

# The Lost Sense of Sin

The Lost Sense of God's Holiness

***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8)***





ONE more week to Holy Week – the holiest time in the liturgical year as we focus on the coming passion of Jesus. His suffering, passion, and cruel death by crucifixion – and worst of all, being called a criminal. Jesus, the sinless one, took upon Himself our sins. The sense of the sin in our world today is lost, yet we know that Jesus carried the weight of our sins on his shoulders. He died to save us from our sins. These coming days is a good time to review our lives, take stock of our sins, big or small, venial or mortal.

**So what is sin really?** In today's world, many have lost the sense of sin, are desensitised and indifferent to moral decadence. Life in the second decade of the 21st century differs from the way it used to be a century ago. Violence has become rampant. Sexual harassment and corruption have become an everyday occurrence. Money and material well-being are priority goals for millions of people, who would easily give up their moral principles for financial gain or authority. This moral decadence has adverse effects on society, because it changes cultural, moral, and social norms and sets new but lower standards for appropriate behaviours. It promotes public acceptance of violence, justifies discrimination and injustice, and limits opportunities for social development that is so important to keep societies flourishing. "Moral decadence" is a popular term in research and practice. According to Njoku (2013), it can be defined as "failure to uphold sound morality in society".

Today many seemingly good Christians' violation of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment is prevalent. ***"I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods but Me."*** The evil one creeps up little by little and makes lame excuses for doing things that looks 'good' on the outside but with evil intent. For example, telling people that it's alright to seek fortune tellers or buy that crystal for good luck etc. And slowly people begin to trust in such things and not God. This creates a sin opening for the evil one to enter into their lives and soon have a hold on them.

Living a sincere sacramental life can lead one to an honest, open talk about sin. Far from being an exercise in wallowing in our own guilt, naming sin can actually be liberating. It's like taking stock of our worn clothes in the clear light of day and then making good use of the 'modern miracle' that is the washing machine. In authentic Catholic and Christian spirituality, sin is an important word. The trick is remembering how to start saying it again. And then remembering that sin doesn't have the last word. God does.

Gone are the days when we hear and discuss sin, judgment, heaven and hell. Whenever we pursue pleasure for its own sake to the detriment of others, we sin. It is not unusual these days to come across people with an unformed or distorted conscience or with a conscience relying primarily on instinct or personal preference rather than on a sober awareness of right and wrong and on an acknowledgement of God's law.

People in general are afraid of breaking the civil law but forget that there is God's law too. Many attended the recent seminar, ***"Keeping Doors to the Demonic Closed"*** by Adam Blai. There is usually an overwhelming response to such talks about demons than about God's love and forgiveness. This is good, but the knowledge about the tactics of the evil one needs to move us into taking extreme measures to **close ALL the doors to sin**. Because the biggest doorway for the evil one to usurp our lives and cause havoc in our family life, is the violation of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment, which has been overlooked for a long time.

There are Catholics and Christians who claim to believe in Jesus, but also believe in superstitions and new age. They seek an easy way out, a comfortable and cosy life with frills and thrills. These attractive trimmings initially seemed harmless but gradually people become pre occupied with these and get sucked into what seemed 'harmless' camouflage as good fortune. Precisely, this is a violation of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment as they rely on all other superstitions and not on God.

A stark reminder of Jesus in scripture, ***"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it"*** (Matthew 7:13).

Why? Simply because they want it fast, easy, hassle free. For God does not work this way. God comes to us from the inside-out. He changes first our inner being and from there He gives us wisdom, insight and contentment which will be the compass that stirs us to a deeper hunger and love for God as we experience an inner joy and peace that is long lasting. Unlike the material things that only satisfies us for as long as we have them. But once it is taken away, we become despondent, and depressed. Sin is the force not to be reckoned with. It brings disaster, divisions, sickness of mind and body, unrest, affliction of soul.

