

Lake Michigan is about 922' deep at its deepest point, the Pacific Ocean, at its deepest is almost seven miles deep, over 36,000'. Recently, my youngest nephew on a family trip looked out on the ocean and was afraid to go into the "abyss" as he called it. Being dragged down into the depths of the sea is a very frightening thought...yet in the eyes of God, that is better than the weight of guilt on our soul if we lead others, especially little ones, to sin.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

While St. Paul once put someone to sleep with his homily, no one is recorded as being bored by Jesus Christ, He always provoked a reaction beyond a yawn. Some were moved to repentance, the poor and afflicted were consoled, others were amazed and afraid.

Last week Jesus focused on the positive side of being childlike if we were to be His disciples. Children are innocent and vulnerable, they need protecting. Scandalizing others, causing little ones to sin by bad example is a terrible thing. We are all children before our heavenly Father, He wants us to protect each other's virtue, dignity, innocence, and faith. Are we helping, by word and example, bring people to heaven or are we trying to drag them down with us? This is tough love from the Lord, but a necessary warning.

Jesus then used hyperbole saying it would be better for us to cut off body parts that cause us to sin rather than be cast into fiery Gehenna with our whole body.

"And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'"

The images from today are meant to be powerful and stick in our heads. The fiery Gehenna of which the Lord speaks is symbolic for hell, the place of suffering and eternal separation from God.

These teachings today are very strong and because in sinning we actually do evil, not simply the breaking of an arbitrary rule, with God as a police officer and judge ready to arrest and accuse us. When we sin, we give our hearts over to something disordered, selfish or unloving and we do it willingly. So, Jesus calls us with His grace to come back from that, willingly. What are the habits we need to cut off because they lead us away from Love and self-gift?

One of the best definitions for sin I have heard is:

"I know what you want me to do Lord, but I'm going to do what I want to do, even if it's evil."

We need loving reminders to stay on the path which is why Jesus gave us the Magisterium of the Church.

The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell... The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs (CCC 1035).

Fortunately, the Lord loves us more than we love ourselves and never gives up on us, the only sin God can't forgive is the one we're not sorry for.

May we say with the psalmist today:

***From wanton sin especially, restrain your servant; let it not rule over me.
Then shall I be blameless and innocent of serious sin.***

Fr. Mike

"Jesus, I trust in you."

