

Statement for Website
30 March 2020

First, a few things you should know.

- Bishop Bergie has asked that Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish be closed for private prayer. The only Church where it is possible to enter for private prayer is The Cathedral of St. Catherine Monday to Saturday from 11:30 AM until 12:30 PM and Sunday from 9:00 AM to 10:30 AM. A person can only remain in the Cathedral for fifteen minutes and a maximum of five people will be allowed in at once (social distancing rules apply-keep six feet from everyone else.). Once details are worked out, it may be possible for people to go to Confession in the area inside the external door closest to the Adoration Chapel on Saturdays from 3:30 to 4:00 PM. I will keep you posted if this can be done.
- The Bishop's Gala which raises funds for students in need in the Niagara Catholic District School Board scheduled to be held at Club Roma for April 17 has been postponed.

When I am preparing Grade Two students for First Confession I teach them a simplified version of the Act of Contrition: "O God, I am sorry for all my sins and I will try not to do them again". Many parents and some teachers teach the traditional version but since many of students are nervous about forgetting what they are supposed to say, I try to keep it as simple as possible. Inevitably, when they do make their First Confession some will say "I will not sin again". While these students are likely sincere in never wanting to sin again, experience teaches all of us we will sin again and likely commit the same ones we just confessed. Nevertheless, having a firm purpose of amendment (trying not to sin again) is an essential part of the Sacrament.

In today's Gospel, some scribes and Pharisees bring a woman caught committing adultery to Jesus and ask him what should happen to her. The Jewish Law was clear: the woman should be stoned to death with her husband casting the first stone. Jesus is aware the scribes and Pharisees are not interested in justice. It takes two people to commit adultery. Where is the offending man? Where is the husband who would be the person most affected by this action? Christ's decision to not immediately condemn her to death annoys the scribes and Pharisees. His statement "let the one who has committed no sin be the first to throw a stone" is often thought to mean it is not right for one human to judge or punish another. Yet, if that were true, anyone could break the law without fear of judgment or punishment, and that would be unjust. A better explanation for the statement would be that Christ sought to balance justice with mercy. He knows the woman is guilty of adultery (a serious sin) and does not excuse her. He knows the other offending party was not likely going to face judgment. Finally, he knows the woman is being used by the Pharisees for their own purposes. For this reason, he warns her not to sin again. He links a firm purpose of amendment to his forgiveness.

During this Covid 19 pandemic, the normal spiritual practices of Catholics have been disrupted. There are no Sunday or weekday Masses. There is no Eucharistic Adoration. Other than the Cathedral, there are no Churches open for private prayer. It is almost impossible to get to Confession. As I mentioned in a previous post, Catholics can still pray the Rosary, read the Bible and watch the Mass live-streamed from a number of parishes. When it come to addressing the issue that we are still committing sin and what we should do about it, many Catholics are perplexed. One possibility is to undertake an examination of conscience every day. A person recall of the things which happened to them during the preceding day starting with getting out of

bed in the morning and continuing until they to bed at night. Once they have remembered their sins, they make a sincere Act of Contrition and then a firm purpose of amendment. Many people have used this exercise before the Covid 19 outbreak, but for those who have not, it provides a useful tool to take stock of their spiritual life.

Unusual circumstances like the ones we are living through do not diminish the damage caused by sin or our need to be aware of it. All Christians know God is just and merciful. Holding ourselves accountable for our sins, asking for forgiveness and consciously try to do better makes up better equipped to respond to the spiritual and other challenges we will face in the future.