

ONE

The two ways and the steps to conversion

Matthew 7:13 Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to complete destruction is wide and easy, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Jesus teaches clearly there are two destinations open to us: Heaven or Hell. We will go to the one we choose. But how could a person choose Hell. I mean, how could a person see God and reject him?

Recall how the powers of the soul work:

1. The intellect perceives reality and presents it to the feelings as “This is good for me” or “This is bad for me.”
2. Then the feelings *respond* to what the Intellect presented with, “I like this,” *prompting* the will to choose it; or “I dislike that,” *prompting* the will to avoid it.
3. The will chooses the apparent good; avoids the evil

If we foster the habit of telling ourselves the things that lead to God are good, like Mass and prayer and the moral law then we develop the desire for them and choose them. If we foster the habit of telling ourselves we don’t like Mass, or prayer or the moral laws, then we develop an aversion to these and we don’t choose them.

At death we will desire and choose what we did throughout our life. If we had a desire for God and practiced choosing Him, we will choose heaven. If we had an aversion for God and the things of God throughout life and practiced not choosing Him, we will do the same at death – and not choose God. That is hell.

The habits we form in this life will determine whether we desire or reject God at death.

TWO

The reality of the two ways is an urgent call to conversion.

As we see our sins, we recognize we need conversion. We need to change. But it can be overwhelming. We have so many bad habits and they are so strong and deeply rooted that we can be tempted to despair, to feel completely defeated, and want to throw in the towel and quit fighting.

I hate coming to see my sin. I am ashamed, embarrassed and angry at my sin and bad habits. I should be better than this...

Oh really – who do you think you are! Only Jesus and Mary were without sin.

We have such an unrealistic view of ourselves. We are surprised and dismayed by our sin, now that we see it, when it has been painfully obvious to others all the time.

We are coming to reality – to humility. We are learning we have sins and bad habits. Well, this self-knowledge, this awareness of our problem is the starting point for the Narrow Way, the Way that leads to life.

So I am sorry you are embarrassed, angry or ashamed or humiliated by the knowledge of your sins but this awareness is the first step on the right path.

This realistic view of yourself will help you be more humble, merciful, patient and less judgmental and angry toward those around you.

THREE

The next step is to form a strategy

Our sins come from vices which are just bad habits. But they are just that – habits - and habits can be reversed and changed into virtues with the grace of God.

Getting on the Narrow Way that leads to life begins with becoming aware of a vice, a sinful habit.

We accept this reality of ourselves, we accept we have limitations and weaknesses.

We turn to Jesus and tell him we are sorry for these. But this is not self-help.

We ask Jesus to live more fully in and through us. To help us think, and desire and do what is right.

Then we must know that God does not expect us to correct every vice at once. God is patient. He is giving us time and His grace to change. But one step at a time. If we try to think about and work on too many things at once we become overwhelmed.

Ask Jesus and Mary and someone you can trust, what is the one thing they want you to work on now.

Ask them and try to identify that one thing as you listen to them in this decade.

FOUR

Take the next right step

Once we become aware of one sinful or destructive habit, we need to find out where it begins to change it at the source.

Let's say a man does not give his wife the time and attention she deserves. Why does he have this bad habit? Well, he takes on too many projects, tries to take advantage of all good opportunities, has a hard time saying no, is unrealistic about his capacity to achieve things. And the consequence is he fails to give his wife the love and attention she deserves, or does so in a distracted way.

We must begin at the source of the river. If he takes on too much, then he needs to take on less. But where to begin. With one simple concrete action. Just the next right step. Begin to look at the calendar this week and identify what is not absolutely necessary and cancel it. Yes, it will be humbling and people will accuse you of failing them and you can admit that, yes, you have failed. But you are making a correction and that correction puts us on the narrow way to life.

So what is the source of your bad habit? Where does it begin? And what is the next right step you can take to bring some correction today?

FIVE

The narrow gate and the road that leads to life is summed up in the Golden Rule "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

Here is the one rule that applies to every situation in life – do to others what you would want them to do to you.