

“God made us without us, but He will not save us without us,”

St Augustine

There seems to be a great deal about sin in the readings and prayers of today’s Mass, which is perhaps surprising given that, surely, *Lent* is the time for penitence and turning from sin, isn’t it? Isn’t that what all the purple vestments and emphasis on penance, and fasting, and almsgiving, and so forth was all about? So, how come we hear so much about sin again now two whole weeks after Lent is done and dusted?

In last week’s Gospel from St John we heard how Our Blessed Lord breathed the Holy Spirit onto the Apostles in the Upper Room and conferred upon them the power to forgive sins: ‘Those whose sins you forgive,’ He said, ‘are forgiven; and those whose sins you retain, are retained.’ In other words, the very first act of Our Lord after His resurrection from the dead – apart, that is, from demonstrating that it really is Him! – is to pass on to His newly ordained priests the power to absolve sins in the Sacrament of Confession. And it is easy to understand why: *this* is what all the fuss has been about from the outset. This is what the Incarnation of the Son of God at Christmas was all about; this is what Our Lord’s teachings and parables have all been about; this is what His healing miracles, especially the three times when He raised people from the dead, have been all about. And, most importantly of all, this is what His death and His resurrection have been about, namely, the forgiving of sins and the reconciling of sinners with the Father.

The only purpose of our holy religion is to save us from the consequences of Adam’s original sin and our actual sins. The whole point of our holy religion is the sanctification and salvation of souls so that, after we die, we might go to heaven instead of hell. It is as simple as that.

As a result, we are reminded throughout the Easter season why it was that Our Lord died in the first place, and why He rose again from the dead.

It is almost as if Our Lord is saying, ‘Look, I’ve done all the hard work. I have taught you, and given you signs and miracles, and I have even died a wretched death on the Cross for you. Come on. Now it’s your turn to do something.’

He is *not* say, ‘I’ve done my bit, and now it’s over to you.’ He *is* saying that if we want to benefit from His work of redemption then we now have to play our part. It’s a two-way thing.

So, what is our part? What does our part involve?

First and foremost, it involves worshipping the Lord our God, and loving Him with all our minds, our hearts, and or souls. It means we have to give to our Creator what we, as creatures, owe to the God who made us.

Second, it means thanking Him for all that He has given us. We may not always receive from His hands the things we *want* to receive, or all the things that we think we *should* receive or think we *deserve*. Nonetheless, if we were to count every single good thing that He had given us, we would not get to the end of the list by bedtime tonight.

Third – and this is where the question of sin comes in again – we must be proactive in turning away from sin, and changing our lives, so that we avoid what is evil and do what is good, as St Peter himself tells us elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Pet 3:11). This very practical principle is at the heart of our lives as Catholics. We must go out of our way to change the bad habits in our lives, and turn them into virtues instead. If we allow ourselves to be lulled into a sense of complacency, and think that we’re more or less okay as we are, or that God doesn’t really mind about such small things, then we will have failed to grasp the whole point of Good Friday, and we will have failed to understand just how important our role is in our own salvation.

In other words, if we really do want to get to heaven after we die, then we have to do something about it now!

If, on the other hand, we think we are not *truly* wicked people and that we don't have to do *much* more than we're already doing to avoid hell, then, the saints tell us, we are far more likely to end up exactly where we do not want to end up.

The choice is ours. It's up to us. As St Augustine said, 'God made us without us, but He will not save us without us' (*Sermo* 169, II, 13: PL). We have to do our bit. And here's the thing: just coming to Mass every Sunday, whilst it's a necessary starting point, will not be enough on its own.

So, sing your hearts out this Eastertide, and allow yourselves to be exhilarated that Christ is indeed risen from the dead and has already defeated the ultimate enemy, namely eternal death. But don't forget that if we want to join Him in heaven, it's now our turn to do something about our own salvation!