

THE PASTOR'S DESK

July 4, 2010 - What's for Supper



Dear Parishioners,

Three men unexpectedly find themselves at their eternal resting place. It was certainly not what they expected. There are no streets paved with gold. There is no crystal river. The worst of all it is very, very hot and there is no air conditioning. They have only the stub from their one way ticket.

After an orientation session, the men find themselves seated at a table for a barbeque. The question goes around, as it will for all eternity, "what brought you here?"

One man, a Southern Baptist, answered "I had a drink of alcohol, and I enjoyed it." The second man, a Roman Catholic, said "I had breakfast thirty three minutes before communion." Finally, the third man, an Episcopalian, confessed "I used the wrong fork at dinner."

What was the common denominator for all three men? It is quite simple. They misunderstood the great difference between law and grace. Each one counted on the law for their salvation, and chose not to live in the freedom that is Christ Himself. They took refuge in the law, so they were summarily condemned by it.

This brings me to the very important but overlooked issue of scruples or scrupulosity. It is a great detriment to living a true spiritual life.

A rather pungent definition of scruples goes like this: "[An]unreasonable fear that a thing is forbidden which is [actually] permitted, or that a sin is grave when it is only trivial. An excessively severe judgment on one's own conduct based on an erroneous conscience, an obstacle to spirituality inasmuch as a mental obsession is formed a right conscience is destroyed."

Did you catch those key words? Unreasonable, fear, excessive, severe, obsession, destruction. Pretty powerful stuff.

Why would a Christian want to subject himself to that kind of spiritual life? There are rules to live by,

of course. God's Holy Word is pretty clear on that. There is clearly right and wrong. There are no grey areas of morality. That's a brute fact.

We have to realize that by His dying on the Cross, Jesus fulfilled the Law, so that we are no longer condemned by it. We live in an era of grace. As the old hymn goes "Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all my sins."

One of the most pernicious fallacies that people desperately cling to is the idea that God has nothing better to do than to watch every move we make, and that he jots down every misdeed. This causes us to live in fear.

An examination of conscience is one thing. It helps us to see patterns of sinfulness in our lives. It is a useful spiritual tool, one recommended through the centuries by the spiritual worthies. But Satan can use the examen to cripple us, to destroy the joy of the Christian life if we become obsessed with the trivial. Do you think God is trivial?

Here it comes. Are you confessing too frequently? Do you confess your sins by how many times you committed them? That is not healthy! Unless you are in serious spiritual danger, there are healthier ways to run the race and finish the course. We do not drive with the brake, we drive with the accelerator.

Our goal is to be healthy, happy and holy Christians. Our conscience should be used as the spiritual gift it is intended to be and not a weight around our neck.

I realize there will be many angry responses to this, or perhaps just some misunderstanding. But before you ask any questions, examine what is disturbing you.

And remember, the salad fork goes to the right of the dinner fork. Your bread and butter plate is always on your left.

Bon Appetite,

Fr. William