

## **THE RESULTS OF SIN AND HOW TO OVERCOME I**

In our Gospel Reading today, we find that the disciples had come upon a man who was driving out demons in Christ's name but was not a member of Christ's band of disciples and certainly not one of the Twelve. They had ordered him to stop. Had they acted correctly? Wasn't the driving out of demons part of the authority Jesus had given to them? John's words showed both a concern for Jesus and also a concern for their rights as disciples. The first was proper, the other not.

Jesus promptly told them that they were wrong. That the man drove out demons in Jesus' name proved he was a believer, unless of course there would have been specific evidence to the contrary. Such, Jesus told the Twelve, would be rewarded by the Lord even if a person's deed was no greater than giving a cup of water in Jesus' name to those who were his.

This certainly means that we will never seek to prevent others from preaching and proclaiming Christ, even if they are not part of our specific group. We must leave the final judgment to Christ Himself. On our part we must, rather, be watchful lest by word or example we lead anyone astray, and Christ here even includes the little ones who believe in Him. We must always ask ourselves: Does my life and do my deeds and words lead others to Christ or lead them into sin? If the latter, Christ here issues a serious warning to us. It will be better that before we ever lead anyone into sin, we will forfeit our own lives by having a millstone - a large one, turned by a donkey or an ox - tied to our necks and then being cast into the sea. To sin is something dreadful, but to lead someone else into sin is definitely worse.

Our Lord uses graphic expressions to teach His disciples and us how important it is to fight sin. Sin leads to hell. Jesus uses the pictures of Isaiah 66:24 to describe hell. It's the place of eternal torment, *where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out.*

To "be thrown into hell" is what will happen when we choose that which is evil. To "be thrown into hell" is to be condemned to hell; God pronounces the judgment. That is what all face who sell out to sin.

What price are we willing to pay to avoid hell? Jesus says we should be ready to cut off our hands, cut off our feet, pluck out our eyes. Are these words to be taken literally? Note that Christ says, "If your hand ... if your foot ... if your eye causes you to sin." Is it really the hand, the foot, or the eye that does so? If so, what about the remaining foot, the other hand, or the other eye? Jesus gives His disciples the key to understanding these words (7:17-23). It is a person's heart that is the source of sin, though the hand, the foot, or the eye may be used to commit the sin. Jesus uses pictorial words lest we take sin lightly.

So what then if, as a result of avoiding sin, we don't get everything out of life our evil heart's desire and we enter life crippled? Remember, we are entering life - eternal life, the kingdom of God. That's worth any and every sacrifice. In heaven there are no cripples (see Philippians 3:21).

Jesus also points out how sin is overcome. He uses another figure of speech - salt used to make food palatable and to preserve it. Sometimes this salt will burn like fire. What can this salt be? It is God's Word, whose law burns and whose gospel heals. Christ also warns that this salt is to be used as God has given it. If it is desalted, as many modern theologians attempt, it will not do what God wants it to do. Then the case is hopeless. Take God's Word into your heart as it is, and you will have salt in yourself. By means of it, you will also be able to be at peace with one another - a reference to the argument the disciples had about who was the greatest.

What about being at peace with ourselves? Although we fight against sin, we can never overcome it completely. Is our case hopeless? No, Christ had already assured His disciples that He can and does forgive sins (2:5-10). That is why He came, and that is why He was now going to Jerusalem to suffer and die and rise again. But, as these words of Jesus show, the fact that we have forgiveness in Him dare never move us to take sin lightly.