

# From the desk of Fr. Tim

---

## Some Aids to Spiritual Growth

### Part 1: The Problem of Sin

Most every Christian has, at one time or another wanted to become more adept in spiritual matters. If the spiritual journey is understood properly, there are many fruits of a stronger, more mature spiritual life. We want the confidence, clarity and calm resolve that come from this pursuit. The methods for developing this in our time are somewhat limited and oftentimes only effective for a short period of time. The articles that will follow spring from a classical model of the spiritual life. Most all the modern Catholic versions of spiritual development are based on these ideas, so some readers may recognize certain principals reflected here. We should all be encouraged to revisit our decisions to be faithful disciples of the Lord and search diligently for those helps to our growth. This involves every aspect of our life. Learning how to integrate the many aspects and duties of our life is important for us, especially in our time of busyness and distraction. So, let us begin.

The first consideration is unpleasant. It is the problem of sin. We want desperately to start with the positive elements of our spirituality. To do so is a fantasy and a sham based on the false notion that the need is for understanding or practice or some defect in our creation, all of which could be rectified by adding to our list of characteristics. We do not want to face the fact that there is something wrong with us and it is absolutely the result of our choices. This is the very first principal of the Gospel. Following Jesus is about conversion from sin. We must be very clear about this. It will not do that we begin with the notion that spiritual growth is about improving our relationship with God, if what is meant by that is feeling better about him, or him about us. All that is good in its proper place, but there can be no addition to what and who we have become in order to make that happen. First, we have to undergo a kind of spiritual surgery. Something has got to be taken away.

Imagine coming home during a rain storm with incredibly muddy shoes. We know they are, but we want the warmth and comfort of the house, even if it means we are going to make a huge mess of the carpet. We hear our mother calling out to us. We hear her, but we are more concerned with getting dry than we are with stopping the tracks from one end of the living room to the other. Now, to apply this analogy to our relationship with God, let's imagine that we are very concerned to improve our relationship with our mother, even as we track in mud. So we begin to compliment her on her new hairdo. We can go on and on with this, but the point is clear. We cannot improve our relationship with God until we are ready to deal with the mud on the floor, our sin.

Of course, we face an additional problem of having to deal with our culture that has almost brought the whole world to the point of imagining that there really is no such thing as sin. (By the way, the beginning of this was to get rid of guilt. Sin was obvious, but feeling bad about it was a thing of the past. Now, a more brazen idea has appeared that rids us of the problem entirely.) We can actually combat this fantasy pretty easily. Sin always causes damage. Its effect is misery, separation and pain. So, we look around and what do we see, but misery, separation and pain ... all caused by sin. A good example of this is the ideal of existence in the Hollywood star, whose sins are sorrowfully public. We created these miserable people, and that we are able to ignore the fact that they are suffering miserably, is deeply strange. All their shiny bangles cannot hide their misery. The effect of sin is immense sadness, and our world is flush with it.

The Old Testament definition of sin is admittedly incomplete, but it is the best place to start. There, the understanding is simple, that it is a violation of God's law. The sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, was clearly this. God said don't eat the fruit of this one tree, but they did and the cascading effect of it is still being felt today. The decisions that they made about their actions were not the result of accident. This is generally speaking the nature of divine law. It is stated, codified, stated clearly, so that none can claim misunderstanding or trickery as the cause for our disobedience. While comedians can claim that it was someone else's fault or "I didn't know", or the devil made me do it, this is not the case with violations of divine law.

We cannot end the subject of sin at this juncture, but it is important here to firmly place our understanding of the spiritual life in a context. It certainly will not do that we seek a deeper, more satisfying spiritual discipline while clinging to the old ways of sin. It would be like trying to play on a pro football team being forty pounds overweight and unable to jog around the block. It makes no sense. This means that much of what will aid us in our spiritual journey is directly related to overcoming our inclination to sin and repairing the damage done by them, of getting our soul in shape to "run a race".

### **Pledge Cards**

Please turn in your pledge card by the first week in December. We need everyone in the parish to pledge their financial support to the parish in the coming year. We love our parish and the work that God calls us to do. Please support this. We are dependent on God and on one another.

### **2007 CCA Contributions**

We are behind in our CCA contributions for the first time in many years. We are \$15,000 in arrears for the year that ends December 31. The CCA pledges are made directly to the Diocese of Dallas for the support of charitable work. Our parish pledged amount was \$102,000 for this year but many of our folks have fallen behind. Please make your 2007 contribution before the end of the year.