There is sin in the world and we are sinners. We are right to meditate at length and in depth on the mercy of God and His love for us. This meditation offers endless possibilities of feeding our minds and warming our hearts. Yet we should not be blinded to the reality of sin which is part of our unhappy world and part of our own lives. It is foolish and dangerous self-deception to point the finger at other people without taking note of our own sins. We sin from frailty and from malice. There are of course those sins of weakness when we are overcome by passion and by our weaknesses. There are those calculated and deliberate decisions to do what is wrong for the sake of our own advantage or self-interest. But, in some measure, all of us are burdened with sin.

*"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross because of sin, not just the treachery of Judas, not just the mistaken obedience and sense of duty of the Roman soldiers, not just the weakness of Peter and the other apostles who ran away, but the sinfulness of the rebellious and stiff-necked world, the sin of men and women down the ages. So each of us in some way contributed to the passion and death of our Lord. There is a certain solidarity in sin. A repercussion, a ripple effect that affects all of us in some way, when we reflect deeply on sin.

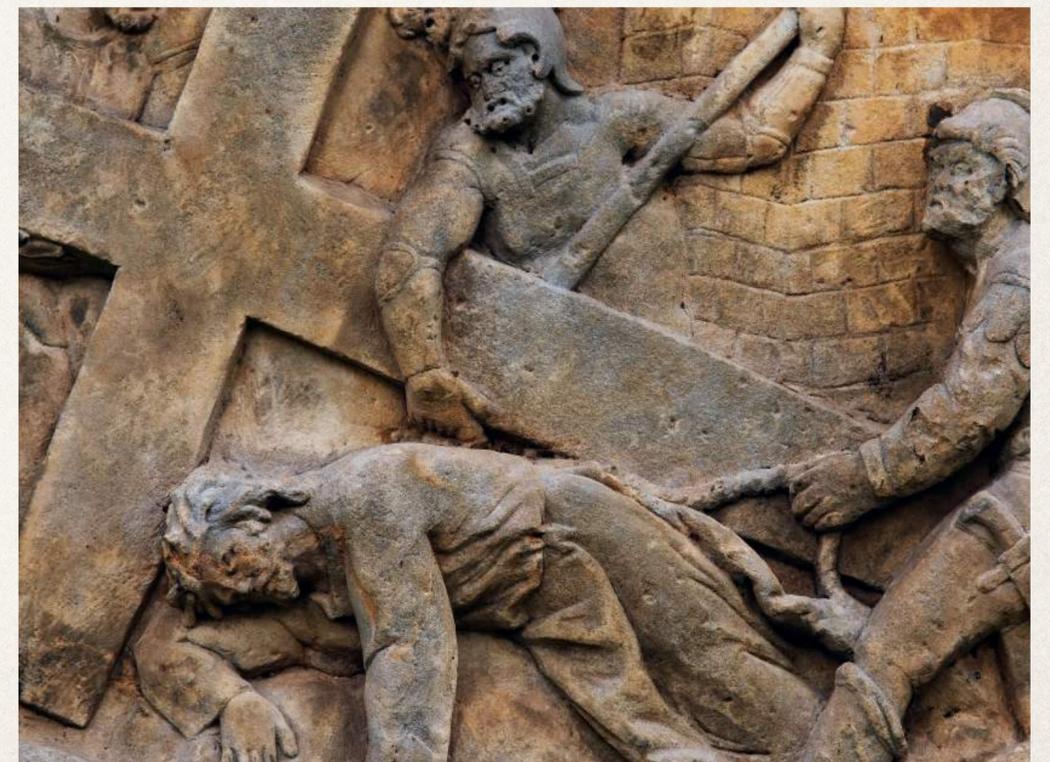
That is not a reason for becoming depressed or overcome with guilt feelings. There must be sorrow, of course, there must be admission of our sin, and expression of our sorrow, there must be a putting right of what has been wrong. In the Catholic church those of us in grave sin, and conscious of it, are called upon to go to the sacrament of Reconciliation, to confession. We turn back to God, *metanoia* - a transformative change of heart, a spiritual conversion.

