

## We must fight sin

Our Lord uses graphic expressions to teach His disciples and us how important it is to fight sin. Sin leads to hell. In our Gospel for today, Mark 9:38-50, there is a section where Jesus uses the pictures of Isaiah 66:24 to describe hell. It's the place of eternal torment. He says that hell is the place where "*their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out*" (Mark 9:48).

To "go into hell" is what will happen when we choose that which is evil. To "be thrown into hell" is to be condemned to hell; God pronounces the judgment. That is what all face who sell out to sin.

What price are we willing to pay to avoid hell? Jesus says we should be ready to cut off our hands, cut off our feet, and pluck out our eyes. Are these words to be taken literally? Note that Christ says, "*If your hand ... if your foot ... if your eye causes you to sin.*" Is it really the hand, the foot, or the eye that does so? If so, what about the remaining foot, the other hand, or the other eye? Earlier Jesus had given His disciples the key to understanding these words when He said, "*Do you not know that nothing that comes into a person from the outside can defile him, because it does not go into his heart but into his stomach and goes out into the toilet?*" — *In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean."* — *He went on to say: "What comes out of a person is the thing that defiles him. For from inside, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, thefts, murders, adulteries, sinful desires, greed, wickedness, cheating, shameless lust, a jealous eye, slander, pride and folly. All these evils come from inside and 'defile' a person"* (7:18-23). It is a person's heart that is the source of sin, though the hand, the foot, or the eye may be used to commit the sin. Jesus uses pictorial words lest we take sin lightly.

So what then if, as a result of avoiding sin, we don't get everything out of life our evil hearts desire and we enter life crippled? Remember, we are entering life - eternal life, the kingdom of God. That's worth any and every sacrifice. In heaven there are no cripples. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "*He will change our humble bodies and make them like His glorified body, because He has the power by which He can make everything subordinate to Himself*" (3:21).

Jesus also points out how sin is overcome. He uses another figure of speech - salt used to make food palatable and to preserve it. Sometimes this salt will burn like fire. What can this salt be? It is God's Word, whose Law burns and whose Gospel heals. Christ also warns that this salt is to be used as God has given it. If it is desalted, as many modern theologians attempt, it will not do what God wants it to do. Then the case is hopeless. Take God's Word into your heart as it is, and you will have salt in yourself. By means of it, you will also be able to be at peace with one another - a reference to the argument the disciples had earlier had about who was the greatest.

What about being at peace with ourselves? Although we fight against sin, we can never overcome it completely. Is our case hopeless? No, Christ had already assured His disciples that He can and does forgive sins. Earlier, four men had carried a paralytic man to Jesus in order for Him to heal the man. Since they could not reach Jesus because of the crowd, they opened the roof over where Jesus was and let the paralytic man down on the mat he was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "*Son, your sins are forgiven.*"<sup>6</sup> *Some of the scribes were sitting there and thought to themselves:*<sup>7</sup> "*Why is this Man speaking like this? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?*"<sup>8</sup> *Jesus immediately knew in His spirit that they were thinking to themselves like this. He asked them, "Why do you have these thoughts in your hearts?"*<sup>9</sup> *Which is easier: to say to the paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk!'*<sup>10</sup> "*You should know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins!*" *Then He said to the paralysed man,*<sup>11</sup> "*I tell you, get up, take your mat and go to your home!*" (2:5-10).

That is why Jesus has come, and that is why He was now going to Jerusalem to suffer and die and rise again. But, as these words of Jesus show, the fact that we have forgiveness in Him dare never move us to take sin lightly!