

one

Happiness and Sin

Today we begin to learn and meditate upon the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount – the heart of the teaching of Jesus.

Beatitude means happiness.

If God wants us to be happy, why do we always resist Him? Why do we do things we know are wrong and that *we know* won't make us happy?

In paragraph 1871 of the Catechism, a sin is defined by St. Augustine as *A thought, word, or deed, contrary to the Eternal Law* – it goes against our design. In other words, God made us for Happiness with Him, that's our design, but instead we choose to go against our design, and so against our own happiness.

And every sin involves two parts:

First, it involves an attraction to some good thing. We only sin because we want something which appears, at least in some way, to be a good.

Second, our pursuit of that good thing is in some way irrational and contrary to God's will for us. Because even if it's a good, it's not the good we were made for, and it's not a good that can ultimately make us happy.

So it's unreasonable to pursue it.

two

Every sin is therefore a sin of Pride

Because **pride means pursuing some apparently good thing we have no business pursuing.**

Pride is a turning towards a good that distracts us from the ultimate good, God, the only good who can give us happiness.

Pride is saying, "I reject the Good that You Are, God. I want this good instead. I don't want to be happy like this. I want to be happy like that." And it doesn't work. It's not how we were made. So, pride always ends in frustration and dissatisfaction.

three

So why *do* we pursue goods we have no business pursuing?

Well, because they're right in front of us, and God isn't. God, as you might have noticed, hides himself. It doesn't feel like he's there, most of the time. And that gives us the opportunity to choose a lesser, immediately experienced goods over God, the ultimate, but not immediately experienced good.

But then why does God hide himself? Because if He didn't we wouldn't be free *not* to choose Him. If God appeared to us as He is, we'd be so attracted by his awesome glory that nothing else could compete for our attention. God's goodness is too overwhelming. It captivates, overpowers the created will, like a beautiful woman captivates the attention of an admiring man.

In fact, imagine a woman, the most beautiful woman in the world, who is so stunningly beautiful, every man falls hopelessly in love with her at first sight.

During WWII this young woman became pen pals with a soldier. They got to know each other by writing letters. As soon as the war ended, they wanted to meet in person.

He asked, "How will I know you."

She wrote back saying that she would be holding a red rose as she got off the train.

As the train arrived, the young man was waiting for her at the station. He sees a woman come off the train holding a red rose. But she is not as attractive as he had imagined or hoped.

He hesitates...Then he remembers who she is...from her letters...so he goes up and he introduces himself and embraces her.

But the woman is startled and says, "Who are you?"

He responds, "I'm David, aren't you Sara?" And she says "No, you have mistaken me for someone else."

He asks "Why are you holding this red rose?"

And the woman turns and points at another woman coming off the train saying, "She gave it to me."

The woman coming off the train was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Immediately, he went to that woman and asked, "Are you Sara?"

"Yes, I have never known whether I was freely loved or whether the men only hypnotized by my beauty. But now I know you love me freely and you love me for who I am."

Why does God seem to go to such great lengths to hide himself?

God hides himself so that we could be free so we could see what use we would make of our freedom.

God allows us to choose whether or not to love Him, before we lose ourselves in the enjoyment of his unfathomable goodness.

four

Magnanimity and Humility

How do we fight pride, then? Be being Poor in Spirit.

But Poor in Spirit is not what you think.

To be Poor in Spirit is made up of two virtues:

The first is **Magnanimity**

This is the virtue that keeps us focused on the greatness, the goodness and the happiness, that we're actually called to. The good we're called to pursue is union with God, to share in His divine life and his divine activity; to be like God and live like God forever in heaven with all the saints and angels. That's got to be the ultimate focus of everything we do.

The second is **Humility**

This is the virtue that prevents us from getting distracted by false goods. It's the virtue that says – "If this word or thought or act can't be directed to God, then I have no business pursuing it. And I'm not going to."

So Magnanimity is the virtue keeps your eyes on the prize, and humility resists be distracted by lesser goods.

five

And actually, Magnanimity (pursuing greatness) is deeply tied to Humility. Why?

Because greatness usually lies in doing quiet, ostentatious things

In fidelity to daily meditation. In showing up to work every day and doing your duty. In serving your family. In accepting and offering up suffering.

So yes, you're called to be the best you can be – and your also called to be humble. Because both usually involve a steady, simple – and happy – path to everlasting glory with God.