

Session #3: Ephesians

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: SIN

1847 "God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us."¹¹⁶ To receive his mercy, we must admit our faults. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."¹¹⁷

1848 As St. Paul affirms, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."¹¹⁸ But to do its work grace must uncover sin so as to convert our hearts and bestow on us "righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."¹¹⁹ Like a physician who probes the wound before treating it, God, by his Word and by his Spirit, casts a living light on sin:

II. THE DEFINITION OF SIN

1849 Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."¹²¹

1850 Sin is an offense against God: "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight."¹²² Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become "like gods,"¹²³ knowing and determining good and evil. Sin is thus "love of oneself even to contempt of God."¹²⁴ In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation.¹²⁵

III. THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SINS

1852 There are a great many kinds of sins. Scripture provides several lists of them. The *Letter to the Galatians* contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit: "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God."¹²⁷

IV. THE GRAVITY OF SIN: MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN

1854 Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sin, already evident in Scripture,¹²⁹ became part of the tradition of the Church. It is corroborated by human experience.

1855 *Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him.

Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it.

1856 Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us - that is, charity - necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the setting of the sacrament of reconciliation:

When the will sets itself upon something that is of its nature incompatible with the charity that orients man toward his ultimate end, then the sin is mortal by its very object . . . whether it contradicts the love of God, such as blasphemy or perjury, or the love of neighbor, such as homicide or adultery. . . . But when the sinner's will is set upon something that of its nature involves a disorder, but is not opposed to the love of God and neighbor, such as thoughtless chatter or immoderate laughter and the like, such sins are venial.¹³⁰

1857 For a *sin* to be *mortal*, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."¹³¹

1858 *Grave matter* is specified by the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the answer of Jesus to the rich young man: "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not

defraud, Honor your father and your mother."¹³² The gravity of sins is more or less great: murder is graver than theft. One must also take into account who is wronged: violence against parents is in itself graver than violence against a stranger.

1859 Mortal sin requires *full knowledge* and *complete consent*. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God's law. It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart¹³³ do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin.

1860 *Unintentional ignorance* can diminish or even remove the imputability of a grave offense. But no one is deemed to be ignorant of the principles of the moral law, which are written in the conscience of every man. The promptings of feelings and passions can also diminish the voluntary and free character of the offense, as can external pressures or pathological disorders. Sin committed through malice, by deliberate choice of evil, is the gravest.

1861 Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back. However, although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God.

1862 One commits *venial sin* when, in a less serious matter, he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent.

1863 Venial sin weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly repairable. "Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness."¹³⁴

While he is in the flesh, man cannot help but have at least some light sins. But do not despise these sins which we call "light": if you take them for light when you weigh them, tremble when you count them. A number of light objects makes a great mass; a number of drops fills a river; a number of grains makes a heap. What then is our hope? Above all, confession.¹³⁵

1864 "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."¹³⁶ There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit.¹³⁷ Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss.

V. THE PROLIFERATION OF SIN

1865 Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root.

1866 Vices can be classified according to the virtues they oppose, or also be linked to the *capital sins* which Christian experience has distinguished, following St. John Cassian and St. Gregory the Great. They are called "capital" because they engender other sins, other vices.¹³⁸ They are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia.

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1867 The catechetical tradition also recalls that there are "*sins that cry to heaven*": the blood of Abel,¹³⁹ the sin of the Sodomites,¹⁴⁰ the cry of the people oppressed in Egypt,¹⁴¹ the cry of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan,¹⁴² injustice to the wage earner.¹⁴³

1868 Sin is a personal act. Moreover, we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we *cooperate in them*:

- by participating directly and voluntarily in them;
- by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them;
- by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so;
- by protecting evil-doers.

1869 Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. "Structures of sin" are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a "social sin."¹⁴⁴

113 Cf. *Lk* 15.
114 *Mt* 1:21.
115 *Mt* 26:28.
116 St. Augustine, *Sermo* 169,11,13:PL 38,923.
117 *1 Jn* 8-9.
118 *Rom* 5:20.
119 *Rom* 5:21.
121 St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22:PL 42,418; St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I-II,71,6.
122 *Ps* 51:4.
123 *Gen* 3:5.
124 St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 14,28:PL 41,436.
125 Cf. *Phil* 2:6-9.
127 *Gal* 5:19-21; cf. *Rom* 1:28-32; *1 Cor* 9-10; *Eph* 5:3-5; *Col* 3:5-8; *1 Tim* 9-10; *2 Tim* 2-5.
128 *Mt* 15:19-20.
129 Cf. *1 Jn* 16-17.
130 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I-II,88,2, *corp. art.*
131 *RP* 17 § 12.
132 *Mk* 10:19.
133 Cf. *Mk* 3:5-6; *Lk* 16:19-31.
134 John Paul II, *RP* 17 § 9.
135 St. Augustine, *In ep. Jo.* 1,6:PL 35,1982.
136 *Mt* 12:31; cf. *Mk* 3:29; *Lk* 12:10.
137 Cf. John Paul II, *DeV* 46.
138 Cf. St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, 31,45:PL 76,621A.
139 Cf. *Gen* 4:10.
140 Cf. *Gen* 18:20; 19:13.
141 Cf. *Ex* 3:7-10.
142 Cf. *Ex* 20:20-22.
143 Cf. *Deut* 24:14-15; *Jas* 5:4.
144 John Paul II, *RP* 16.