

DIVINE MERCY AND SINS AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

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In my Lenten “examination of conscience” homilies I made mention of a special category of sins called the sins against the Holy Spirit. These are, in a very strict sense, sins, which usually refer to insults against the God, and in particular, the Holy Spirit. But in a broader sense they are, as defined by the Fathers of the Church, those sins in which a person doesn't turn to God and ask for His divine mercy, sins in which a person refuses to make use of the graces available to him for his salvation.

Traditionally, the Church has defined six types of sins against the Holy Spirit: 1) A presumption of God's mercy, that is, committing a mortal sin with full consent, thinking that one can just go to confession later; 2) A refusal to ask forgiveness for sin or final impenitence, that is a perseverance in mortal sin until death, a fixed determination not to repent; 3) The obstinate rejection of inspirations of the Holy Spirit to do good works, such as, go to confession; 4) Resisting the known truth; 5) Envy of another's spiritual welfare; and 6) The despair, in which a sinner, conscious of many grave sins, thinks that he doesn't deserve God's forgiveness and renounces the grace of His mercy.¹

The Church teaches that sins against the Holy Spirit are unpardonable, not because God would ever want to refuse pardon to anyone, but because the person places a barrier between himself and God's forgiveness in the same manner in which a sick person would refuse to take the medicine and food necessary for his cure. These sins are unforgivable because the sinner does not want to be forgiven. And because God doesn't do violence to our free will, He will generally not intervene in the free choice of any person. The unforgivableness of these sins is not because of God's unwillingness to forgive but rather because of the sinner's rejection of it. Thus, final impenitence is absolute, “for even God cannot pardon where there is no repentance, and the moment of death is the fatal instant after which no mortal sin is remitted.”²

John Paul II pointed out that there are no limits to the mercy of God, but that anyone, who deliberately refuses to accept it by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit.³ And St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that sins against the Holy Spirit are “unforgivable by [their] very nature, insofar as [they exclude] the elements through which the forgiveness of sin takes place.”⁴

By despising or rejecting the inspirations and impulses which, having been stirred up in man's soul by the Holy Spirit, would turn him away or deliver him from evil, sins against the Holy Spirit are, therefore, sins of malice.⁵ But there is one sin against the Holy Spirit, which can be somewhat different than the others because it doesn't usually originate from pure malice. It is rooted, rather, in a loss of hope due to an acute realization of the enormity of one's sins—namely, the despair that leads a person to think that he is unforgivable.

The Church has always taught God's infinite mercy of which the sacrament of Penance is its most visible manifestation. But because man often forgot about God's mercy, he had to be constantly reminded of it. That's why in our time, a time when sin seems to reign, God had to once again come to tell us that even though our world has seriously gone astray, there is still hope, there is still mercy, there is still salvation—if

only we would turn to Him. That's why He came in the 1930s, in the midst of the bloodiest and most oppressive century in history, to a simple nun in Poland, Faustyna by name, to tell us that He is not a God of vengeance but a God of love and mercy, to tell us that we are the ones, who condemn ourselves if we reject His mercy. He held out His hand and gave us the chance to save ourselves—through His mercy freely given, if only we would accept it.

Christ once told Faustyna: “Disbelief in my goodness wounds me the most. If my death has not convinced you of my love, then what will? ... There are souls, which disdain my graces and all of the evidences of my love. They don't want to hear my call but march straight for the abyss of hell. This loss of souls plunges me into unspeakable sadness. I cannot help such a soul, even though I am God, because it has disdained me. They have a free will. They are able to scorn me or love me.”

On another occasion, Christ came to Faustyna and told her: “My daughter, tell the whole world about my unfathomable mercy. I desire that the Feast of Divine Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On this day, the inner depths of my mercy are opened. I pour out an entire ocean of grace upon souls, who approach the font of my mercy. Whatever soul goes to confession and receives Holy Communion will obtain complete remission of guilt and the punishment due to sin. On this day, all of the Divine floodgates through which graces flow are opened. Let no soul fear to draw close to me, even if its sins be like scarlet. My mercy is so great, that for all eternity no intellect, be it human or angelic, will fathom it. All that exists flowed from the inner depths of my mercy. For all eternity, every soul will ponder all my love and mercy. The Feast of Divine Mercy emerged from the depths of my mercy and I desire that it be solemnly observed on the first Sunday after Easter. Humanity will not know peace until it returns to the source of my mercy.”⁶ This then, is the great feast that we celebrate today as the fruits of the blood and water that flowed from Christ's side as He hung upon the Cross.

It was especially to those, who are filled with despair on account of their sins that Jesus told Faustyna: “My heart is filled with great mercy for souls, especially for poor sinners. If only they could understand, that I am the best Father for them, that for them flowed blood and water from my heart like a spring filled with mercy.”⁷

There are many souls today, oppressed by the enormous weight of their sins. Often, these are sins of the flesh and the related sin of abortion, which have perhaps haunted a person for many years. Some find their way into the confessional, the Throne of God's Mercy, moved by the grace to repent and seek God's forgiveness. But they are so deeply wounded by their past transgressions, that in seeking God's mercy they are, at the same time, often tormented by the thought that perhaps they have so offended God by their sins that they might not be worthy to receive God's gift of total and unqualified mercy. This, however, is a state of mind motivated more by an inability to forgive oneself than by the reality of the infinite mercy of our God, who will go to any length so as not to lose one of His sheep.

Others, so wounded by their sins have not yet come to the point of considering confession because they feel that their sins are so numerous and so heinous, that they can't be forgiven and are unworthy of God's love. And herein lies the danger They begin to sin against the Holy Spirit by refusing to be moved by God's unceasing call to repentance. Their hearts can become hardened and slip into the malice of impenitence.

This can then transform itself into the sin of pride, in which the person begins to justify his sins and condemn God for putting demands on him. We see so much of this today.

Jesus told Faustyna: “I opened my heart as a living font of mercy. Let all souls draw life from it. Let all souls draw near to that ocean of mercy with great trust. Sinners will receive vindication and the just will be confirmed in their goodness. Whoever puts his trust in my mercy, I will fill his soul with the peace of God at the hour of death.”⁸

It is said that where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. So, by analogy one could also say that where sin abounds, the special grace of Divine Mercy is exceptionally abundant, a mercy so great, so boundless, that the sins of even the greatest sinners can be wiped away by it. A mercy so unfathomable that we are even incapable of understanding it. Our only option is to merely accept it and remember what the Prophet Isaiah wrote so many centuries ago: “Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool.”⁹

God’s mercy is infinite and open to all. His heart yearns to pour it out upon us all. All that we have to do is allow ourselves to humbly accept it.

¹ “Holy Spirit,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07409a.htm>).

² *Ibid.*

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1864 Taken from: John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 46.

⁴ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 46. (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theo. IIa-IIae*, q. 14, a. 3: cf. St. Augustine, *Epist.* 185, 11, 48-49: PL 33, 814f.; St. Bonaventure *Comment. in Evang. S. Lucae*, Ch. XIV, 15-16: *Ad Claras Aquas VII*, 314f.)

⁵ “Holy Spirit,” *Catholic*.

⁶ Św. s.M. Faustyna Kowalska, *Dzienniczek*, tranl. Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC (Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów: Warszawa, 1993), 699.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1520.

⁹ Isaiah 1:18.