

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year C February 10, 2013

Theme: Are you a sinner?

Are you a sinner?

Are you a sinner (*pointing to someone else*)?

What about you back there in the corner?

Is any one of us here today a sinner?

Please note the question does not ask whether or not we have ever committed a sin – that is some act offensive to God or God's law.

I'm sure we could get quite a big list of sins among us:

I once stole a can of paint.

I passed on gossip about my neighbor's daughter.

I drank too much at the Christmas party and drove home.

And those would be the ones we'd be willing to mention.

No, the question asks about our description of our "self": how we see ourselves. Am I a sinner?

At the root of my being, am I a sinful person?

Most of us would probably say, no!

We'd say we're mostly decent folks who try to treat other people kindly, who do the right as we see the right, who love our God as best we can.

We work hard for what we have; we may not be heroes or saints and of course we mess up from time to time like everyone else, but we would not describe ourselves, at our core, as sinners either.

Well, then, if we are not sinners and simply good people who occasionally commit sins, then why should we be anointed with ashes on this coming Wednesday and instructed to **“Repent of our sins and believe in the Good News”?**

Why do we need forty days of Lenten fasting and prayer and almsgiving as repentance for sin?

And why this about to begin season of intensive build-up to the annual celebration of the Paschal Mystery which our own Saint Paul, in the oldest known statement of the Christian Message, in his Letter to the Corinthians wrote as we heard today:

“I handed on to you as of the first importance what I also received: That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; That he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.”

If we are not sinners at the very core of our being then what is the point of, what is the need for, Christ’s death and resurrection?

What is the point of, what is the need for the coming season of Lent and our annual celebration of the Paschal Mystery?

We can gain some insight, perhaps, from the example of our Blessed Leader Peter in the story reported by Luke’s Gospel today.

Jesus had climbed into his boat and told him to put out into deep water and lower his nets.

And though he had been fishing all night to no avail, Peter lowered the nets and caught so many fish he needed his partner’s boat to help haul them in.

Seeing this Peter fell at Jesus’ feet and said: **“Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”**

“Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

Note how Peter describes himself as a sinful man, sinner.

In light of God's overwhelmingly abundant goodness in Jesus, Peter realized how his own response had been so small and inadequate.

Peter was blown away by the knowledge that he could never deserve or be worthy of what Jesus had freely and generously given him.

Because of this, Peter threw himself at the feet of Jesus as **"a sinful man."**

Now I would suggest this is quite a different understanding of "sin" than most of us are used to.

We tend to think of sin as something we "do" rather than something we "are" at the core of our humanity.

But we "are" so undeserving and unworthy of all the goodness and blessing God has showered on us in Jesus.

We "are," like our predecessor Peter, so small and inadequate in our response to the trust and love, the blessings and gifts, the grace and goodness God has showered on our lives.

We, too, are sinful men and women throwing ourselves at the feet of Jesus this day, overwhelmed at the abundance with which our nets have been filled.

To be sinners does not make us people who have committed horrible, terrible deeds or broken God's commandments:

Rather, we are women and men who need to remember God's overwhelming goodness despite our weaknesses.

...who need forty days to get ready for the most magnificent sign of that goodness, the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.

...who need anointed with ashes to remind them they are all sinners standing in the need of prayer.