

Quinquagesima Sunday 2009

Whenever I teach a course in the catechism, inevitably the word *concupiscence* crops up. It's hard finding a synonym for this word in order to get across the idea that we poor fallen creatures come into this world with a debility that eggs us on to commit sin. I had often used the word 'desire' as a substitute for concupiscence, but realized how inadequate it is to express that fiercely driving impulse, that even maddening desire that fuels the lust, greed, anger, anxiety, and vanity behind so many of our usual sins. Then the right word hit me. Craving. There's an internal disturbance in us that impels, moves, drives us: craving. Most unsettling! This is the pitiable condition of all fallen humanity. It's the result of the friction created by 'craving' something when our mind tells us it must not be. Humanity deserved to be punished with concupiscence because Adam first contradicted what God had told him. 'You shall not eat of the forbidden fruit.' Collectively, we ate that fruit and thus we got what exactly what we had asked for: the biting, gnawing desire that goes contrary to what we know is right. So many of our spiritual battles then are centered upon having to control, binding up, and tame this beastly craving within. And so the struggle goes on in each man who must contend with concupiscence and find ways of curbing it. Its remedies as prescribed by the Church are obedience, discipline, good upbringing, the cultivation of the spiritual life of prayer, solitude, silence and the willing application of penances, bodily and spiritual. Of course, for some these things are not even considered: there's little or no resistance given to these drives. Instead there's the voluntary fueling of those tendencies and in that way people get themselves into some monumental difficulties in becoming slaves, addicts to sin. The modern remedy for these ills is to be drugged into tranquility with medicines, a solution that only masks the underlying human problem. Religion offers other remedies that go to the root of the problem and which, if applied diligently, begin to heal the soul, wounded by concupiscence.

Although I've spoken on this subject before in my sermons, I invoke it again for this Quinquagesima Sunday on account of the scriptures and the approaching season of Lent. There was a blind man, overlooked and silenced by the crowd. Did no one have a care about him? Here was the very symbol

of fallen humanity, a man disabled by a native condition. Our Lord had compassion on him. When the man was met by Christ, he was asked ‘what do you wish that I should do for you?’ The man answered as we would have expected. He wanted to be cured, to be well. Because of his faith in Jesus as God, he was granted his wish and he was cured.

There are many things about faith that are wonderful. Religion puts us into contact with God and opens up effective commerce with Him. We can praise Him, love Him, adore Him and in return we receive countless benefits from Him. We can’t reduce all of religion to its pragmatic purposes in being cured of our weaknesses and forgiven of our sins, but we have to admit that this is a good part of it and a fundamental reason for being religious people. We need God to be in an upright condition.

The tongue-twister Quinquagesima indicates 50 days before Easter. The countdown began two Sundays ago and now we are headed for the opening of Lent this week. There is no more urgent business before us than self-reform—and Lent is its season. There are many things we might undertake to do for Lent: giving up this or that, or taking on some good spiritual practice. Whatever thing we do however should have as its aim to make us spiritually sound. To accomplish this we may need to adjust our schedules, to modify our habits. There should be a change in our daily routine, that is, every day during Lent. This should be reflected in what is being served on our tables. It should forbid us to go to entertainments. It should mean imposed times of silence. Does anyone do these things anymore?

It may be that our worries about our securities in these trying times is the needed thing to bring back an awareness of being accountable to God for ourselves, for our self-reform. If everything in life came to a halt and there was no longer anything else to occupy our time, would there be God and eternity staring us in the face, or merely emptiness? The vain pursuits that are fueled by concupiscence lead to despair. Without a conversion to God and a reform of life, we will be lost eternally.

Saint Paul estimated that nothing in life was of any value without charity. For this reason then, for the *love* of God, for the *love* of your own souls, for

the love of the Church and for the conversion of the world, prepare yourselves for a spiritually beneficial Lent. Whatever it is you do, it should help bring about a restoration of your human condition to a state of spiritual health—with charity, with love, rather than *craving* being the prime mover in your life.