is not bothered or tortured by his lack of wholeness. He's less concerned about conforming himself to an ideal and more concerned about acting

out that ideal to others. . .or **reshaping the ideal to fit his behavior. He doesn't strive for the truth, but for comfort, power, or gain.**

Which brings us to today's Gospel about two sons (Matthew 21:28-32): the rebellious first son and the seemingly compliant second son. On the surface, they both seem hypocritical. But, again, there's a profound difference.

The first son – representing tax collectors and prostitutes – **is divided but capable of repentance.** “*I will not,*” he says to his father. But then he changes his mind and conforms himself to the father's will. He was rebellious, to be sure. But he also had the capacity to repent. He lost his way, but not his compass.

The second son – representing the chief priests and elders of the people – **is a hypocrite.** That's our Lord's preferred term to describe leaders (see, for example, Matthew 23). **The second son says one thing – “Yes, sir” – and does another, without any qualms or pangs of conscience. Nor does he repent of the contradiction that he's introduced into his soul and into the world. He's made peace with it.**

The point is, **the greater defect** in the second son isn't disobedience but **a lack of repentance. What offends God more than sin is the denial of it and the refusal to repent.** Thus Jesus brings the lesson to its conclusion when He rebukes the chief priests and elders, not so much for their initial error but because they “did not later change [their] minds and believe.”

The parable reveals why we always find our Lord so patient and gentle with “tax collectors and sinners.” It's not because He makes light of their sins (that would be the modern solution). It's because **He finds in them a discontent and discomfort, a desire for wholeness, and therefore a capacity to repent and be restored.**

By the same reasoning, our Lord is severe with the chief priests and elders. It's not because they have authority that He rebukes them (as, again, a modern reading would have it), but

because **they have made peace with the division within them. They have grown accustomed to speaking an insincere “Yes” to the Father and then doing what they want.** He finds in them nothing to work with because they lack the ability to change their minds and believe.

We want to be men and women of **integrity**, to live lives that are whole and entire, coherent in thought, word, and deed. This **requires two fundamental habits.**

First, a constant orientation to the truth. Only adherence to the truth about God and man can bring that interior wholeness we desire. Without truth as our lodestar, we veer towards divisive and debasing goals – for possessions, pleasure, and power. Either we will conform ourselves to what is true, or we will be divided by our own desires. As now-Blessed Fulton Sheen once observed, **“If you don’t behave as you believe, you will end by believing as you behave.”**

Second, continual repentance. In our fallen human nature, repentance is necessary for integrity. Saint Thomas More, a man known even in his own day as a man of integrity, was aware of his sinfulness and need to repent. The man of integrity is not sinless. But he’s not a hypocrite either. He knows when he says “No” to the Father and repents of it.

The Church doesn’t claim that her saints (except for our Lady) were perfect. She acknowledges that they – although holy now – were still sinners in this world. The integrity – wholeness, holiness – they now possess came from being repentant and always returning to the Father.

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