

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This weekend's Gospel is very strong. If anyone thinks that Jesus is a "nice guy" they will quickly find this is not the case. Rather, **Jesus loves**. Jesus loves us so much He wants us to get to Heaven to be with Him forever. This means that He will speak the Truth even if it means hurting our feelings or sensibilities, as long as it helps us to get to Heaven.

Today, we hear Jesus say that we need to cut off all that leads us away from God. No pulling of punches here – He says that if anything keeps you from eternal life, cut it off, pluck it out, get rid of it. This should make us **gasp!** And then, it should make us step back and ask ourselves what keeps us from God? Think about this... I mean, really think about your life. What habits keep you from getting close to God? What patterns? What relationships? Sometimes, especially when we find ourselves in addictions or a downward spiral, we may think that there is no way out. The truth is that God will give us the grace if we, first, ask for it, and second, grab a hold of that grace with both hands.

So if you struggle with gluttony, cry out to Jesus, and ask for help. Then get yourself an accountability partner (or group) to help you to live this grace day to day (and stop buying Twinkies!). If you struggle with pornography, beg Jesus for freedom from this addiction. Then put safeties into place – internet filters on computers and wireless devices, put computers in public places in the house, and get someone whom you trust (a spouse?) to keep you honest. If you struggle with impulsive buying, ask Jesus to give you moderation. Then cancel the credit cards, and make a budget strive to work by it. If recreation or entertainment is keeping you from experiencing the full life of God and the Church through the Mass, ask God for the grace to know His love coming to us in the Mass, in Word and Sacrament. Then find someone with whom you can go to Mass, and change your schedule so that the God of the universe can be at the center of your life.

Amid all of these, avail yourself of the Sacraments (Confession for all of the times you fail and fall – it will heal your wounds so you can get up and fight again – and Eucharist to strengthen your will), spend more time in prayer re-forming your mind and habits.

Does it mean the temptations will disappear immediately? No. But it means God will help you, little by little to change your habits and desires. You see, we can't do it on our own. Our shame (which comes from the evil one) will tell us we need to do it ourselves, that we need to keep it secret. Rather, our salvation comes from flying to God, and then doing the necessary work – and often enlisting the help of the people who love us and want our good.

Jesus loves us more than anyone else in the universe, and He will give us the help we need. Sometimes, though, the hardest part is recognizing our attachment to sin and then taking the first step to cut it off. Jesus will give us courage, if we ask. I have seen it over and over again in my own life, how God is faithful! Jesus longs for us to be with Him forever: loving Him and being loved by Him. This world is here to try us, to teach us to let go of that which is passing and hold on to He who lasts forever. May we not be afraid to cut off all that keeps us from growing deeper in love with God.