Jesus looked ahead to his passion as He **resolutely** took the road to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), because it was the means of our salvation. Jesus was preparing for this moment. Speaking to Pilate, Jesus said: ***"For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth"*** (John 18:37).

*"For my part, I made no resistance, Neither did I turn away. I offer my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who tore at my beard. I did not cover my face against insult and spittle"*  
(Isaiah 50:5-6)

**Reflection for Holy Week - The Suffering Servant (Please read the whole chapter of Isaiah 53)**

*"Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:4-6)





## No More Condemnation ... Justified!

Justification is not the same thing as a pardon. If we bring a criminal before a judge and the judge pardoned him, he would still have a record. Justification means there is no record against us in heaven at all.

## Get Out of Jail Free

When playing the game of monopoly, one of the best cards to have is the famous “Get Out of Jail Free” card - but when we are playing the game of “real life,” the card doesn’t work quite so well. A man was pulled over when a traffic police officer saw he was not wearing his seat belt and also that the car he was driving had an expired insurance policy. It turned out the driver himself was also a wanted man being searched. The wanted man pulled out the infamous monopoly card. The card might provide a few laughs for the traffic police officer, but the man still landed himself in jail. *Isn’t it a relief that we don’t have to try card tricks on God to try and receive mercy ... Jesus have given His life to save us.*

## The Passion of Jesus Christ Speaks to Us

Reflecting on the Passion of Jesus each year is a sacred and special time for us all. It’s special because it is the account of our salvation, of Jesus giving His life to save us. It was because of our sins that Jesus died. This coming week, is indeed a Holy Week, a week like no other in the year, a week when we celebrate Sacred Triduum, on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil and recall what Jesus did for us. This week is a week to take time out, to stop, to reflect, to spend time with Jesus who gave His life for us, a week to pray with more intention, devotion and attention.

✦ In Gethsemane we see that prayer to God gives us strength to face the worst. When Jesus began His prayer in Gethsemane, He said His soul was sorrowful to the point of death (Matthew 26:38; Mark 14:34) and even asked His Father to take the cup away from Him.

✦ Jesus was asking His Father to grant that He would not have to suffer and die. But during His prayer He gained strength to face His Passion and was able to pray “*not what I will but what you will*” (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42).

This is an example of the life of Jesus for us. Prayer helps and strengthens us. Jesus went from being ‘cast’ down (take this cup away from me) to being ‘lifted’ up (not what I will but what you will). When we have problems, turn to prayer more than ever because prayer helps. Prayer helps Jesus to face His Passion and **prayer helps us also to give up sinning.**

During the Last Supper, Peter said that he would be willing to go to prison with Jesus, even to die with Him (Luke 22:23). Yet a few hours later that same evening Peter denied Jesus (Luke 22:56-62). How quick Peter changed. How quick he turned when the pressure was on him. Peter could make fine promises during the Last Supper but when the crunch came, he decided to save his skin. What about us in the face of temptation? Do we give in? Do we cling to Jesus?

We make great promises to Jesus after our conversion retreats and when temptation comes our way. How do we react? Do we cave in when under peer pressure like Peter or do we stand by Jesus like the women and John and go right to the cross? Peter heard the cock crowing after he denied Jesus (Luke 22:60) but our world is so addicted to sin that maybe we don’t even hear conscience crowing any more when we sin.

How can we not hear the account of Jesus’ Passion and not be moved by it? An atheist woman was so moved by watching the movie, *The Passion of Christ* that she cried. When asked by her party friends - *why she cried* – the woman responded – *The person would be evil if there is no tears!*

The Passion of Jesus moves us when we truly see with our eyes of faith that it is we who have inflicted this suffering on Jesus. It was not the chief priests and it was not the cruel Roman soldiers who brought this suffering on Jesus. It was our sins that inflicted this suffering. We nail Jesus again and again ... so then the account of the Passion of Jesus moves us to flee from sin, to leave sin behind. And through the Passion of Jesus, we receive forgiveness, “*through his wounds we are healed*” (Isaiah 53:5).